



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

***Eyrbyggja* and Icelandic Scholasticism**

The Boethian Influence on Saga Narrative

Ritgerð til MA-prófs í íslenskum bókmenntum

Ryan Eric Johnson

September 2014

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Abstract

Eyrbyggja saga is thought to have been written at the monastery that was located at Helgafell on the south side of Breiðafjörður during the 13th century. Many have considered the saga to have had relatively little Christian influence due to its vivid descriptions of what is purported to be heathen objects and customs within the saga. Recent research has turned this view on its head, leading scholars to ponder where heathen influence ends and Christian begins.

It is the purpose of this thesis to explore the idea that a Christian cleric modelled the saga based on the oral sources that he had at his disposal, weaving these sources together to suit his own aims. Rather than searching for the pagan and the Christian elements explicitly, the text will be inspected for one particular aspect of Latin education, well known to have been taught all over Europe at the time the saga is purported to have been written. This aspect is a part of the *trivium* of Latin learning, known as dialectic.

The implications of this type of education is first inspected, then a text available and extremely popular during the time is consulted for an understanding of the content of this education, Boethius' *De topicis differentiis*. Finally this understanding is applied to a portion of the text of *Eyrbyggja saga* with the express goal of looking at the text from a similar lens as that of the Christian cleric that may have written it.

Ágrip

Talið er að *Eyrbyggja saga* hafi verið rituð á 13. öld í klaustrinu að Helgafelli við sunnanverðan Breiðafjörðinn. Mörgum hefur sýnst að sagan beri fá merki um kristileg áhrif, ekki síst vegna eftirminnilegra lýsinga á heiðnum siðum og gripum. Nýlegar rannsóknir hafa snúið þessum viðhorfum á hvolf og nú velta menn því fyrir sér hvar mörk kristinna og heiðinna áhrifa liggja í sögunni.

Í þessari ritgerð verður sagan skoðuð út frá þeirri megin hugmynd að þar hafi klerkur verið að verki, en að hann hafi unnið á sinn sérstaka hátt úr miklu safni munnlegra heimilda. Úr þeim hafi hann ofið söguna með ákveðinn tilgang í huga. Í stað þess að greina í sundur hina kristnu og heiðnu þætti úr þessum heimildum, verður hugað að því hvernig höfundur stundar sinn vefnað með hliðsjón af útbreiddri hugsunartækni sem kennd var í skólum og tilheyrði Latínulærdómi, nánar tiltekið þríveginum (*trivium*). Þetta var þrætubókin (*dialectic*).

Fyrst er fjallað um hvað menntun á borð við þessa hafði í för með sér en síðan er litið sérstaklega á útbreiddan texta á þessum tímum, *De topicis differentiis* eftir Boethius til að auka skilninginn á þessari tegund menntunar. Loks verður hluti af *Eyrbyggju sögu* rannsakaður í því skyni að horfa á söguna sama sem næst sömu augum og hinn kristni klerkur sem kann að hafa samið hana.

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Introduction

There have been many analyses of *Eyrbyggja saga* put forth over the years, but many of them counter the idea that the scribe who wrote it would have been of a clerical order, or if they consider the idea, then the cleric is relegated to the lowest ranks of such an order. However, it is the position of this thesis that the scribe had to have been in the ranks of the clergy in order to weave such a complicated tale together. Without the education of the cleric in legal matters, rhetoric, and dialectical discourse, the saga would not have become what it is. Nothing we argue for here in this context rules out the use of oral material, it is rather that the material at hand for the scribe was woven together in its current form using a learned art common throughout Europe at the time of writing. This thesis concerns itself especially with one aspect of Medieval Latin education contemporary with the writing of the *Eyrbyggja saga*. Dialectic was the instructed form of logic that complemented rhetoric and grammar in the *trivium* of Latin education at the time that the saga was written. In this introduction we will do away with some of the broader questions and implications that surround this aspect of Medieval Icelandic society during the middle of the 13th century, in order for us to continue on to question dialectic as it was taught at the time, and the influence of such education as might have proceeded from it.

The Time and Place of Writing

It is commonly held that *Eyrbyggja saga* was completed around 1250. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson makes a good case for the saga having been written somewhat earlier, sometime between 1200 and 1245 in his edition of the saga.¹ He further posits, based on poetical evidence, that the saga must have been extant and somewhat known in some form by the year 1222.² His complete analysis is based on the individuals that must have been living at the time of writing,

¹ Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Eyrbyggja saga*, xlv–lii.

² “...líklegt virðist, að sagan hafi verið til ok nokkuð kunn 1222.” Ibid., li.

what texts would have been available to the writers, and an analysis of the text itself with respect to its word choice and semantics. His conclusions are similar to those of Eiríkur Magnússon in the edition he and William Morris compiled in 1892.³ Einar Ólafur, however, does not take on a full scale attempt to determine the precise identity of the author of the saga, and he rejects the prior attempt made by Magnússon in declaring the author to be Abbot Hallr Gizurarson, saying that his term as abbot is too late for his dating.⁴

The analysis begins with the setting of the final events of our saga. Where Þorfinnr ór Straumfirði is mentioned, it is said that the Sturlungar descend from him, and so it must be assumed that the sons of Hvamm-Sturla have already started to make an impression in Iceland. The starting point for the dating is further narrowed by the translation of Snorri goði's bones, while Guðný Bøðvarsdóttir is said to have been in attendance. Einar Ól. makes his estimation using the text's proclamation that she was then living at Hvammr with the later events of her life, and deduces the events of the text end in the first decade of the 13th century. The *terminus post quem* of the text is accordingly decided to be no earlier than this, which is most likely too early for the actual text to have been compiled. However, he does not surmise whether Guðný was alive or not at the time of composition, she died in 1221, but does not allow for her presence during the scribe's work, meaning that whether she was alive or not, the information came from a third party account.

The analysis continues with a comparison between the saga and other written works of the time. This introduces the biggest debate with respect to the dating of *Eyrbyggja*. The saga itself refers to *Laxdæla saga* and so it has been assumed by many that *Laxdæla* was written before *Eyrbyggja*, but Einar Ól. disagrees with this assumption positing that the citation was

³ Eiríkur Magnússon and Morris, *The Story of the Ere-Dwellers*, xxi–xxiii.

⁴ "...er það helzt til seint, enda frekar ástæða að eigna söguna Breiðfirðingi." Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Eyrbyggja saga*, lv.

added by a later scribe, and there is some evidence to support this notion. According to “Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog”, the oldest extant manuscript is AM 162 E fol. Einar Ólafur advises that this manuscript along with a younger late 15th century manuscript (AM 309 4^o) do not include this citation.⁵ Another piece of evidence suggesting that *Eyrbyggja* was composed earlier than *Laxdæla* is that two versions of *Landnámabók* appear to use *Eyrbyggja* as a source, *Styrmisbók* and *Sturlubók*. In the case of Styrmir, he died on the 20th of February 1245, and so due to this, the saga could have been written before 1235–40, additionally claiming that his research into *Laxdæla* has suggested that it would not have been available at the time that Styrmir had *Eyrbyggja* at hand. Another point that Einar Ól. brings up is that there is no evident influence from the chivalric sagas or romances within *Eyrbyggja*. However this is an unconvincing piece of evidence, as a saga style’s inclusion or exclusion in a particular piece of work does not provide this type of luxury for dating, if we consider that the scribe may have catered to a particular audience. Furthermore there is harder evidence than Einar Ól. provides in his dating of *Eyrbyggja* regarding the dating of *Tristrams saga*, one of the foremost of the translated chivalric sagas, in particular to the year 1226.⁶

Hermann Pálsson is somewhat more skeptical when it comes to the dating of *Eyrbyggja*, claiming that Einar Ólafur Sveinsson does not provide substantially convincing evidence that *Laxdæla saga* is younger. Hermann offers a third solution to the problem advising that the two could have been written contemporaneously, though *Laxdæla* need not have been written at Helgafell.⁷ Contrary to Einar Ól., he is certain that *Eyrbyggja* was written at Helgafell because

⁵ Forrest S. Scott provides a clear delineation of the manuscripts at the beginning of his edition, showing that AM 162 E fol. is the earliest vellum manuscript and AM 309 4to is the latest of the medieval manuscripts with a firm dating of 1498. *Eyrbyggja saga: The Vellum Tradition*, 1; Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Eyrbyggja saga*, xlvii.

⁶ “Var þá liðið frá hingaðburði Kristí 1226 ár er þessi saga var á norrænu skrifuð...” Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Riddarasögur*, I:3.

⁷ Hermann Pálsson, *Helgafell: saga höfuðbóls og klausturs*, 135.

of the familiarity with the area that is evident in the text, and he further indicates that the scribe would have had a cleric's education. Therefore there is little doubt that the cleric would have been situated at Helgafell at the time of writing or more simply lived there.⁸ He also shows quite clearly in his analysis that there is a close connection of these two sagas to the *klaustur* (monastery) especially in regards to Helgafell within the storyline, where one saga ends the other picks up. *Eyrbyggja* discusses the beginnings of the area during the Settlement Age onward until 1008 and it is at this point that *Laxdæla* picks up the story.⁹ By Hermann Pálsson's estimation, neither of these sagas would have been written if a centre of education had not sprung up at Helgafell.¹⁰

Even though Einar Ólafur Sveinsson did not convince Hermann Pálsson of the older age of *Eyrbyggja*, Einar Ól. raises a number of interesting points which are worth reviewing. What he feels is the nail in the coffin regarding his dating of the saga is his analysis of the poetry of the Sturlung Age. The earliest comparable piece he shows is from 1212, which he admits is not unquestionable, but the earliest pieces he does not question having influence from *Eyrbyggja* are from 1222. He believes the saga to have been extant at this time and to have received a great deal of popularity early on from those in the district, especially those attempting to usurp more and more power, most especially the Sturlungar. This popularity, in his opinion, moved through their works in a manner reminiscent of Mikhail Bakhtin's *dialogic* relationships where the word that represents an object takes part in the contemporary and future aspects of the culture at hand.¹¹ The dialogism of a whole work can then be placed inside this forever changing landscape of the conversation between other works, allowing for a give and take between the particular work in question and its contemporaries at any given

⁸ Ibid., 134.

⁹ Ibid., 135.

¹⁰ Ibid., 136.

¹¹ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 278.

point in time, what Bakhtin refers to as its point of utterance. Although Einar Ólafur does not appear to foresee the possibility for the two-way communication this would suggest is possible. The two-way communication between *Eyrbyggja* and the poetry involved is rather one-sided, only allowing *Eyrbyggja* to influence other works instead of both being influenced and influencing other works of the 13th century.

These analyses offered by Einar Ól. and Hermann Pálsson, are useful for the present study as they show the connection of the saga to the klaustur at Helgafell. Additionally, Einar Ólafur demonstrates an especially strong connection to the Sturlung Age. No matter which of these two sagas were written before or after the other, they both take part in the same cultural milieu within the same area of Iceland. It is impossible to know for certain whether *Eyrbyggja* saga was written in the klaustur at Helgafell or who had possibly commissioned or wrote the project, but what we do know is that this story is intrinsically linked to this piece of land more specifically than any other in the saga. Furthermore, it can also be safely asserted that there is little doubt now that the saga was written in the mid-thirteenth century, most likely prior to Norwegian hegemony and during the strife of the Sturlung Age.¹²

The Influence of International Politics

As Bernadine McCreesh has noted, the conversion of Iceland to Christianity was an important milestone, and we can see this reflected in the Sagas of Icelanders.¹³ She utilizes examples from a number of sagas to show this reflection. However, in *Eyrbyggja* specifically, there is another reflection that the conversion does not take into account and which tends to reflect

¹² Scott uses linguistic evidence to show a possible dating to the 13th century, favouring a later dating for a *terminus ad quem* within that century due to the use of “ek hefir”, a Norwegianism not attested in 13th century manuscripts, though he also shows linguistic evidence suggesting an earlier *terminus a quo* of 1200. Scott, *Eyrbyggja saga: The Vellum Tradition*, 22–23.

¹³ McCreesh, “Structural Patterns in the ‘Eyrbyggja Saga’ and Other Sagas of the Conversion.”

the overall structure of the saga much more convincingly, as Torfi Tulinius has pointed out.¹⁴ Torfi calls into question the relationship between father and son in the saga and examines just how a father's legacy is born out. The *seme* which appears constantly with this in mind is boiled down by Torfi as tangibility,¹⁵ bringing out a major dialectic of the story in terms of a father's tangible offerings to his offspring and the realization of the value of such offerings after their deaths.¹⁶

As Einar Ólafur Sveinsson states in his foreword to the saga, there isn't much said in the story itself that points to Christian clerical influence.¹⁷ On the face of it this is true, if we view *Eyrbyggja* from a discriminating lens that delineates clerical influence by whether a text is ecclesiastical or not. The saga is not an ecclesiastical text even though one thread in the story has by some interpretations the feel of an exemplum, that being the Marvels of Fróðá. Because Einar Ólafur has kindly pointed out that the only visible evidence of a clerical hand is the *Fróðárundr*, we can then assume that this is the only easily apparent ecclesiastical type of thread in the story. Though it must be stated that his opinion on whether this rules out the hand of a well learned cleric is somewhat narrow minded. It may well be that his opinion was tainted by the will to see an original oral tale in the mix.

Kjartan Ottósson provides a convincing summary of sources suggesting that the idea that pagan men who visit their funeral feasts were thought “vel fagnat at Ránar”¹⁸ (well received at Rán's abode) by those still swayed by oldlore (*forneskja*), was most likely not based on a factual understanding of pagan ideas but rather the pen of a Christian mind taking liberties

¹⁴ Torfi H. Tulinius, “Hamlet í Helgafellssveit.”

¹⁵ My use of this term is in connection with the semiology of literature where *semantic units* are connected by a *seme*. For example, here one of the *semantic units* would be any son found in the text and the *seme* that connects all of them is the tangibility of what the father bequeaths them upon death.

¹⁶ Torfi H. Tulinius, “Hamlet í Helgafellssveit,” 427–429.

¹⁷ Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Eyrbyggja saga*, lv.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 148.

with popular folklore.¹⁹ And so the most persistent idea in *Eyrbyggja*, evident throughout the story and not exclusive to the beginning, which the Christian scribe presents as pagan is not necessarily a pagan idea at all and should be deemed a liberty. Einar Ólafur himself remarks at how questionable the interpretations can be of this text if the reader relies on the author's proclaimed oral evidence.²⁰ This brings into question Einar Ól. Sveinsson's own claim that the cleric who wrote the saga had a great deal of interest in ancient pagan customs. It is clear that he had some interest in it, especially at the beginning of the saga, but whether this interest was truly sincere and outweighed his interest in Christian or more to the point Latin and foreign material is dubious at best.

Even at this, Einar Ólafur Sveinsson's idea regarding the position of the scribe requires more thought. Why is it that this type of saga could only have come from the *minnsti klerkur* (the least clerical of clerics) as he states?²¹ His logic is founded on the idea that the cleric would have had little knowledge of the world outside of Iceland. He had no knowledge of Latin texts as his style was never dictated by them. And yet, in Einar Ólafur's opinion, he was studious in law. This seems somewhat contradictory as law was an important facet of Christian life. Law texts that were known to have been in the possession of Helgafellsklaustur are thought to have been transferred to the laity at some point. Knowing that Helgafellsklaustur was commissioned to write other works for outside sources (e.g. *Codex Scardensis*), it is not implausible that these works of law were also commissioned works.²²

¹⁹ Kjartan G. Ottósson, *Fróðárundur í Eyrbyggju*, 99.

²⁰ Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Eyrbyggja saga*, xxviii.

²¹ "Annars virðast mér ekki sjáanleg á sögunni klerkleg fingraför, nema ef vera skyldi kaflanum um Fróðárundur, og tryði ég því vel, að söguritariinn hefði verið minnsti 'klerkur' í klaustrinu, þ.e. haft minnstan erlendan lærdóm." *Ibid.*, lv.

²² "... vitað er um Cod. Scard. að það handrit hefur verið skrifað fyrir Orm Snorrason á Skarði." Ólafur Halldórsson, *Helgafellsbækur fornar*, 42.

Within the Church it was those clerics who had mastered putting word to vellum and were well spoken that were directed to study church law. *Lárentíusar saga* bears witness to this in an episode when Lárentíus was in the company of Archbishop Jörundr at Niðarós, and he is given a place of honour among his clerics after some of his behaviour is corrected by the bishop, though Lárentíus appears somewhat reluctant to leave behind his writing of verse. Lárentíus recites a verse he composed to the Archbishop about the head nun of the convent at Staðr. After his recital, the archbishop tells Lárentíus to stop composing verse and to instead study church law. The two of them then have an exchange in Latin where the archbishop refers to verse as the shape of the false (*falsa figura*) and Lárentíus retorts that it has nothing but the greatest of healing (*maxima cura*). Then Lárentíus' clothes are exchanged for those of a more appropriate colour, as he was dressed in a fashion forbidden for clergy, claiming that he had no other clothes available. Then Lárentíus is placed in the care of Jón flæmingi (the Fleming, a person of Flemish origin), a man who found himself in trouble because the majority of people couldn't understand any of the languages he spoke.²³ Lárentíus is to sit with him and learn church law. He then is said to quickly become quite dear to Archbishop Jörundr. Here the image of Latin learning is exemplary as the student is to mimic the mentor. Lárentíus mimics both the archbishop and his teacher of law. He wears the same clothing as the archbishop had worn at his level of learning, and he sits with and learns law directly from Jón flæmingi.²⁴

There is an interesting facet to this passage that can be drawn out in parallel with other types of sagas, that of the ignorant Icelander in a foreign land. This is a common theme in saga literature, especially found within the kings' sagas. In such episodes, despite his ignorance of the intricacies of court life, and more so his generally strange behaviour, the

²³ "... hann talaði allt á latínu, fransísku eðr flæmsku." Jón Sigurðsson et al., *Biskupa sögur*, I:799.

²⁴ "... hafði hann lengi til París staðit ok í Orliens at *studium*, var hann svo mikill juristi, at enginn var þá í Noregi hans líki[.]” Jón Sigurðsson et al., *Biskupa sögur*, I:799.

Icelander is able to find a position of honour within the court, and is typically at some point held in high regard by the king.

Typically the Icelander finds a footing in the foreign society as a well-spoken individual as is evidenced by *Lárentíusar saga*. Despite his inability to clothe himself properly, he is able to gain favour by showing his propensity for the spoken and written word. It is fair to assume that the verse that he composed was in Norse, but he also demonstrates the ability to defend his actions in Latin, showing that he had a propensity for language in general and varying styles of it, not to mention his ability to communicate with Jón flæmingi, a feat many others found a great obstacle. Such a student of language in this time period, the beginning of the 14th century, would have been well versed at the very least in the *trivium* of Latin learning, and he especially shows a propensity for a dialectical structure of argument in his Latin rhetoric. This example is however a little late for the time period in question, centred about the writing of *Eyrbyggja*, as it is clearly set after the fall of the Icelandic commonwealth.

On the other hand, the kings' sagas are notorious as a genre of saga that flourished quite well before Norwegian rule encompassed Iceland. What this tells us about the position of Icelanders during the commonwealth period, in regard to their relationship with other nations and their own image of self, is that even though they did not have a king, they fully intended to take part in the politics of the court. This episode about Lárentíus is no different in this respect, except that it exemplifies instead the international relationship with the Church, and it shows that a position of honour within its greater fold would have been well received in general. William Ian Miller comments in his book *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking* that the unique nature of Icelandic society must have seemed somewhat strange to both Icelanders and their European counterparts alike.²⁵

²⁵ Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, 41.

William Ian Miller also mentions Cardinal William of Sabina, who is known to reveal the outlook that Iceland should adopt a king because all other countries in the world serve a king.²⁶ Lára Magnúsdóttir is convinced that this comment from the cardinal came about due to Icelandic authorities querying him to provide a solution where Iceland could form a concord with the Church. Six years later, in the year 1253, a resolution was passed at the Alþing that when the law of God and the country differ, the law of God will prevail.²⁷ Lára Magnúsdóttir interprets this resolution as an attempt to create a concordat between the form of government extant in Iceland and the Church.²⁸ However, this attempt would have fallen on deaf ears because the Church would not recognize an agreement unless it was ratified by a king. This resolution has also fallen into ill repute with other scholars such as Magnús Stefánsson who refers to it as not having received formal ratification despite its use by Bishop Árni, because it was recognized neither by the laity nor the crown.²⁹ As Lára points out, the Icelandic laity would not have taken it upon themselves to create such a resolution, it was more likely a request from the clergy. The clergy was looking for a way to reach the same type of agreement for the country that had been struck between the Church and their Scandinavian brethren. However, the resolution was passed as evidenced by its propagation in all medieval manuscripts of *Kristinréttur*.³⁰ Árni Þorláksson made use of it in 1281, though he received some trouble from the king's courier, Loðinn leppur, in its recognition. This is no surprise

²⁶ Mundt, *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, 144.

²⁷ For the motion at the Alþing see *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, 1857, II:1; For an example of its use in *Kristinréttur* see “Kristinréttur Árna,” 161. In this diplomatic edition based mainly on AM 49 8vo, it is made clear that the motion succeeded. “Þat var logliga ritat. oc fvlkomiiga staðfest aislandi at þar sem agreindi guðslog oc landz log. þa skyldo guþslog raða.”

²⁸ Lára Magnúsdóttir, *Bannfæring og kirkjuvald á Íslandi 1275-1550*, 348–351.

²⁹ Magnús Stefánsson, “Kirkjuvald eflist,” 140–141.

³⁰ “Kristinréttur Árna,” 52.

however because Loðinn leppur had no interest in listening to any reservations that Icelanders might have to the king's new law book, *Jónsbók*.³¹

This type of struggle between church and state is exemplary of the time and still appears relevant to the interpretation of saga literature today. There are three axes of power at work here, the Icelandic laity, the Icelandic church and the Norwegian crown. By 1262-64 there were only two of these powers at work, as the Norwegian crown took over for the lay powers of Iceland. William Ian Miller points out that scholars, mainly those of the Icelandic school,³² have been apt to see the battle of the Icelandic church for its legal rights in a negative light.³³ This view is unfortunately tainted by the more recent independence movement in Iceland during the 19th and 20th centuries. The destruction of the commonwealth is seen as a negative outcome for the country due to a perceived loss of national sovereignty, but in reality it may have benefited those of the lower classes and hence the majority of the population. After the coming of Norwegian hegemony the lay powers in Iceland were effectively castrated and could not affect such rampant violence as they had before. The violence that they had affected was a blight for those who gained nothing from the conflict and yet invested their lives in the outcome.

William Ian Miller makes mention of this social situation in the first chapter of *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*³⁴ but this does not figure into the framework of his interpretation of *Þorsteins þáttr stangarhöggs* in the following chapter. His case is made point by point in regards to

³¹ Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, "Árna saga biskups," 93.

³² The Icelandic school is typified by looking at the saga as a form of literary art. In Icelandic their theories are referred to as *bókfestukenningin* (the theory of setting down in literary form) as compared to other scholars, which held to *sagnfestukenningin* (the theory of setting down in oral form). Their theories have been an important development in saga scholarship, allowing for the saga to be seen as art and not merely orally derived historical sources.

³³ Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, 39.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

Grágás and the episode of Þorsteinn Staffstruck. His interpretation in this fashion is well made, and sheds better light on laws regarding accidental or intentional harm in *Grágás* that might otherwise be left to obscurity for the modern reader. However, the social situation that frames both this society and the possible motivations of the scribe are not exposed here, and no part of the interpretation brings this type of relationship to light in regards to the larger legal questions of such a society. It is one thing to deal with medieval Icelandic law from the point of view of solving the differences between members of the laity and it is another to expose the strife between the laity, the Church, and the crown that is expressed in a great deal of saga literature. *Þorsteins þáttr stangarhöggs* is not immune to such analysis.

Ármann Jakobsson, in his article, “The Specter of Old Age”, brings about some important questions that need to be asked when analysing the episode of Þorsteinn Staffstruck in relation to new versus old societal values. This is accomplished, in Ármann’s opinion, by pitting the father, Þórarinn, an old disgruntled Viking, against his son, Þorsteinn the younger peace loving sort.³⁵ Gert Kreutzer similarly believes the episode should be interpreted in a political light.³⁶ Kreutzer specifically interprets the episode in relation to its connection with *Vopnfirðinga saga*, where in manuscript form it typically follows immediately afterwards. The story has been published outside of *Vopnfirðinga saga* as a so-called *þáttr*, but in some ways it is difficult to remove it from the context of the saga. For example, Bjarni Brodd-Helgason is not introduced in the *þáttr*, as is customary in saga literature, and yet he receives the most glorification at the end, whereas Þorsteinn barely receives mention at the end of the episode by comparison.³⁷ Bjarni’s descendants are listed and he is said to have travelled to Rome. Thus the Church does receive some attention in this episode and when it does it is exalted, and a character is lifted up in renown because of it.

³⁵ Ármann Jakobsson, “The Specter of Old Age,” 58–66.

³⁶ Kreutzer, “Siðfræðileg orðræða og þjóðfélagslegur boðskapur í nokkrum Íslendingasögum,” 12–17.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 15–16.

The Internal Conflict and the Dialectical Argument

Ármann Jakobsson also directs attention at the use of the small community (two farms) as a representative microcosm of the larger society at hand (the macrocosm).³⁸ In the story, Þorsteinn takes part in a horse fight with Þórðr, Bjarni's stable hand. In the midst of the fight, Þórðr strikes Þorsteinn with his prod but Þorsteinn decides to turn the other cheek. A great deal of taunting occurs afterwards and Þorsteinn's father goads him into attempting to garner compensation from Þórðr for the act. Þórðr refuses and Þorsteinn ends up killing him. The problem only escalates from there. If the conflict between these two men is likened to the microcosm, then the story is not only dealing with the strife between two men and the results of that, but it is also dealing with the strife of the society as a whole on a macrocosmic level. In this way we can determine that the message of the story revolves around a call for peace. In Gert Kreutzer's terms the story calls for the vassal to submit to his lord.

In contrast, William Ian Miller deals with the characters on a lawyer/client basis, calling the people who propagate the violence (the servants, women and old men), the "clientele",³⁹ and the "clients"⁴⁰; and the protagonist, and antagonist, the "principals"⁴¹. This choice of words allows us to understand the legal dealings of medieval Iceland through the eyes of the criminal justice systems of today, and it certainly has its use in interpreting the events of Iceland's past. Unfortunately it may also lead to anachronisms if not as deftly applied as Bill Miller has done. Ármann admits his own interpretation might be construed as an anachronism. The episode is considered most likely to have been composed at the time Bjarni's ancestors listed at the end of the episode are still living, making the time of writing

³⁸ Ármann Jakobsson, *Illa fenginn mjöður*, 126–127.

³⁹ Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, 69.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 69.

somewhere between 1235 and 1239⁴², right in the middle of the strife of the age of the Sturlungar. The overall message of this episode may in fact be a call for peace between feuding people, showing that it is ridiculous to behave in such a manner, exalting those who turn the other cheek. This type of interpretation could be an anachronism attached to the peace movements of our own time. However, there are a variety of sources from the 13th and 14th centuries that directly criticize the strife that abounded during that period in Iceland's history.⁴³ It is not out of the question to conceive of a scribe writing an allegory on vellum to try and ward off such behaviour, especially one with a clerical background.

The extant law book available today, *Grágás*, is our only direct source of law during the commonwealth period in Iceland. This law book, though governed a great deal by Christian law, is greatly concerned with the laws of the land (*landslög*) that were learned from past generations in Iceland since Úlfljótr brought the laws from Norway in 930 at the establishment of the Alþing.⁴⁴ They were not re-evaluated after the conversion to Christianity to be a complete reworking of law from a Christian perspective, only altered slightly with additions. The moral sensibility contained in those laws can be seen as quite a bit different to those we consider within canon law.

It was not until 1253 that the Alþing made the formal acknowledgement that canon law (*guðslög*) would overrule the law of the land (*landslög*) where required. Yet, seeing as those who wrote sagas on vellum were for a large part clerical scribes, and if we deem them to have such specific intentions, it can be imagined that even before 1253 they would have utilized their own Latin learned logic in devising the plots that interwove these types of disputes into

⁴² Jón Jóhannesson, *Austfirðinga sögur*, xxxiii.

⁴³ A number of scholars have examined this type of 13th and 14th century contemporary criticism. See for example: Ármann Jakobsson, "Sannyrði sverða"; Bjarni Guðnason, *Túlkun Heiðarvígasögu*; Gunnar Karlsson, "Siðamat Íslendingasögu"; Sverrir Jakobsson, "Friðarviðleitni kirkjunnar á 13. öld."

⁴⁴ Ólafur Lárusson, *Lög og saga*, 60–61.

their tales. Therefore, the actions and behaviour of the individuals in the saga are taking part in a traditionally Icelandic forum, where as William Ian Miller says, “their sense of status and security relative to their counterparts in other households depend on the figure the householder and his sons cut into the world. And in Iceland, in the short run at least, looking good meant acting tough”.⁴⁵ However, their stories are being told through the lens of a different type of logic, where it is not simply appropriate to act tough, they demand the dialectical question be asked as well, such as, “is a man’s importance to his community to be measured in how tough he is?” Or one of the ultimate of Christian dialectics “is a man who turns the other cheek a coward?”

Dialectical questions and comparisons like these are constantly raised by saga literature, and a series of arguments in the form of the narrative itself attempt to resolve them. It is part of what makes the *Sagas of Icelanders* a remarkable corpus of literature, and also why they are so widely read and their content still discussed, with a neverending set of polarized ideas, within and without Icelandic society—even today. Barring this type of dialectical argument within these works, we would not still be asking the same questions today that people of the 13th century had asked, cliché questions, such as “who killed Vésteinn?” A question bringing about a defence from Anne Holtsmark in the mid-twentieth century, who tasks herself with Þórgrímr’s defence by attempting to charge Gísli’s brother Þórkell with the crime, and later Claiborne Thompson who in a manner of speaking responds by placing the blame on Þórgrímr by means of Gísli’s dreams.⁴⁶ Other common questions can be mentioned, such as, “who did Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir love most?” And even, “did Egill drink when he was but a child?” Most who know the stories will have made up their minds about these topics, but the fact remains that these questions can still be asked. The sagas refuse to provide firm answers

⁴⁵ Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, 69.

⁴⁶ Holtsmark, *Studies in the Gísla saga*; Thompson, “Gísla saga”. It is worth noting that both of these arguments are predicated on the language used by either Þórkell or Gísli in chapter 14 of the saga.

out of design, perhaps dialectical design. This method of shaping sagas into a written form may have been learned from the influence of medieval Latin scholastics, perhaps even from the texts of the man referred to as the first scholastic, but it was used to form a subtext of local social commentary in Iceland that has lasted to the modern day.

Boethius

The man who some have dubbed one of the first medieval scholastics,⁴⁷ was a Western Roman Ostrogoth, a consul under King Theodoric the Great (454-526). Anicius Manlius Severinus Boëthius was fluent in Greek and translated a number of Aristotle's works into Latin. Other than Cicero's works of similar Platonic depths, Boethius is credited as the man who kept Aristotle alive in the West.⁴⁸ Without his treatises on Aristotle's, Themistius', and Cicero's, *topics*, dialectical disputation would not have been the same art that it became under the Western Roman Catholic Church.⁴⁹ It is his book, *De topicis differentiis*, recently translated to English by Eleonore Stump that will provide us with the tools to closely read our saga. Instead of looking at a piece of Icelandic Literature through the guise of modern structuralist or post-structuralist approaches, we will let the man who developed medieval dialectic reasoning guide us. This reasoning, or logic, was utilized by Latin education that met a resurgence during the 12th century. It remained relatively unchanged up until the 14th or 15th century, after which translations of the ancient philosophers made a reappearance due to Arabic influence from Spain. This was an education system that Icelander's took part in and attempted to emulate in every way possible.

⁴⁷ Eleonore Stump refers to him as an authority for the early scholastics second only to Augustine. *Boethius's De Topicis Differentiis*, 15.

⁴⁸ Richard E. Rubenstein, *Aristotle's Children*, 57.

⁴⁹ For further information about the terminology of dialectical argumentation see Appendix I.

Arfur og umbylting (legacy and upheaval)

Torfi Tulinius has directed attention to a three-fold manifest within *Eyrbyggja saga* that he explicitly shows using A. J. Greimas' actant model.⁵⁰ Three sets of legacies are portrayed from the settlement of Iceland (*landnám*), pictured in the saga at the outset with Þórólfr Mostrarskegg⁵¹, to those who inherit their legacy as grandchildren, Snorri goði, Arnkell and so on. The third in this line are those who are taking part in the legacy nearly contemporary to the saga's writing, these actors show themselves at the end of the saga with the re-interment of three sets of human remains belonging to Snorri, his uncle Bǫrkr and his mother Þórdís. The active character who is attested to have witnessed the re-interment is Guðný Bǫðvarsdóttir who is given no further description other than that she was the mother of "those Sturlusons", Snorri, Þórðr and Sighvatr.⁵²

Kevin Wanner has a similar stance on the three-fold periodization to be examined in the context of the contemporary views of both producer and consumer. He argues that most of the past interpretations have looked only to a two tiered periodization, where the past is reflected upon nostalgically. He sums up:

Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards characterize it as 'essentially nostalgic, reflecting pride in the past rather than in the author's own time' (1973, 12); Paul Schach suggests that it 'be interpreted as an exemplum extolling moderation and restraint to the ruthless chieftains during the brutal age of the Sturlungs' (1984, 568); and Bödl places it among those sagas which 'durch die Konstruktion einer idealischen Vorzeit implizit Kritik an den Verhältnissen der Gegenwart üben wollte' (1999, 195) (through the construction of an idealized past intended to criticize present conditions). Vésteinn Ólason, writing in his introduction to the

⁵⁰ Torfi H. Tulinius, "Hamlet í Helgafellssveit," 433–435.

⁵¹ Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Eyrbyggja saga*, 8–9.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 183–184.

most recent English translation of *Eyrbyggja saga*, summarizes the general perspective from which this and similar sagas have been interpreted.⁵³

Wanner goes on to quote Vésteinn Ólason at length, where Vésteinn explains how the sagas depict a past that looked more like a golden age expressed nostalgically. This he compares to other medieval European literature that, “tends to build upon either timeless, escapist fantasy or a divinely decreed order.”⁵⁴ Wanner admits that these interpretations are valid but that a new set of questions arises regarding the understanding the ‘producers/consumers’ would have had of their past, when we look at the events at the beginning of the saga through a new lens.

The lens Wanner introduces in his article focuses on the breach in the social setting between Settlement Age and Saga Age. Using an anthropological theory provided by Mary Douglas, Wanner looks at the dispute over defecation at the *þing* site controlled by Þórólfr Mostrarskegg on Þórsnes as causing a major change in social order. Using Douglas’ anthropological approach he defines the society that Þórólfr initially creates as having the elements of a *high classification environment* that is eventually torn asunder by the *Kjalleklingar*. Wanner then turns to an inspection of monastic life, the connection of Helgafell to the discourse of purity laws, and the relevance of Þórólfr’s creation of a *high classification* society, with that of the scribe who might have written the saga. The fact that Þórólfr’s ability to persuade others to follow his purity rules, based on his role in religion, connects both of these ideas together, that of Douglas’ anthropological theory and the world of the scribe.

Before Þórólfr Mostrarskegg leaves Norway behind, he consults Þórr. He asks whether he should make amends with Haraldr hárfagri, or leave to seek out Iceland. The oracle returns the answer that he should uproot and travel to Iceland. He takes the high-seat pillars from his temple when he leaves, and he uses them to direct his course to his new lands. When he finds

⁵³ Wanner, “Purity and Danger in Earliest Iceland,” 232.

⁵⁴ Regal and Quinn, *Gisli Sursson’s Saga and The Saga of the People of Eyri*, x–xi.

the pillars, he uses fire to mark the land which he is claiming. Wanner points out that he is the only settler to have been described as performing all three of these rituals.⁵⁵ In fact, there is quite a bit more to the description of the objects that come from the temple, and it is the most descriptive detail offered for pagan customs in the whole of the saga. It is worth repeating that detail here:

Hann tók ofan hofit ok hafði með sér flesta við, þá er þar höfðu í verið, ok svá moldina undan stallanum, þar er Þórr hafði á setit. [...] Þórólfr kastaði þá fyrir borð öndvegissúlum sínum, þeim er staðit höfðu í hofinu; þar var Þórr skorinn á annarri. Hann mælti svá fyrir, at hann skyldi þar byggja á Íslandi, sem Þórr léti þær á land koma. [...] Hann tók land fyrir sunnan fjörðinn, nær miðjum, ok lagði skipit á vág þann, er þeir kølluðu Hofsvág síðan. Eptir þat kōnnuðu þeir landit ok fundu á nesi framanverðu, er var fyrir norðan váginn, at Þórr var á land kominn með súlurnar; þat var síðan kallat Þórsnes. Eptir þat fór Þórólfr eldi um landnám sitt [...] Hann setti bæ mikinn við Hofsvág, er hann kallaði á Hofsstöðum. Þar lét hann reisa hof, ok var þat mikit hús; váru dyrr á hliðvegginum ok nær öðrum endanum; þar fyrir innan stóðu öndvegissúlurnar, ok váru þar í naglar; þeir hétu reginnaglar; þar var allt friðarstaðr fyrir innan. Innar af hofinu var hús í þá líking, sem nú er sōnghús í kirkjum, ok stóð þar stali á miðju gólfinu sem altari, ok lá þar á hringr einn mótlauss, tvítōgeyringr, ok skyldi þar at sverja eiða alla; þann hring skyldi hofgoði hafa á hendi sér til allra mannfunda. Á stallanum skyldi ok standa hlautbolli, ok þar í hlautteinn sem stōkkull væri, ok skyldi þar stōkkva með ór bollanum blóði því, er hlaut var kallat; þat var þess konar blóð, er svœfð váru þau kvikendi, er goðunum var fórnat. Umhverfis stallann var goðunum skipat í afhúsinu. Til hofsins skyldu allir menn tolla gjalda ok vera skyldir hofgoðanum til

⁵⁵ Wanner, “Purity and Danger in Earliest Iceland,” 222.

allra ferða, sem nú eru þingmenn höfðingjum, en goði skyldi hofi upp halda af sjálfs síns kostnaði, svá at eigi rénaði, ok hafa inni blótveizlur.⁵⁶

It is extremely interesting in this way that Wanner should propose a connection between the *high classification environment* that Þórólfr Mostrarskegg initially creates in Iceland to the Christian monastery moved there from Flatey in 1184. In Wanner's argument, the Christian light is being cast on a very pagan episode in *Eyrbyggja*. He makes note of the connection scholars have made of the writing of this saga with Helgafell, and the great amount of Latin texts that would have been available at Helgafell at that time.⁵⁷ Taking Hermann Pálsson's suggestion to look to Augustinian monastic life in other parts of Europe, Wanner makes some connections to how a monastery wealthy in land would utilize its capital to make an impression on the area. He makes note of Lester K. Little's description of how the friars of a monastery were *miles Christi* (soldiers of Christ) and were in the throes of symbolic war with demons taking up arms in the form of liturgy. This war Wanner extends from demons to impurity and sets the friars within the confines of Douglas' *high classification environment*.

The impurity laws under inspection here set down by Þórólfr are summed up in the saga as the following:

... á því fjalli hafði Þórólfr svá mikinn átrúnað, at þangat skyldi enginn maðr óþveginn líta ok engu skyldi tortíma í fjallinu, hvárki fé né mǫnnum, nema sjálft gengi í brott. [...] Þar sem Þórr hafði á land komit, á tanganum nessins, lét hann hafa dóma alla ok setti þar heraðsþing; þar var ok svá mikill helgistaðr, at hann vildi með engu móti láta saurga vǫllinn, hvárki í heiptarblóði, ok eigi skyldi þar álfrek ganga, ok var haft til þess sker eitt, er Dritsker var kallað.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Eyrbyggja saga*, 7–9.

⁵⁷ Wanner, "Purity and Danger in Earliest Iceland," 234.

⁵⁸ Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Eyrbyggja saga*, 9–10.

Thus the connection we see here revolves around the sanctity of the land. Wanner again points to Hermann Pálsson in suggesting that the move of the monastery from Flatey to Helgafell was done under the auspices of a migration to holy land, and social centrality, just as much as it was done for conservative reasons, such as easier access to supplies. This is mere speculation on the part of these scholars, but the part that this monastery has played in the society has by all accounts been extensive. It is clear that it was not uncommon for monasteries to take part in the society it was located in. They were not disconnected from their surrounding communities, instead more likely centres of assistance. This can be seen in the physical evidence provided by the remains found at the East Iceland monastery Skriðuklaustur where it is clear that it acted as a kind of hospital for its community.⁵⁹ On the contrary Helgafellsklaustur appears to have extensively promoted the written word, for example in legal texts.⁶⁰

This type of connection with society, although not commonly understood to be a role taken on by a community of ascetics, should in all reality not come as much of a surprise. Just as their spiritual war should be waged through liturgy and prayer, their temporal war should be waged through well-reasoned logic, and their actions should promote the community, and its well-being. Wanner makes the connection of Helgafellsklaustur's wealth in land to that of the landholdings of Þórólfr Mostrarskegg, placing both accounts of ownership under the basis of "sacred order or divine sanction".⁶¹ Wanner then takes into account the scholarship of a number of its early abbots who had studied in Paris,⁶² and the large collection of both Latin and Norse texts.⁶³

⁵⁹ Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir, *Sagan af klaustrinu á Skriðu*.

⁶⁰ Ólafur Halldórsson, *Helgafellsbækur fornar*, 42.

⁶¹ Wanner, "Purity and Danger in Earliest Iceland," 237.

⁶² Hermann Pálsson, *Helgafell: saga höfuðbóls og klausturs*, 57, 133.

⁶³ Guðbrandur Jónsson, "Íslenzk bókasöfn fyrir siðabyltinguna," 76–77.

The remainder of Wanner's analysis is taken up for the most part by a comparison of *Stjórn*,⁶⁴ a biblical translation that would have been available to a 13th century author. *Stjórn* was comprised of "portions of the Pentateuch through II Kings (IV Kings in the Vulgate)."⁶⁵ This again Wanner connects to the analysis of Mary Douglas where he says that she has, "demonstrated in one of her most celebrated analyses, parts of the Bible, and especially of the Pentateuch, are greatly concerned with issues of pollution and purity"⁶⁶. What follows is a particularly intriguing analysis by Wanner because he makes a direct connection between the pagan story of Þórólfr's settlement and his establishment of sanctity at Helgafell with a text available in both Latin and Old Norse at the time of *Eyrbyggja's* composition. Wanner therefore shows in his article both a societal breach from Settlement Age to Saga Age, and a connection between the pagan roots of the tale to the Christian mind that moulded it to his own end, positing a correlation between the alteration of Mosaic Law with Christian law, and the pre-Christian Icelandic law with Christian law.

There is a great deal that comes forth of interest in Wanner's analysis in connection to the legacy created by the *landnámsmenn* and the upheaval of this legacy by their sons. A further point that deserves closer scrutiny in connection with this analysis is that of where the landholdings of the monastery came from. Øgmundur, the first abbot is thought to have made the land purchase for the monastery.⁶⁷ In this light, it is interesting to note again the importance of Guðný as a representation of the third order in the tri-periodized framework of the saga.⁶⁸ Moreover it is of interest in connection with the drowning of Þorsteinn þorskabítr

⁶⁴ Unger, *Stjorn*.

⁶⁵ Wanner, "Purity and Danger in Earliest Iceland," 237.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Janus Jónsson, "Um klaustrin á Íslandi," 227–228.

⁶⁸ Sverrir makes a good case for Guðný's influence in the area. Sverrir Jakobsson, "Konur og völd í Breiðafirði á miðöldum," 165–172; Jenny Jochens also provides some valid connections to Guðný. Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society*, 7–16.

and the subsequent opening up of the mount and being welcomed by his forefathers, that Ögmundur the first abbot died by drowning two years after his term as abbot was completed in 1189.⁶⁹ We have come to one of the main questions we need to address regarding our saga: How does the monastery at Helgafell relate to the production of this work? We will also explore this question in relation to the cleric that would have resided there.

Eyrbyggja as a Product of Helgafell

The popular consensus today is that Eyrbyggja saga was written at the Helgafell monastery. The only evidence for this is highly circumstantial and is therefore not irrefutable, but the idea has been compelling enough for many to write about the possibility. The textual evidence used to establish this is the superb knowledge of the area evidenced by the saga, which is to say that the scribes committed to this project were intimately aware of the surroundings involved. However, in consideration of the motives of the monastery in legal matters, there is an interesting premise to be established here. Kevin Wanner's treatment of the episode of the settlers in Iceland, involving Björn inn austræni, Þórólfr Mostrarskegg, and their children, shows that not only was Christian law under inspection by the scribal hands of Eyrbyggja but so too was Mosaic law.⁷⁰ It is the assertion here that the monastery took on the role of considering all law under God and nation and cared for its harmonization, and *Eyrbyggja saga* is a textual witness to the beginning of this mandate in the changing legal landscape of early to mid-thirteenth century Iceland.

⁶⁹ Janus Jónsson, "Um klaustrin á Íslandi," 228.

⁷⁰ "If we assume, for argument's sake, that the parallels between the early Icelandic and the Hebrew situation were deliberate [...] then one way to interpret their significance is to conclude that they were meant to be read typologically. They were designed, in other words, to suggest that just as the Gospel of Christ, with its emphasis on grace and internal or spiritual condition, had transcended and supplanted the Mosaic Law [...] so too has the Gospel come to replace the similar and similarly outmoded beliefs and practices of the pre-Christian Icelanders." Wanner, "Purity and Danger in Earliest Iceland," 240.

Eyrbyggja is an episodic narrative and some early scholars have expressed some negative criticism due to this,⁷¹ yet interest in the saga has not waned but grown since the time these scholars shed a somewhat negative light on the narrative style of our saga. With the growing interest, a great many new ideas have come to light, some in terms of legal matters depicted in the saga. If we assume the place of writing is Helgafell, a clear development in legal matters is seen in the texts written there. As Kevin Wanner has pointed out, a text referred to as *Stjórn* was available there and copies from there are still extant. In this text the medieval cleric had part of the Pentateuch and up to Kings II available to him. In a compilation of *Stjórn* with a well calculated provenance to a particular scribe at Helgafell, AM 226 fol.,⁷² a number of other sagas are included that have their origins for the Helgafell scribe in Latin works, *Rómverja sögur*, *Alexanders saga*, and *Gyðinga saga*.⁷³ The same hand found in 226 is found in a number of other manuscripts, most notably *Skarðsbók*, which is the crowning achievement of lawbooks from Helgafell.

Writer as Cleric

A further look at the writers of the 13th century is appropriate, with an eye for what might have influenced them to create the work at hand. Bernadine McCreesh has concluded that the saga-writers of the thirteenth century contemplated the conversion to Christianity a great deal in their works because it was thought a significant stepping stone for Icelandic society, specifically pointing to a change from a realm of supernatural powers to a realm ruled by the will of man.⁷⁴ There is nothing to refute this conclusion, we can only add to its legitimacy.

⁷¹ Lee M. Hollander sums up the negative criticism up to 1959 in “JEGP,” 222.

⁷² Current scholarship in this area still rests on Stefán Karlsson’s work, *Sagas of Icelandic Bishops*, 19–21; and Ólafur Halldórsson’s *Helgafellsbækur fornar*, 37–38; see also Þorbjörg Helgadóttir’s introduction to *Rómverja saga*, I:xlvi–xlvii.

⁷³ All basic manuscript information and provenance comes from Knudsen, “Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog”; and Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, “handrit.is.”

⁷⁴ McCreesh, “Structural Patterns in the ‘Eyrbyggja Saga’ and Other Sagas of the Conversion,” 280.

However, it should be noted that the medieval cleric most certainly believed in supernatural powers, especially an Augustinian friar. Not only did they believe in them, they felt that they were required to protect their community from them.

The assumption that has been posited here is that the scribe or scribes were these types of clerics, not a single least clerical of clerics as Einar Ólafur Sveinsson has suggested. Our current argument allows for the supposition that leading clerics of the monastery would have had a role in the creation of the text in question. This piece would pave the way for the future of writing at the monastery within a legal sphere. Paul Schach's suggestion that the writer was housed at Helgafell but was not a cleric is worth further consideration.⁷⁵ The reason this suggestion was made is that the work does not appear to have been created to praise the clerical office. However, this argument falls short in light of some inspection of contemporary reception. The narrative at hand is utilizing oral sources to weave together a work of dialectical argument serving at the same time to both placate and instruct the lay public body without directly preaching the values of the Church as a *typical* clerical work such as an *exemplum* might do, or praising the clerical office like *vitae* (lives of saints) do.

Latin learning did not necessarily involve itself directly with the religious activity of the Church as did the religious works such as *homiliae*, *exempla*, and the *vitae* have obviously done.⁷⁶ It did however involve itself with what Augustine termed the three states of vision: corporeal (that perceived through the body), spiritual (whatever is not a body and yet is something), and intellectual (that which is perceived by the mind alone).⁷⁷ With these states of

⁷⁵ “Very likely he got this training at the Augustinian monastery located at his time on Helgafell. But in all probability he was not a clergyman himself: not only are there no pious reflections in his work, but Christianity in general evidently was not in the forefront of his thinking.” Paul Schach and Lee M. Hollander, *Eyrbyggja Saga*, xvi.

⁷⁶ Boethius, being a Late Classical, early medieval scholastic and pious Christian achieved a similar narrative form that does not emphasize the Church in *The Consolation of Philosophy*, 1969.

⁷⁷ Robert E. Meagher, *An Introduction to Augustine*, 40–42.

vision the clerical office sought to bring understanding to their respective societies. Specifically within the sphere of intellectual vision, clear arguments were discovered utilizing dialectical reasoning, and subsequently, rhetoric was used to fashion these arguments into a narrative form.

Bernadine McCreesh has argued that the *Fróðárundr* episode is an *exemplum*.⁷⁸ However, while it can be agreed that the episode contains elements conducive to classifying it as a parable, there is more at work. There are two facets which evoke the nature of parable, firstly the way that Þuríðr covets Þorgunna's possessions, and secondly the moving of Þorgunna's body to sacred ground. In the first case, we cannot say for certain that the intent was to paint Þorgunna in a positive light, as she takes blame on her deathbed for what eventually occurs. On the second point, an *exemplum* to show the importance of funerary rights would have been useless for an Icelandic audience at the time of our saga's original reception, as funerary customs were some of the first customs of the Christian faith to have been taken up by Icelanders, especially in the west in the Breiðafjörður area.⁷⁹ At most we can say that there

⁷⁸ I presented a paper that Bernadine McCreesh attended at the International Medieval Congress in 2013. Her position was clear, stating that the *Fróðárundr* was an exemplum. "Íslendingasögur and the Carnival: Eyrbyggja as a Case Study."

⁷⁹ "Þar var þó um langtímaþróun að ræða sem hófst fyrir kristnitöku og stóð lengi eftir það. Sést samhengi þetta m.a. í því að víða um Norðurlönd héldu menn áfram að grafa lík í heiðnum kumlateigum nokkuð fram yfir trúarbragðaskipti og reyndu jafnvel að halda því áfram eftir að kirkjugarðar voru komnir til sögunnar. Af þessum sökum og öðrum leikur oft vafi á hvort flokka beri fornleifar sem heiðin kuml eða kristnar grafir." Hjalti Hugason et al., *Kristni á Íslandi*, 2000, I:339; "Í Eyjafirði og Rangárvallasýslu hafa fundist flestar heiðnar grafir, en mjög fáar í sumum héruðum öðrum. Í Skaftafellssýslum og víðar hafa eldgos, stórflóð, sandfok og aðrar hamfarir eytt gröfum eins og öðrum manna verkum. Það á þó ekki sérstaklega við um Borgarfjörð eða Breiðafjörð, einhver bestu héruð landsins, þar sem heiðin kuml hafa bæði fundist fá og fátækleg. Heiðnin virðist ekki hafa staðið djúpum rótum víða vestan lands, og þar hafa menn líklega keppt við að smala forfedrum sínum í kristinna manna reiti eftir kristnitöku, eða gert forna kumlateiga að kirkjugörðum þar sem þeir voru nálægt bæjum. Slíkt kann að hafa verið algengt hér, þar sem svo lítil átök urðu milli kristni og heiðni." Björn Þorsteinsson, *Íslandssaga til okkar daga*, 20; In Kristján Eldjárn's extensive publication on the known heathen graves of Iceland, *Kuml og haugfé*, 83, only one heathen gravesite in the Breiðafjörður area

may have been an oral tradition that aided the early Christians of West Iceland in achieving this early adoption of Christian funerary rights.

Recent studies into the use of *exempla* have shown that they should not be solely considered a literary genre, as they were also used as a function for other literary works outside the collections of *exempla* published throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. *Exempla* allowed for the ease of creating rhetorical arguments.⁸⁰ What we actually have here is a cleric's use of an Icelandic oral tale in the same fashion as an *exemplum* would have been used in fashioning a rhetorical argument to edify the lay public sphere on a grander scale than the single *exemplum* could do on its own. One could say that this is an example of a native Icelandic tradition in the same vein. However, the motivations of the original *exemplum* have been altered considerably by its use in the larger narrative, and so the original *exemplum* is now lost.

Motivations of the Cleric

Despite its location quite removed from continental European society, Iceland was not an insular society. In the Icelander's effort to be taken seriously on the European stage their attempts to conform to the societal model might be viewed as extreme. Despite the fact that they did not have a king, Lára Magnúsdóttir has shown that they attempted to gain concordance with the papacy as a nation state in their own right. This attempt shows a move towards a political and legal situation common for the time; to find a way to bring the secular and ecclesiastical arms of law together under a single banner, yet with their own well defined jurisdictions. This model is well exemplified in *Eyrbyggja saga* with the *Fróðárundr* episode. The aim was not to preach and to propagate this story as an *exemplum* itself, but rather to

interacts with our saga, that of *Árnkell goði*. However, *Eldjárn* considers that this site cannot be classified as a fully qualified heathen *kuml*.

⁸⁰ For a recent study in this vein, see Louis, "Production, diffusion et usages des recueils d'exempla latins aux XIIIe-XVe siècles."

inform public opinion through catering to the public in a more secularized form of entertainment. The saga either proved quite successful at culminating popularity in this fashion as noted by Einar Ólafur Sveinsson in his analysis of the poetry,⁸¹ or the clerics of Helgafell used contemporary popular elements to assist them in weaving their moral, spiritual, and legal messages into their work. There is probably a bit of truth to both of these ideas.

The account that Eiríkur Magnússon gives of the abbots deserves further attention in light of our current speculation. He posits that the author of *Eyrbyggja* was none other than Hallr Gizurarson, who presided over the abbacy of Helgafell from 1221–1225. Despite his abbacy being within Einar Ólafur’s best guess for the writing of our saga, as noted above, Einar Ól. dismisses the possibility of his authorship. As discussed above, it seems that Einar Ól. believed that the contemporary poetry had to have come from *Eyrbyggja* first, dismissing a dialogical model out of hand, even though his earliest date of a comparable work, 1212, shows some possibility of two-way dialogue between the works.⁸² His reasoning for dismissing Hallr Gizurarson as having anything to do with *Eyrbyggja* seems to be propped up by an unstable foundation if the work is considered to have been composed by one or more clerics, with an interest not in the ancient customs of their predecessors, but rather with a will to harmonize the past with the present, legally and morally.

⁸¹ This analysis leads Einar Ól. to posit the exact age of the saga closer to 1222, at least in some early form. Though it seems more prudent to admit some dialogical discourse between works instead of positing that all of the poetical similarities between works owe their origin to *Eyrbyggja saga*. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Eyrbyggja saga*, xlix–li.

⁸² “Ég þori að sönnu ekki að treysta á vísu Sighvats frá 1212, sem er einangruð, enda er líkingin þar minnst, en líklegt virðist, að sagan hafi verið til og nokkuð kunn 1222.” Ibid., l–li.

Considering Russell Poole’s analysis of the *Máhlíðingavísur*, there is evidence suggesting the poetry predates the work at hand, but was nevertheless created *ex post facto*.⁸³ With this type of oral dialogue known to have existed, it is difficult to continue assuming that *Eyrbyggja* was the source for the similarities in the analyzed poetry, rather it is easier to believe that the poetry lived within a dialogic framework that found its greatest expression at the time that Einar Ólafur Sveinsson posits their dating. Furthermore, as a collaborative effort, we can easily imagine that the work would receive a good treatment for its geographical location from the information gleaned from locals of the area, which would have obviously included people connected directly with the monastery. In addition, the education that Eiríkur Magnússon held in high regard of Hallr Gizurarson cannot be said as firmly about the earlier abbots that Einar Ól. directs our attention to.

It is becoming more widely accepted that our scribe or scribes mastered a crafted art in writing *Eyrbyggja*. Lee M. Hollander offers as his conclusion to “The Structure of *Eyrbyggja* saga”:

[T]he sagas, and more especially this one, cannot be read quasi-passively, as can a unilateral story or a modern novel, but require a certain amount of co-operation on the part of the reader which, as *exempla docent*, our scholars have not shown in this instance. But read thus, I believe we must come to the conclusion that the interbraiding, like the intercalation of sentences in Skaldic poetry, is hardly fortuitous; rather, it shows conscious planning on the part of an author who has in mind an audience that is constantly on the *qui vive* and able to follow this method

⁸³ “The *Máhlíðingavísur* are probably not by Þórarinn but by a later, unidentified poet. They were probably composed as an embellishment to a twelfth or late eleventh-century account of the deeds of Snorri goði.” Poole, “The Origins of the *Máhlíðingavísur*,” 281.

of presentation. He does not merely string along the traditions of his countryside artlessly—popular tradition does just that—but arranges them to suit his purpose.⁸⁴

While we can agree with Hollander that there is a method being followed in the writing of the saga, his interpretation of the “interbraiding” of events in skaldic stanza style format is quite terse and allows only a scratch at the surface. With the scribal will to harmonize two disjointed spheres, the divine, and the temporal; the ecclesiastical, and the lay; the idea that scribes would have practiced a learned art in its creation must be explored.

Dialectical Discourse as an Instrument for Interpretation

For Boethius, dialectic was a tool to be used by the philosopher, and the rhetorician, just as much as it was to be used for the interrupted style of argumentation in use by the dialectician.

Since almost every discipline uses an instrument to do what it is able to do, there will also be an instrument for the rhetorical discipline. This is discourse; and it is used partly in the political genus and partly not. But we are talking now about discourse which involves a question or which is suitable for the purpose of untangling a question. Discourse used in the political genus runs along without a break; but that which is not used in political cases unfolds in questions and answers. The first is called rhetorical; the second, dialectical. The latter differs from the former, first because the former examines a political hypothesis [but] the latter, a thesis; [and] then because the former is carried on by unbroken discourse [but] the latter, by interrupted discourse, and because rhetorical discourse has a judge in addition to an opponent, but dialectical discourse uses the same person as both judge and opponent.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Hollander, “JEGP,” 227.

⁸⁵ Boethius, *Boethius's De Topicis Differentiis*, 82.

Boethius' understanding of dialectic was somewhat different from modern philosophy's brandishing of it, as what has been termed Hegelian dialectic is so often at the fore of our modern understanding of it, the so-called syllogism of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.⁸⁶ Though not far removed, Boethius prefers to think of dialectic as a source for finding arguments, and so provides in *De topicis differentiis* a set of methods to do just that. Book IV attempts to merge the rhetorical device with the dialectical. His source is Aristotle's *Topics* or *Topoi*, and with his knowledge of Greek, Boethius bridged the gap between classical and medieval scholasticism before the rest of Aristotle's works would surface from an Arabian source.⁸⁷ They gained a foothold in the universities of Europe during the Middle Ages and were used by Gratian to form a basis for his work in harmonizing canon law and papal decretal letters in the 12th century. Gratian's work would have been well known to the educated friars of Helgafell.

Scribes at Helgafell were also interested in harmonizing law and by the middle of the 14th century law books had become their bread and butter. The best example of this is AM 350 fol. otherwise known as *Skarðsbók*, a book of such rich distinguishment that only a wealthy man

⁸⁶ It is best put by Chalybäus when he says, “[s]till it is in vain, that we endeavour in this sphere to get free from the power of Dialectics; like Proteus it flies from one shape into another, but everywhere it is found that within reflection no individual momentum affords a safe resting-place - that each passes irresistibly into its counterpart, or rather that each is already in itself the other.” *Historical Development of Speculative Philosophy, from Kant to Hegel*, 378.

⁸⁷ As Richard Rubenstein tells it, the scholarship of Byzantium floundered while scholars were persecuted and the Platonic Academy was closed in 529 by Emperor Justinian. These scholars chose to move east into Persia where their intellectual abilities were able to blossom and take shape. This is how the Arabs received a wealth of Classical learning. Later in the 12th and 13th centuries, Archbishop Raymond of Toledo would establish a house for translators where the works of these scholars would find their way back to the Christian forum. *Aristotle's Children*, 77–78.

could have commissioned such a work, and some evidence exists that it had been bought and sold during the 15th century at a value of 5 cows.⁸⁸

The use of dialectics in a rhetorical context, not for oral construction, but written, has obvious advantages. It allows the writer to balance his rhetorical exposition by finding arguments with universal maxims (maximal propositions), so as to harmonize disparate cases (hypotheses), from both a legal and a spiritual perspective. However, if the writer wishes to leave an argument open to interpretation, because he is aware of dialectics, he can also remove any semblance of an argument that would cause belief for any single facet from the rhetoric. Because the written word is not legal discourse, where a single case is argued by a plaintiff and a defendant, there is no separation of judge and opponent, thus we can say that the rhetoric of written discourse has a great deal of use for dialectical rather than rhetorical topics at a somewhat base level. If one writes a work to argue multiple cases or hypotheses to a reader, they must present a thesis and utilize as much universally accepted logic as possible to harmonize them through arguments, and subsequently syllogisms. We are beginning to use the vocabulary that Boethius himself utilizes in *De topicis differentiis*, and for the reader's use, a short glossary has been placed in Appendix I. It is important to have in mind that instead of utilizing the terms: *thesis*, *antithesis*, and *synthesis*; we are using: *thesis*, *arguments*, and

⁸⁸ “Þess er enn að geta um Skarðsbók, sem fátítt er, að hún segir sjálf til um aldur sinn; aftarlega í henni er yfirlit um heimsaldra og sagt að 1363 ár séu liðin af þeim aldri sem hófst með burði Krists. Fyrir utan sjálfa lögbókina eru á Skarðsbók réttarbætur margar, Hirðskrá (lög um hirð Noregskonunga), kristinréttur Árna biskups og ýmsar biskupastatútur (frá árinu 1359 sú sem yngst er), og síðast nokkurir fróðleiksmolar til fyllingar. Hefur hér verið safnað í einn stað öllum þeim lögum er helzt vörðuðu Íslendinga er bókin var ger, og ber hún með sér að sá hefur verið auðugur maður og átt mikið undir sér er hana lét rita. Því miður vitum vér ekki hver hann var. Það er varla út í bláinn að hann lét taka Hirðskrá upp í bókina, og mætti gera sér í hugarlund að hann hefði talið sig handgenginn konungi og líklega haft hirðstjórátign [...] Á síðasta áratugi 15du aldar gerði Björn Guðnason í Ögri skrá um peningaskipti við Guðna Jónsson föður sinn og nefnir þar fyrst að hann hafi fengið honum ”lögbók með réttarbótum og kristinrétt og hirðsiðum, hver eð keypt var og seld fyrir 5 hundruð“. Þetta gæti vel verið Skarðsbók, en hvort sem svo er eða eigi, er athugasemdin fróðleg um verð eigulegra bóka; eitt hundruð var kýrverð.” Jón Helgason, *Handritaspjall*, 70–71.

sylogism instead. It is important to remember that the closer one gets to the general in their argumentation, A) the more believable their argument is, and B) the more likely the argument can be used repeatedly.

For example we can see a dialectic formed in the final chapter of *Egils saga*. When Egill's bones are discovered, he is placed in a pagan burial first (thesis), then reinterred and buried under an altar (antithesis). Finally, Skapti Þórarinnsson has the bones placed on the outskirts of the cemetery where the prime-signed should be buried (synthesis). These are three separate cases, and in each, something different is done. There is dialectical argumentations to be found here in harmonizing the three cases, and we must begin to form propositions from our thesis. Since a thesis is general, and not specific, it is about the burial of a person in order to allow their resurrection in the afterlife or access to paradise. Therefore the proposition regarding the burial of pagans is that they cannot take part in the afterlife, for Christians of the time it was a sin to even have so much as a contractual relationship with a pagan. Here we can use the maximal proposition: "if what seems the less to inhere inheres, then what seems the more to inhere will inhere,"⁸⁹ as surely what inheres in an earthly contract inheres in the spiritual in this case since it seems the more to inhere to the spiritual.

The argument against burial under an altar is that only the most holy should receive such sanctity. We have an argument from the topic of genus here, is Egill a species of man that falls under the genus of most holy? Such a categorization of Egill is easy to dismiss, based on the easily established argument that being prime-signed is of lesser quality to being a most holy man. This is easily and readily believable. But what about being buried in the churchyard or cemetery? There is obviously an argument to be found for this as well, and it boils down to the fact that the prime-signed are unable to receive such sanctity as such a burial establishes. The synthesis or syllogism is finally formed by the final case where there is an argument for

⁸⁹ Boethius, *Boethius's De Topicis Differentiis*, 55.

the prime-signed to have a place for burial just outside the cemetery.⁹⁰ So the dialectical question here appears as: Does a pagan man deserve a Christian burial? Another question also appears in a similar form: Does someone who knows not the salvation of the lord have access to paradise? A question faced and countered by the dialecticians of the 12th and 13th centuries in the growing educational systems of Western Europe, cf. Peter Abelard’s arguments against the condemnation of those ignorant of Christ’s salvation.⁹¹

Of interest as well to the present discourse because of its relationship with Aristotle is the prose translation of the 12th century Latin poem, *Alexandreis*, by Walter of Châtillon in the 13th century by Brandr Jónsson. Book 1 (*Liber I*) of the work begins with Alexander’s tutelage under Aristotle and his present studies are described as simply logic (*logica*) in the original poem but specifically as “*dialectica heitir alatino. en þręto boc er kolloð anorono*“ in the translation.⁹² Brandr Jónsson is thought to have translated the piece in Trondheim at the behest of King Hákon the Old during the winter of 1262–63, making it contemporary with *Eyrbyggja saga*. The use of the words *dialectica* and *þrętubók* in the translation is interesting and shows that the translator had knowledge of the specific type of logic that Aristotle would have instructed from outside of the direct source material. The Norse word *þręta* is an interesting one under our current lens because it is intimately connected with argumentation and legal disputation.⁹³

⁹⁰ Torfi Tulinius provides further cases and arguments for Egill’s burial on the outskirts of the cemetery in *Skáldið í skriftinni*, 8–9;82–85.

⁹¹ “if they have tried, in their ignorance of the Savior, to please God with all their might. Christ did not die to pay some debt on our behalf either to the devil or to God. He died to pour charity into our hearts. Those who learn to love God, not just to obey him mechanically, may be saved whether they are Christians or not.” Richard E. Rubenstein, *Aristotle’s Children*, 95.

⁹² Walter of Châtillon, *Alexanders saga*, 3; See Gualterus de Castiglione, “*Alexandreis*” for original.

⁹³ *þręta*, u, f., older and better *þrętta*, D.N. v. 57, B.K. 51, [Dan. *trętte*]:-a quarrel, wrangling, litigation, Nj. 16, Fms. vi. 373, viii. 157, 338, Sks. 650, passim; *þrętu-bók*, a book of dialectics; *þrętu-hagi*, a disputed pasture, Ann. 172. COMPDS: *þrętu-dólgr*, m. a quarrelsome litigant, Bs. ii. *þrętu-*

Helgafell was an Augustinian monastery and we would be remiss if we did not explore what relationship Augustine himself had with the dialectical logic known to Boethius himself, and to medieval western Christians through his work. Richard Rubenstein points out how Augustine in his *Confessions* indicates his joy at learning Aristotle's *Ten Categories*.⁹⁴ St. Augustine details how he found *Categories* easy to comprehend but found that others around him faltered in their understanding of it.⁹⁵ *The Ten Categories* was available to Augustine in a translation by Gaius Marius Victorinus, a fellow African who also moved to Rome to instruct others in rhetoric. Augustine cites him as a great influence, a fellow convert, though not from Manichaeism but from Platonism. Augustine himself was influenced by Platonism and Plotinus' Neo-Platonic philosophy.⁹⁶ Birna Bjarnadóttir suggests that Augustine goes through a conversion from Neo-Platonism when she says that, "Augustine lived during the developmental era of Christianity, and his text bears the marks of its time."⁹⁷ She discusses the temptation for knowledge that Augustine had before he converted and his continuing need to keep it at bay.⁹⁸

His quest for knowledge, he thought, must be tempered by Christian doctrine, and so he is not quite the same type of classical thinker as Boethius, as he does not have the same recipe

gjarn, adj. fond of litigation. þrætu-mál, n. a litigation, Fms. vii. 219. þrætu-sterkr, adj. strong in dispute, Mar. þrætu-teigr=þrætuhagi, D.N. Cleasby, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 748.

⁹⁴ "Recalling his classical education in Carthage, [Augustine] remembered how proud he had been to master Aristotle's *Categories* without any help from his teachers." Richard E. Rubenstein, *Aristotle's Children*, 51; What Augustine refers to as *The Ten Categories* of Aristotle is found in the first section of *The Organon*.

⁹⁵ Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions and Enchiridion*, bk. IV, ch. xv, 28.

⁹⁶ Ibid., bk. VIII, ch. ii, 3; The first two tenets of Augustinianism are defined as: "1. God is Pure Being, immaterial, eternal, pure intelligence, immutable, and a unity. (Augustine was influenced by Plato and the Neo-Platonic philosophy of Plotinus.) 2. The soul rules the body (as in Platonism) and its spiritual condition causes good and evil." Peter Adam Angeles, *Dictionary of Christian Theology*, 25.

⁹⁷ Birna goes on to say: "In terms of the inner life, he steps out of neoplatonism into Christianity." *Recesses of the Mind*, 82.

⁹⁸ This discussion looks at the influence of Augustine on literature since the writing of *Confessions*. Ibid., 76–82.

for argumentation. What Augustine could know of the Greek philosophers he had garnered from the Latin translations available to him at the time, especially those by Victorinus, whereas Boethius knew Greek and was a man devoted to such translations at a time when those of the Latin educated were losing their command of that language. For places like the Abbey of St. Victor, Boethius took over from Augustine in providing an able path to rationalize Christian doctrine without falling victim to the sin of excess in the thirst for knowledge.

In Book IV of *De topicis differentiis*, Boethius juxtaposes the rhetorical topics with the dialectical stating that the main difference between the dialectician and the rhetorician is the difference between the general and the specific, thesis vs. hypothesis, and that while a pure dialectician can be content with his suite of topics, the rhetorician cannot proceed without the dialectical topics. The dialectical topics are universal and simple, not following one particular set of circumstances, whereas the rhetorical topics are narrowed by particular circumstances. With the use of dialectical topics one can move from the sphere of thesis to the sphere of hypothesis, the general to the specific.

In Search of Arguments

Now that we have familiarized ourselves with the foundation of Boethian dialectic and rhetoric, let us review the established premises for the scribal practices and the environment of a cleric in 13th century Iceland. First of all, the cleric was skilled in law, and this does not count against him in a clerical fashion, since clerics were indeed interested in law and harmonizing law between the Church and any given state, even in fact if there were considerable obstacles hindering the process, as exemplified by their attempt to develop a concordance with the Church. Secondly, the cleric was instructed using the premises of the seven liberal arts, of which dialectic was a fundamental facet that lead not only to the ability to simply produce arguments, of which most are applicable to legal process, but also aided both

philosophical and other rhetorical interests which sought universal truths and their explication via rhetorical devices, orally and on calfskin. Though we must be careful not to attribute this method to the indigenous oral tradition of Iceland, it definitely has a place in the dialogic pattern of works available to us from 13th century Iceland. Clerics were bound by the one true faith, but their interests were in the health of all the souls that were found within their purview, and this necessitated getting closer to local institutions, a point that Kevin Wanner successfully convinces, as noted above.

In order to appeal to their flock, the cleric would have utilized the knowledge obtained from those who had been educated on the mainland. Furthermore, Icelandic travels to mainland Europe were not uncommon, they were in fact common enough to warrant the writing of a handbook by the most well-travelled among them at the time, Gizur Hallsson. He was especially well travelled as a pilgrim, as he is noted as going as far south as Bari in 1152,⁹⁹ contemporary with Þorlákr helgi, and he is credited with the writing of the lost *Flos peregrinationis*, a guidebook for pilgrims.

Unfortunately, Kevin Wanner's claim that a number of the early abbots of Helgafell had a Parisian education appears somewhat misguided. He claims that Hermann Pálsson reviews a number of early abbots in his book *Helgafell: Saga höfuðbóls og klausturs*.¹⁰⁰ However, this is an erroneous assertion, as we shall now see. Fortunately for our part, the exercise of reviewing who had an education and where, will still favour our current argument, being that the educated of Iceland were no less educated than those on the mainland. It is ridiculous to think that the clerical scholars of Iceland would be completely unaware of the common method

⁹⁹ "Klængur fór utan hit sama sumar sem hann var til biskups kosinn, með bréfum Bjarnar biskups, á fund Áskels erkibiskups, ok vígði hann Klæng til biskups xij. nóttum eptir Mária messu á vár, ok hit sama sumar eptir fór hann til Íslands, ok var þá kominn frá Róm sunnan, ok allt utan or Bár, Gizurr Hallsson, [ok] fór út með honum; ok áttu þá menn at fagna tveim senn hinum beztu manngersemum á Íslandi." Jón Sigurðsson et al., *Biskupa sögur*, I:80–81.

¹⁰⁰ Wanner, "Purity and Danger in Earliest Iceland," 237.

instructed by Boethius' texts in the discovery of arguments, when by all accounts Boethius was second only to Augustine in medieval scholarship.¹⁰¹ It is also no less ridiculous that they would be unaware of their merit in constructing rhetorically based compositions such as those delivered orally in addition to those which were produced on vellum. It is noted that Cicero through Augustine was consulted by the medieval Icelandic scribe,¹⁰² and these two in addition to Boethius have an intimate textual relationship. As Richard Green notes in his translation of *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Augustine and Cicero were extremely important to Boethius' work as well.¹⁰³ These three early Christian scholars form a good portion of medieval western European scholarship in the seven liberal arts. These works have been fundamental for a number of centuries by the time our scribe at Helgafell is putting quill to vellum and hardly revolutionary. At the same time the medieval renaissance in Toledo is going on, where philosophy begins to come back to the West, but our Icelandic scholastics cannot be said to have travelled to Spain, and they may not have had much knowledge of this.

Plato and Aristotle had achieved a sort of legendary status in the west. Though they were at times recognized for their contributions to the clerical education of the age, they were also

¹⁰¹ “[F]or the next five centuries, as tribal migrations and raids, famines, plagues, and warlordism disrupted European society, the translations and essays of Boethius, along with two or three short summaries by other writers and a compendium of texts by Cassiodorus, would be all that the West would know of Greek philosophy. As a result, when learning revived in the Latin world half a millennium later, virtually every thinker’s starting point was the logic of Aristotle as translated, interpreted, and applied by Boethius.” Richard E. Rubenstein, *Aristotle’s Children*, 62–63; “In short, he was one of the main influences on the early scholastics and was an authority for them second perhaps only to Augustine among Christian philosophers.” Boethius, *Boethius’s In Ciceronis Topica*, 2–3.

¹⁰² “Kennslubækur í mælskufræðum eru ekki nefndar á nafn í heimildum utan *De doctrina christiana* (Um kristin fræði) eftir sælan Ágústínus frá Hippó (d. 430). Sú bók er til í klaustrinu í Viðey seint á 14. öld. Líkur benda þó til að hún hafi verið til miklu fyrr. Og hún var ekki einungis handbók í kristnum fræðum heldur lagði Ágústínus þar fram fyrirmæli um hvernig semja skyldi ræður og studdist í því við verk Cícerós. Klassísk mælskufræði átti með þessu riti greiðan aðgang að klerkum og öðrum lærdómsmönnum sem numið höfðu fræði sín undir verndarvæng kirkjunnar.” Vésteinn Ólason et al., *Íslensk bókmenntasaga I*, 275.

¹⁰³ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, 1962, pt. Introduction.

sometimes vilified as counterintuitive to Christian sensibilities. Martyrs and apostles were praised for their ability to utilize all the liberal arts, but when it came down to it, reason or, better, the truth could only be obtained through Jesus Christ. A good example of this, *Katarine saga*, has a young woman, well versed in all the liberal arts, counter the arguments of the pagans of Alexandria. The great pagan philosophers are won over after they have been “at þreyta við helga mey iþrottir ok þræta i moti henni með svikum ok prettum ok slægðum”.¹⁰⁴ Unconvinced or merely attempting to hold onto power, the king makes them into newly converted martyrs by putting these philosophers to death by fire. So, although they owed much to Plato and Aristotle, the medieval cleric sometimes barely admitted to it, a conflict inherited from Augustine, and one which was continuously subject to scrutiny. Plato was harmonized with faith, time and time again, just as the medieval Icelandic cleric harmonized the pagan past with the Christian present. Even anachronisms appear in their texts in relation to Latin learning, such as can be found in *Petrus saga postola*, where the seven liberal arts are attributed to the Romans living at the time of the Apostles.¹⁰⁵ While in reality the seven liberal arts were a product of Latin learning from the early Christian scholastics.

Icelandic Scholasticism

As previously asserted, the connection Iceland had was not as some believed to be, isolated, rather they were well connected with the mainland, and many earlier Christians were able to receive an education abroad. Here we outline those that made the largest impact on Icelandic scholasticism, particularly in the Skálaholt diocese. There are two disparate groups that appear closely linked with the early scholastic fathers of Iceland in this area. The line between them is drawn by clan affiliation. The prominent families are the Haukdælir and the Oddaverjar. The

¹⁰⁴ Cf. the definition of þræta. Unger, “Katerine saga,” 406.

¹⁰⁵ “... hann þotti algiör at ollum .vii. iþrottum, þeim sem Romverium voru i þann tima kærar.” Unger, *Postola Sögur*, 57.

most famous Oddaverji, and one of the first Icelanders to study abroad is Sæmundur fróði. Legends have risen around him, most interestingly that he attended the Black School in France.¹⁰⁶ Regarding the Haukdælir, Ari fróði is the most well known, his *Íslendingabók* is the beginning of historical sources in Iceland, and he attributes Sæmundur fróði as an adviser along with the bishops Þorlákr and Ketill.¹⁰⁷

Oddi

Education begins in the Skálaholt diocese in part with Sæmundur fróði's school at Oddi. His education abroad, though said to have been in France by Ari, was probably in an area of Germany called Franconia. There were no formal schools in Europe during the 11th century, so his education must have taken place at a convent or monastery.¹⁰⁸ The rise of educational institutions in Iceland are contemporary with the rise of universities on the mainland, and it is Þorlákr helgi who appears to have taken most advantage of the educational institutions that appeared during his lifetime. He is noted as having studied in England, and Paris, after also having an initial education at Oddi.

Snorri Sturluson is the most renowned Icelander to have received an education at Oddi. It is interesting to note that Snorri also appears to have made some attempt at resolving the pagan past with the Christian present. Ursula and Peter Dronke accuse Snorri of creating a new dialectic, straying from Martin of Braga's epistolary sermon *De correctione rusticorum*, in the prologue of the *Prose Edda*. Man's fall from grace allows him to attain worldly knowledge. "The gift that, in Snorri's Prologue, God gives mankind after the flood is the power to observe cosmic design, and thence to understand what the philosophers and theologians call *the*

¹⁰⁶ Guðrún Bjartmarsdóttir 1939, *Bergmál*, 97–99.

¹⁰⁷ Ari Þorgilsson, "Íslendingabók," 3.

¹⁰⁸ For further information about Sæmundur's education see Garðar Gíslason, "Hvar nam Sæmundur fróði?".

argument from design for God's existence.¹⁰⁹ The Dronke's go on to cite the similarities of harmonizing the pagan past with the Christian present in other testimonies given by members of the early Church, specifically comparing passages from Augustine and Minucius Felix's dialogue *Octavius*. The proposition that surrounds them all is the argument from design.

Haukadalsr

Gizur inn hvíti Teitsson was one of the greatest proponents for the conversion to Christianity in Iceland,¹¹⁰ and it was his son Ísleifr that became the first Icelandic bishop, presiding over all of Iceland at Skálholt. His father had sold him to a nun in Herford, Saxony to be educated. He came home well educated and consecrated as a priest. Christian education began quite early after the conversion, despite there being a number of people in the country unwilling to convert and accept Christian ideals. Many people sold their sons to him to be educated, creating a school at his farmstead at Skálholt.¹¹¹ One of his students was Jón Ógmundarson helgi, the first bishop of Hólar, who also studied in Denmark and Norway.¹¹²

Ísleifr's son, Gizur, had a very similar fate as his father, educated in Saxony, and became the bishop in Iceland. He was also the one, at the behest of some of the magnates of the country that instigated the tithe in Iceland.¹¹³ Ísleifr's other son Teitr was according to William Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon, behind the foundation of the school in Haukadalsr, an outgrowth of the cathedral school at Skálholt that Ísleifr had established earlier.¹¹⁴ This is the same type of scenario that was developing in mainland Europe at the end of the 11th and the beginning of the 12th century, where cathedral schools were transforming into universities. Of course, Iceland was on a much smaller scale, and the schools that developed there outside of

¹⁰⁹ Einar G. Pétursson and Jónas Kristjánsson, "The Prologue of the Prose Edda," 156.

¹¹⁰ Ari Þorgilsson, "Íslendingabók," 14–16.

¹¹¹ Jón Ólafsson, *Hungurvaka*, 12–18.

¹¹² Jón Sigurðsson et al., *Biskupa sögur*, I:154.

¹¹³ Jón Ólafsson, *Hungurvaka*, 36–48.

¹¹⁴ Eiríkur Magnússon and Morris, *The Story of the Ere-Dwellers*, xxii.

the cathedral cannot rightly be called universities, but they were institutions of higher learning with a broader purview than the cathedral schools that were established for a singular aim, to educate and consecrate priests.

The 13th Century Augustinian Order of Iceland

Hermann Pálsson indicates that there is a great possibility that, since he is known for having studied in Paris, Þorlákr helgi would have studied at the Abbey of St. Victor located there. Hermann also notes that Saint William of Æbelholt relocated from there to Denmark, and in 1175 presided as abbot at Eplaholt in Sjáland (Æbelholt in Sjælland), becoming one of the most remarkable cloisters in Denmark.¹¹⁵ Hermann Pálsson also points not only to the connection of Þorlákr helgi to the St. Victor Abbey, but as the first prior of Þykkvabær cloister, the assumption is that his monastery would have taken up Augustinianism. Ásdís Egilsdóttir makes note in her edition of *Þorláks saga* (A redaction) that Þorlákr specifically follows the model from the Abbey of St. Victor.¹¹⁶ Hermann also makes note of later sources, though unfortunately doesn't provide them, which point to Helgafell being a cloister based on the model founded at the French abbey.

One of the greatest dialecticians of the early 12th century was Peter Abelard, a grand showboater who relished in tearing his opponent's arguments apart, often making enemies out of them.¹¹⁷ He is well known for his dispute with William of Champeaux that harkens back to the beginnings of the abbey in Paris. Students there at that time would have had a remarkable

¹¹⁵ This is our connection to the French school which Kevin Wanner subtly misrepresents by saying that a number of the early abbots of Helgafell studied in Paris. Hermann Pálsson, *Helgafell: saga höfuðbóls og klausturs*, 57.

¹¹⁶ "Sagan leggur áherslu á að Þorlákur hafi boðið bræðrum að halda þagnartíma og bannað ferðalög að nauðsynjalausu. Hvort tveggja er í samræmi við þá reglu sem gildi í Viktorsklastri, en á ekki við Ágústínaklaustur almennt. (Dickinson, *The Origins of the Austin Canons*, 74, 180-184.) Ásdís Egilsdóttir, Jónas Kristjánsson, and Gottskálk Þór Jenson, *Biskupa sögur*, II:58-59.

¹¹⁷ Richard E. Rubenstein, *Aristotle's Children*, 89-90.

show of dialectic while studying under William at his hermitage, while he and Abelard, for a time a student of his, began to form their arguments against each other. The greatest result of the disputes with his scholastic mentors, both his earlier mentor Roscelin and later William, was the argument for universal names, such as “man”, being a *vox significativa*, a word that bears meaning, rather than as Roscelin suggested, that universals didn’t exist and were thus a *flatus vocis*, a word without meaning at all. William on the other hand argued that the substance of man is universal, and that men differ only by their accidents.¹¹⁸ In *The Dictionary of the Middle Ages* Abelard is noted as showing himself in this “great debate over the nature of universals”, to be a “logical or, better, epistemological nominalist. On the other hand, he was, like Augustine, a philosophical or metaphysical realist in accepting the existence of reality independent of the human mind ...”¹¹⁹

The French school in general is said by Robert Somerville and Bruce Brasington to have its roots in Stephen of Tournai’s work, in their introduction to a preface of his *Summa* on Gratian’s *Decretum*. He was a contemporary of Þorlákr helgi, studying canon law in Bologna at the same time Þorlákr was studying at the Abbey of St. Victor at Paris. Stephen of Tournai’s work is exemplary in its treatment of the dialectic found in the work of Gratian.¹²⁰ He writes in his preface to this *Summa*:

If you invite two guests to dinner, you will not serve the same fare to those who demand opposite things. With the one asking for what the other scorns, will you not vary the dishes, lest either you throw the dining room into confusion or offend the diners? A Latin embraces unleavened bread, a Greek leavened. If they approach the altar together neither despises the sacrifice of the other. I invited two men to a banquet, a theologian and a lawyer, whose tastes diverge toward different

¹¹⁸ See Appendix I for a definition of accidents.

¹¹⁹ Strayer, *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, vol. I, p. 18.

¹²⁰ Somerville and Brasington, *Prefaces to Canon Law Books in Latin Christianity*, 177–178.

desires, since this one is delighted by tart things, and that one longs for sweets. Which of these should we offer, which should we withhold? Do you refuse what either one requests?

If I propose to discuss the laws which appear in the present work, one skilled in law will endure it with difficulty. He will wrinkle his nose, shake his head, thrust out his lip, and what he deems to be known to himself he believes to be unnecessary for others. If I shall have begun to narrate the sacred deeds of the Fathers of the Old and New Testaments, a theologian will consider these remarks as useless and will both charge our little work with prolixity and accuse it of ingratitude. Let them mutually come down a peg; let them join together in healthy agreement; let them pay the costs for something useful; let the theologian not reject the laws under the pretext of sacred history, nor should one skilled in law dismiss with the haughtiness of the laws what is included in sacred history. I seek pardon for prolixity, although I would be unable to traverse the sea in the brief space of an hour, or to go around the lengthy span of the earth with a small step. With these things briefly having been poured forth for washing the hands, let us serve the promised feast to the diners.

In the same city there are two peoples under the same king, and with the two peoples two ways of life, and with two ways of life two dominions, and with two dominions a double order of jurisdiction emerges. The city is the Church; the king of the city is Christ; the two peoples are the two orders in the Church, of clerics and of lay people. The two ways of life are the spiritual and the physical; the two dominions are the institutional Church and secular government; the double order of jurisdiction is divine and human law. Render to each its own and all will be in accord.¹²¹

¹²¹ Ibid., 194–95.

Aristotelean logic was mostly lost to the West when the Latin educated Roman people were forgetting their Greek.¹²² For dialectical logic, which was a tool necessary for a task such as Gratian's *Decretum*, Boethius' texts were indispensable, both his translations of Aristotle and his commentary such as *De topicis differentiis*, even alongside Cicero. Peter Abelard added to this discourse when he wrote about Aristotelean logic based on Boethius and Cicero.¹²³ Abelard's work titled *Sic et non* is comparable to works by Ivo of Chartres, Gratian, and Peter Lombard in the way they attempt to harmonize contradictory authorities using dialectical logic.¹²⁴ It is more than evident in *Skarðsbók* that the cleric was in fact looking to appease both the ecclesiastical and the lay as disparate but intertwined authorities. A donation image has been of some question which appears in *Skarðsbók*, which Selma Jónsdóttir has awakened speculation about.¹²⁵ She appears to be surprised, asking the question how an Icelander could look upon himself so proudly that he would draw himself handing the holy trinity a work of lay origin?¹²⁶ Considering the present engagement in showing the ties between the Church and legal process of the time, this question merits a response. We may take into question whether the man is the donator or whether the holy trinity is the donator, as Moses received the word of God in the form of tablets containing law, so too might the Icelander receive the word of God in the form of law in the conventional form of his time, a vellum manuscript.

¹²² Richard E. Rubenstein, *Aristotle's Children*, 57.

¹²³ "In his twenties and early thirties Abelard taught philosophy at Melun, Corbeil, and Paris, as well as on Mont Sainte Geneviève, just south of Paris. During this period he began to publish commentaries on Aristotelian logic as transmitted by Cicero and Boethius." Strayer, *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, vol. 1, p. 16.

¹²⁴ "His predecessor, Ivo of Chartres, and his slightly younger contemporaries, Gratian and Peter Lombard, also produced compilations of contradictory authorities, but Abelard's *Sic et non* differs from their works by not including an orthodox solution to protect the reader from possible heresy." *Ibid.*, 18.

¹²⁵ See the image below. The image is taken from a plate published in Selma Jónsdóttir's "Gjafarmynd í íslenzku handriti," 12.

¹²⁶ "Hvaða íslenzkur maður hefur árið 1363 litið svo stórt á sig, að hann gerðist svo djárfur að sýna sjálfan sig afhenda heilagri þrenn-ingu veraldlega bók?" Selma Jónsdóttir, "Gjafarmynd í íslenzku handriti," 12.



Donation Image from Skarðsbók AM 350 fol., fol. 2r

Boethius in Iceland

Also of interest for the discourse at hand is Boethius' own prosimetric masterpiece that has a lofty record of influence throughout the Middle Ages, *De consolatione philosophiae*. It is one of the most translated works during the medieval period, enjoying a translation into Old English by King Alfred the Great himself, and Middle English by Geoffrey Chaucer. A manuscript is recorded in a *máldagi* (property registry) at Hólar from 1525.¹²⁷ That we have this as evidence of Boethius' influence in Iceland might seem meagre, but the texts that comprised Boethius' treatise on *Topics* contain information about their treatment by Aristotle, Cicero and Themistius. These two volumes, *De topicis differentiis* and *In Ciceronis topica*, read like text

¹²⁷ *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, 1857, IX:293–305.

books, and must have been merely primers for the greater works that they refer to. Boethius' own translations of Aristotle's *Organon*, though incomplete, were also available in Latin before the Toledo translation house began its work.

The usage of Boethius' own treatises on the works of Aristotle would have been relegated to such a task that befit text books, and they might not have been saved after the *Organon* was translated in its entirety by the Toledo school and enough time had elapsed to have these volumes disseminated. *The Consolation of Philosophy* on the other hand was kept beyond the 14th century as a work of art that moved beyond the purview of mere instruction. A number of other works that appear in the registry are worth mentioning here: "sextus decretalium og decretalius gregorij. [...] decretum graciane [...] prima pars sancti tome de Aquino [...] auctoritas aristoles [...] alexander [...] Bohetius de philosophiae consolatione [...] kristinn riettur enn gamle og hinn nýe ã einne bok."¹²⁸ Take note not only of Boethius' work, but Gratian and Aristotle in particular, and recall that this is a record from the 16th century. It begs the question, what would a record from the 13th century look like if it had ever existed?

Literary Analysis

In our quest for the arguments of the 13th century Icelandic dialectician, we shall take our lead from our modern scholarly predecessors. Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards have outlined the episodes of *Eyrbyggja* as being 8 in number in their 1973 translation. We list them here below:

1. Prologue (Chs. 1-8)
2. Quarrels between the Þórsnesingar and the Kjalleklingar (Chs. 9-28)
3. The Conflict between Snorri and Arnkell (Chs. 29-38)
4. Snorri and the Þorbrandssynir vs. Björn and the Þórlákssynir (Chs. 39-48)
5. Christianity and the Ghosts (Chs. 49-55)
6. Snorri against Óspakr and the Vikings (Chs. 56-62)

¹²⁸ Ibid., IX:298–299.

7. Echoes from the Past (Chs. 63–64)
8. Epilogue (Ch. 65)¹²⁹

For our current analysis we will attempt a discovery of some of the constituent cases belonging to the first two episodes, while connections will be made to later episodes. *Eyrbyggja saga* is a very complicated saga and a close reading such as this is bound up in the details. Taking care to explain some of the connections to dialectical argumentation will take some doing, and it may be helpful to the reader to consult the glossary in Appendix I from time to time. It would be impossible in this forum to discover all the propositions, questions, and theses, the dialectician may have had in mind. This will instead be an attempt to discover a number of examples and how that relates to the current scholarly dialogue regarding the episodes we can touch upon.

The “Prologue” is self-contained but the “Quarrels between the Þórsnesingar and the Kjalleklingar” is intensely complex. This section I have broken up into 7 sub-sections entitled: 1) The Initial Dispute, 2) The Rise of Snorri goði, 3) The *Máhlíðingamál*, 4) The Horses Found and a Dispute about Sheep, 5) Eiríkr rauði, 6) The *Berserkjamál*, and 7) An Attempt on Snorri goði’s Life.

1. Prologue

The “Prologue” introduces the families by their forebears, focusing on their settlement of Iceland but certainly not limited to it. The initial action takes place in Norway, the Hebrides, and Orkneys. The stage is set with war in Norway, and many have fled their family estates and

¹²⁹ Paul Geoffrey Edwards and Hermann Pálsson, *Eyrbyggja Saga*, 13–23; this edition of the saga like most others follows the chapter scheme found in Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Eyrbyggja saga*; Forrest S. Scott advises that the chapter division from the paper manuscript these editions follow is not exact, though close, to the other vellum manuscripts. *Eyrbyggja saga: The Vellum Tradition*, xiii. Thus here, we will view the saga through these outlined episodes rather than chapter division, though some of these episodes will require sub-division.

some are making raids on the mainland with outposts on the islands. Haraldr hárfagri's role in both inciting the people to revolt by trying to subsume them under a new kingdom, and his attempt to quell this revolt, are introduced. It has been assumed that the portrayals of King Harald Fairhaired have shown that his actions were sadistic and drove people by necessity to seek refuge elsewhere.¹³⁰ In the *Icelandic Family Sagas* he is best portrayed in this light in *Egils saga*, where he is characterized as brutally punishing those who neither fell into his service nor left the country.¹³¹ Sigurður Nordal notes in his edition of *Egils saga* that there are no other particular sources about this kind of punishment being used by Haraldr hárfagri, and speculation for some has since turned to understanding how little we know of the king that united Norway.¹³²

The representation of Haraldr hárfagri as a brutal instigator of violence is not to be found here in our saga. In fact we find him betrayed by Ketill flatnefr who develops a power of his own in his placement as a leader (*hǫfðingi*) of King Haraldr in the Hebrides. An interesting facet of this discourse is that the action happens within dialogue, as Ketill is betrayed by the army that had accompanied him. They say that they do not know that he would bring the kingdom for King Haraldr across the ocean to the west or in the Hebrides, “en eigi sǫgðusk

¹³⁰ Ólafur Lárusson made a defence of the notion that Iceland's settlement period must be viewed through the lens of a migration due to Haraldr's actions in Norway in *Lög og saga*, 57. “Á síðustu árum hafa nokkrir fræðimenn þó dregið þessa skoðun í efa. Sá efi er þó alveg ástæðulaus. Bygging Íslands verður alls ekki skýrð svo fullnægjandi sé, er gjörðist í Noregi um líkt leyti.” His logic is founded largely on the fact that Iceland was established as a nation in a mere 60 years, mostly between the years 890 to 910. However, it is my contention that there was a great deal more going in the Northern sphere that had an influence on the early settlement of Iceland as well. After all, the year that Iceland is said to have received its first settler (874) is the same year that the Great Heathen Army invaded England. Though Ólafur Lárusson's statement here does stand, as we would be seriously remiss if we did not consider Haraldr hárfagri's influence.

¹³¹ “þá lét hann hvern gera annat hvárt, at gerask hans þjónustumenn eða fara af landi á brott, en at þriðja kosti sæta afarkostum eða láta lífit, en sumir váru hamlaðir at höndum eða fótum.” Sigurður Nordal, *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, 11–12.

¹³² Sverrir Jakobsson 1970, “Óþekkti konungurinn.”

þeir vita, at hann drœgi Haraldi konungi ríki fyrir vestan haf.”¹³³ When the king hears this news he then takes action against Ketill, taking his property into his possession. The dialogue here allows for a question, or a proposition in doubt, to form in the reader. Were the soldiers being honest or did they even know what they were saying, and furthermore, was their intent malicious or simply uninformed? This allows us to then speculate on the intentions of Ketill, but on the other hand, Haraldr’s reaction is only to be expected, as previously Ketill had refused to serve him, requiring the king to persuade him to serve him in the Hebrides. One would think that proper procedure at this point dictates that Ketill allay the king’s fears of further revolt and assure him that he acts in his name. Either this message was not sent or not relayed. The reader can ask this question because the properties of the soldiers are unavailable, so she is unable to decide what species of man they belong to.

As in the example from *Egils saga*, King Haraldr provides most with the choice of leaving or becoming his subject, making the choice of staying purely devoted to stubbornness should someone not wish to serve the king, like those who would not evacuate an area to save themselves from a natural disaster in modern terms. The state of being a political refugee is also not unheard of for the modern sensibility. When Ketill’s son returns from Jämtaland (Northern Sweden) he makes an understandable attempt to reclaim the family property, but when he is declared an outlaw, he seems to realize that his only option is to flee. One could say that King Haraldr is not providing Björn with the required options, but his actions in driving Haraldr’s men away causes outlawry to come into play, thus Björn’s options are limited further. Haraldr declares outlawry here by gathering an eight county (*fylkja*) assembly, and so it can be assumed that some formal act is being performed here. Later, the obligatory options are actually provided to Björn’s aid, Þórólfr Mostrarskegg, who has committed no

¹³³ Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Eyrbyggja saga*, 4 This relates specifically to the idea of leaving out maximal propositions. The reader is unable to apply any to this group of men because their definition and subsequent properties are missing from the discourse.

crime other than providing shelter for Björn. Everything that the king does in this case appears to follow a strict set of guidelines, providing an argument here for proper legal procedure, which neither Ketill nor his son attempt to follow. The propositions to be argued here are whether which of the two is better: A) the orderly rule of kingship, or B) the disorderly conduct of the socially unrestricted. This also begins to become a matter of family legacy as we shall see later, and a foundation for the remainder of the saga that brings the spiritual realm into view as well.

This may seem somewhat of a one-sided argument, so let us review some of the arguments for Ketill and Björn. There isn't much to relieve Ketill of blame however, but it might be said that the soldiers betrayed him to King Haraldr, and Haraldr took action too quickly. This might also be said of Haraldr's actions against Þórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson; acting too quickly after bad advice.¹³⁴ As a counterpoint for Haraldr, he must act quickly in order to dissolve any resistance to his rule. Björn's actions may seem particularly at odds with the resulting punishment, since he has killed no one of merit, simply driven them off the land. However, here an argument appears about correct legal procedure, of which Björn clearly does not follow by supplicating to the king, rather he acts on his own with no regard to a formal legal procedure. On the other hand, King Haraldr does not simply send a group of men to kill him, he calls a large assembly to decry Björn's actions and enters a legal sentence of outlawry. We must ask ourselves now if order is taking over for a prior less ordered social system. Ketill and Björn appear unable to bear the changes at this time and must move on. The argument here contains the maximal proposition that order is favourable to disorder, a readily believable *per se* proposition.

¹³⁴ The Hildiríðarsynir provide bad advice to the king to rid themselves of Þórólfr. They say that Þórólfr is keeping more of his tax collection money for himself than he provides the king. In the end the king receives less tax collection money. Sigurður Nordal, *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, 37–43.

Þórólfr Mostrarskegg is a different case and takes on the binary opposite of the disordered social behaviour representative of Ketill and Björn, and we will see how this point interacts with the next episode, the “Quarrels between the Þórsnesingar and the Kjalleklingar”. Our Þórólfr is a seemingly pious man who is called a beloved friend of Þórr (*ástvinur*).¹³⁵ When given the typical Haraldr hárfagri ultimatum, he chooses to consult Þórr to find his path. He decides upon this oracle to seek Iceland as his home. As Kevin Wanner points out with Mary Douglas’ anthropological theories, he creates a *high classification* social order when he successfully controls the area in which he settles in Iceland.¹³⁶ Þórólfr is a pious man, he builds a temple, and makes parcels of land sacred to various degrees. These kinds of pious acts are done to please one god, and so despite his ignorance of Christianity one could argue that he has God in his heart. This is very interesting in comparison with the reasoning of Peter Abelard, where he provides arguments for the position that salvation is possible outside of the Church. Richard Rubenstein advises that Anselm opened the door to this type of reasoning by providing an argument for Jewish ignorance of God’s son, admonishing them of any kind of wrongdoing for their part in Jesus’ crucifixion.¹³⁷

Due to Þórólfr Mostrarskegg’s piety he receives a peaceful rest in the afterlife, as does his son, Þorsteinn þorskabítr. Þorsteinn is obviously also considered pious, though ignorant of Christ’s salvation, since he defends the sacredness of the land to which his father has bequeathed him. Although one could argue that neither of them have enough charity in their

¹³⁵ The word “ást” is omitted from Melabók and Gaulverjabæjarbók. It is only currently retained in the paper manuscript, AM 447 4to in Scott and Louis-Jensen’s edition. We might assume that it is a newer wording from what Einar Ól. dubs the Vatnshyrnuflökkur. See the introduction in Scott, *Eyrbyggja saga: The Vellum Tradition*, 10–11; Cf. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Eyrbyggja saga*, lviii. Einar Ól. notes that Vatnshyrna as we know it has changes in wording especially when words seem to be of an older or peculiar nature.

¹³⁶ Wanner, “Purity and Danger in Earliest Iceland,” 220.

¹³⁷ Rubenstein provides a number of Abelard’s arguments, and explains how Anselm was the instigator of this type of thinking. *Aristotle’s Children*, 94–95.

hearts, not allowing the laws of another authority to persist. But where they fail in the temporal they achieve for themselves in the spiritual, as both of them end up where they most wish to be after death. Though it should be recalled that they are still bound by earthly confines in the holy Helgafell. As we have seen in an earlier chapter, Wanner notes that Þórólfr is the only saga character to perform all three sacred acts when settling Iceland; consulting oracles, using high-seat pillars to guide their journey to shore, and the marking of land with fire to dedicate it to a deity.¹³⁸ Though pious to a single deity, as with Egill Skalla-Grímsson's burial alongside the churchyard, Þórólfr's peaceful rest in the afterlife has its limitations. There is definitely an argument for this result displayed throughout this episode.

The Prologue Wrap-up

The episode that we have dubbed the "Prologue" also brings into focus other *Landnámsmenn*. Besides the diametrically opposing figure to Þórólfr Mostrarskegg, the previously mentioned Björn inn austræni, his sister is also introduced, the fabled Auðr djúpauðga, and then a smattering of others, Geirroðr, Úlfarr kappi, and Finngeir Þorsteinsson, as well as Vestarr Þórólfsson. Despite the intermediary nature of these seemingly unimportant endnotes on the Settlement Age for our saga's geographical purview, there are some important connections made here. Not only does Björn represent a binomial opposite of Þórólfr in social obligation to order, he represents paganism in the pagan/Christian dynamic, whereas his sister Auðr represents Christianity. He comes to the Hebrides and finds his father dead and his siblings have taken up a new religion. His attitude towards this new religion is striking, since he finds it disturbing that they have neglected old traditions, and he receives his nickname, the easterner (*inn austræni*) because he does not want to convert or even give it any attention. Despite this he appears close to Auðr, as he stays with her for two years in the Hebrides and she stays with him for her first winter in Iceland.

¹³⁸ Wanner, "Purity and Danger in Earliest Iceland," 222.

Björn's family is lauded above others in our "Prologue" and the following episode of the dispute, including the Þórsnesingar. The families are placed in direct opposition, and later the family name holds true to the real paternal progenitor Ketill flatnefr, as the word *ofsi* (overbearing, tyrannical) is used to describe what they become due to their numbers in the dispute between the Þórsnesingar and Kjalleklingar. Although Ketill is never described in the same manner, it can be imagined that his character traits based on his actions would lead him to the same behaviour if given the Kjalleklingar numbers, since it is established that Ketill and Björn have a legacy of a negative social character.

Subsequently, we have the description of another female *landnámsmaðr* in Geirríðr, sister to Geirröðr á Eyri. These two have no legacy to speak of from Norway, their mother and father are never named. Geirríðr is described as a kind woman who sets up a shelter for travellers along the main path with a table of food for those who require sustenance. Her own son, Þórólfr, immediately opposes her diametrically, a *landnámsmaðr* himself, he comes later, and thinking her land unsuitable for farming he challenges Úlfarr kappi for the land his uncle had given the champion. Although Úlfarr is old, his nickname is a testament to his courage, he defends himself to his death, injuring Þórólfr, causing him to achieve the nickname of bægifótr (Halt-foot, Twist-Foot, Crook-footed, or Lane-foot). The opposition he will face throughout his life is also set up within this prologue. Along with Úlfarr kappi, comes Finngeir Þorsteinsson with Þórólfr's uncle to Iceland, Finngeir being the grandfather of Þorbrandr Þorfinnsson of Álptafjörðr. Thus the stage has been set with the families that give our saga its complete name, though the omission of the Kjalleklingar name is somewhat foreshadowing, perhaps it is best that the full name is reserved for the end of the saga.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ "Ok lýkr þar sögu Þórsnesinga, Eyrbyggja ok Álptfirðinga." Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Eyrbyggja saga*, 184.

2. Quarrels between the Þórsnesingar and the Kjalleklingar

The Initial Dispute

Kevin Wanner has provided a good basis for the analysis of this episode. Through Wanner and Torfi Tulinius there is an understanding that the social complex at work in this saga is multifaceted.¹⁴⁰ Some of the prior analyses of *Eyrbyggja* have not allowed for connections between the episodes, especially at the beginning of the saga, to represent anything other than a twofold view of society, the view of the contemporary author(s) looking back fondly upon their pagan past. What we see now is that there is a look at the Settlement Age, the early Commonwealth Age, and contemporaneously at the Sturlung Age within the saga, and though the climax can be attributed to the conversion to Christianity, it is a lay outlook on the changes of society from ancestor to descendent, sometimes specifically father to son, that represents the break from episode to episode.

There is a clear indication that the author(s) viewed genealogy in terms of genus and species, where one will in all cases inhere in the other, but to what degree is always questionable. Here we have a break between father and son, since Þórólfr Mostrarskegg was able to maintain his high social order while alive, he is unable to pass that ability on to his progeny. Þórólfr thus never had the keys to create a balanced and well structured society, he possessed only spiritual power but never temporal power. Þorsteinn þorskabítr is despite a valiant effort unable to maintain the purity laws of his father, eventually losing some of his control over the *goðorð*, and an alteration in the purity laws governing some of the land.

As discussed above, Wanner brings in a comparison of the purity laws that lead to the dispute with portions of the *Pentateuch* that would have been available in *Stjórn*, a Norse

¹⁴⁰ Wanner, “Purity and Danger in Earliest Iceland,” 232–233; Torfi H. Tulinius, “Hamlet í Helgafellssveit,” 434–435.

translation of the Old Testament closely related to the *Vulgate*.¹⁴¹ There are a number of interesting parallels to be drawn and the analysis of such similarities allows the conclusion that the reasoning behind the episode harmonizes some of the first laws of Iceland, prior to the establishment of the Alþing, with not only later law, but also draws a parallel between the Judeo/Christian past and the pagan/Christian past of Iceland. This also provides us with a link to the Latin learning of the time, when the greatest medieval scholars such as Peter Abelard were raising arguments about Christian faith in order to reason through them and prove their validity to the faith of the one true religion. One such argument would be involved in how to reconcile your ancestors' ignorance of Jesus; how will they rise again to live in Paradise? The answer for some was that God would not punish the ignorant, those who lived good lives or in medieval Christian parlance, with God in their hearts, would not be punished by God for ignorance because Jesus' role was to pour charity into human hearts.¹⁴²

Familial connections are important in this episode as with the others. At the outset, the most prominent family of Breiðafjörður, the Kjalleklingar, are described as the relatives of Björn inn austroeni. The saga troubles itself in explaining that the Kjalleklingar had a habit of inviting all their relatives from the southern end of Breiðafjörður, bringing a large number of them to the Þórsnessþing. A member of the family from across Hvammsfjörður, Barna-Kjallakr is named only to show how widespread the family is and explain the origin of the place names of their area at Meðalfellsströnd, seeing as Barna-Kjallakr has no functional role in the episode.¹⁴³ It is Þorgrímr Kjallaksson and Ásgeirr á Eyri that start the trouble that ends in

¹⁴¹ Wanner, "Purity and Danger in Earliest Iceland," 237–243.

¹⁴² Richard E. Rubenstein, *Aristotle's Children*, 95–96.

¹⁴³ Einar Ól. notes that in Landnámabók Barna-Kjallakr á Meðalfellsströnd was the son of Björn sterki, brother of Gjaflaug, who married Björn austroeni. These familial links were not defined in Eyrbyggja. We must speculate as to whether there was purpose to this. That is to say, so as not to lengthen the link to Björn inn austroeni through a level of affinity rather than consanguinity. *Eyrbyggja saga*, 15; "Landnámabók," chap. 161.

bloodshed, and they are supported by all the Kjalleklingar, though here we see that their connections also run into the Eyrbyggjar family as well, as Ásgeirr is from Qndurðr-Eyrr and is brother-in-law to Þorgrímr. There appears here a desire to show how the local Þórsnesingar customs are not acceptable or in harmony with all the families in the surrounding areas, thus causing law to break down through the temporal sphere.

The content of the laws under dispute are that of a religious context, setting a precedent for a legal system entwined with religious affairs, a temporal requires the support of the spiritual and vice versa, a harmony that is unattainable to the heathens of Iceland. However, not only is the content of these laws of purity to be consulted here, but we have information regarding procedure and legal reasoning. A third party is called upon to judge the dispute, one who possessed both a relationship of consanguinity (by blood; *frændi*) to the Kjalleklingar and a relation of affinity (by marriage; *námágr*) to the Þórsnesingar, Þórðr gellir. The Kjalleklingar asserted that the Þórsnesingar to be in violation of law (*óhelgir*) for their intention of violence against them. The Þórsnesingar asserted in contention that the Kjalleklingar were *óhelgir* by breaking the purity laws by defecating on the land. However, violence had been committed by both parties with intent to injure (*völlurinn var spilltr af heiptarblóði*), and so Þórðr makes the decision to alter the sacredness of the land which was now *spilltr af heiptarblóði* (corrupted by blood malice), moved the *þing* site, and proclaimed it then part of the system of governance of the entire nation (*fjórðungsþing*). Þórðr declares that nobody shall receive compensation for the killings or injuries received in this dispute, using the phrase “*sá skal hafa happ, er hlotit hefir,*”¹⁴⁴ and thus each must accept the lot they have been cast. The *goðorð* is also divided in two, providing half of the privileges and half the responsibilities to Þorgrímr Kjallaksson, now referred to as Þorgrímr goði. He has demonstrated here that he has proficiency in the temporal

¹⁴⁴ Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Eyrbyggja saga*, 17.

sphere, but unlike others of his societal rank in the saga, he never shows much ability or inclination to take a spiritual role seriously.

Here we have two parties in disagreement that represent the two halves of the local community, and the decision is made fairly by choosing the appropriate mediator who has a relationship with both. Power and responsibility of that power must be given to both of the parties and the concession of no recompense in the legal matter at hand must be accepted by both. The local then becomes a part of a larger whole in becoming the *ffjórðungsþing* site for the Westfjords. In medieval Icelandic philosophy the microcosm could reflect the macrocosm,¹⁴⁵ so this discourse can be applied to contemporary 13th century Iceland in connection with the world at large as well, as the dialectic turns on an argument of legal jurisprudence shared between two disparate groups. If the local þing can find a place in harmony with the national þing, then the national þing can find a place in harmony with the developing international law that a concordance with the Church would bring.

The result at this point of Þórðr gellir's mediation is a shared balance of power, a balance that teeters in favour of Snorri goði when the Kjalleklingar from Meðalfellsströnd are unable to aid their relatives on Snæfellsnes. Snorri comes to the aid of Illugi in recovering his wife's dowry, which Tin-Forni was supposed to have kept for her. Snorri receives renown for it as witnessed by the verse attributed to Oddr skáld in his Illugadrápa. Here we have a discrepancy between local and fringe populations within a single political zone, showing how those that live on the fringe of their *goðorð* will more likely be disenfranchised by their inability to attend all assemblies. The saga goes to the trouble of showing that one case is caused by the Kjalleklingar numbers from Meðalfellsströnd and the other is ruled against them, due to the

¹⁴⁵ Augustodunensis, *Elucidarius in Old Norse Translation*, 39–40. This work moves along the lines of dialectic argumentation or a Socratic dialogue, with a questioner and a responder. The answer to the question of where the corporeal form of man came from is that he is made of the four elements and thus a microcosm.

inability for these same people to attend. Snorri's power begins to rise in his community, not only because he is simply wise, but because he acts prudently, taking advantage of opportunities such as this that are simply revealed through the course of time.

The Rise of Snorri goði

The story of Snorri goði parallels the history of Helgafell in a number of ways. In the beginning, Helgafell is upheld as the only untainted piece of sacred land that was selected by Þórólfr Mostrarskegg when he settles. Subsequently after the change in power, allowing the Kjalleklingar to take over half the responsibility for the temple and *þing* site, Þorsteinn Þorskabátr moves to Helgafell. Þorsteinn has a son he names Grímr and is dedicated to Þórr, and so then dubbed Þorgrímr after his having a heathen baptism. Þorgrímr marries Þórdís Súrsdóttir and after having killed Vésteinn Vésteinsson, he incurs the wrath of his brother in law, Gísli Súrsson.¹⁴⁶ Vengeance is paid upon Þorgrímr's killer as well when Gísli is finally brought down by Þórðr gellir's son, Eyjólfur. Further violence affects the residents of Helgafell when Eyjólfur comes to visit. Þórdís attempts to kill Eyjólfur with his own sword, but failing, Þorkr raises his hand to her and Snorri gets between them to protect her. Torfi Tulinius has discussed the differences in the function of the structure of the story between *Gísla saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga*, and has determined that the structural connections in *Eyrbyggja* between Snorri, his mother, and stepfather/uncle, can be considered a Hamlet style structure. The emphasis here is that there is an unusual closeness to Snorri's relationship with his mother that extends further on into adulthood than is normally the case.¹⁴⁷

There is also a legacy of unusual attachment between sister and brother, as Þórdís was affected by her brother Gísli's intentions for her marriage, by his killing of a seducer of hers, a

¹⁴⁶ In *Eyrbyggja saga*, unlike with *Gísla saga*, there is absolutely no question as to who killed Vésteinn.

¹⁴⁷ Torfi H. Tulinius, "Hamlet í Helgafellssveit," 425–427 Torfi leads the discussion of this closeness to the mother to a theme in the saga regarding the legacy a father leaves to his son.

man named Bárðr.¹⁴⁸ Snorri's attachment to these two matters, A) his unusual attachment to his mother, and B) his control over his sister's affairs, within his maternal legacy is something that Snorri contends with throughout the saga. It isn't until he has moved away from Helgafell that this maternal legacy is transferred to the new owner, Guðrún Ósvífursdóttir, though Snorri appears better able to contend with this legacy after the *Fróðárundr*. Interestingly, Snorri is described in his childhood as rather "ósvífr í æskunni" (intolerant in youth) in *Eyrbyggja*, calling to mind this transfer or at least a shared maternal legacy with Guðrún.¹⁴⁹ As a direct result of this he is called Snerrir and then it transforms to Snorri. This change of names and series of nicknames not only touches upon the maternal legacy, but also the paternal legacy, especially Þórólfr as his name was altered from Hrólfr to Þórólfr due to his piety towards Þórr. Like everyone, Snorri is a character well established as a syllogism of the similarities and differences of his mother, father, and their lineages.

Snorri is able to recover, through an act of not only cunning but prudence, a larger share of the inheritance of his father. He takes over at Helgafell,¹⁵⁰ pushing his uncle out who had hoped to keep Snorri under his wing as a dependent. Torfi Tulinius has likened this story to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, a story which has a lengthy history in Denmark with Saxo Grammaticus' version of the tale. Some have pointed to an oral Icelandic tale as the source for Saxo's work based on a stanza attributed by Snorri Sturluson in his *Edda* to an author named Snæbjörn.¹⁵¹ What is important for our discourse here is that Snorri goði pushes his paternal legacy away, by the way his uncle is pushed away in favour of his mother, only to be left to

¹⁴⁸ Vésteinn Ólason reviews this situation in the introduction to Judy Quinn and Martin Regal's translation. *Gisli Sursson's Saga and The Saga of the People of Eyri*, xiv.

¹⁴⁹ Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Eyrbyggja saga*, 20.

¹⁵⁰ Snorri tricks Þórkr into thinking he has not accumulated any wealth while abroad. Not much is said about his journey other than he was treated well by an old family friend, bringing the legacy of Þórólfr Mostrarskegg back into the picture.

¹⁵¹ Saxo, *Saxo Grammaticus & the Life of Hamlet*, 5–15, 128–129; Snorri Sturluson, *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, 117–118.

contend with a maternal legacy, which as we shall see opposes him in its rash behaviour, but also shares with him a general sense of prudence. Over time he attempts to regain connection with his paternal legacy through the holy mount, Helgafell.

The *Máhlíðingamál*

The *Máhlíðingamál* is a section in the midst of the dispute with the Kjalleklingar, and relates to the larger dispute with Vermundr mjóvi's actions to assist his brother-in-law. Here we see the end to the Kjalleklingar power in the area and the rise of a new, what turns out to be a more noble power, sanctioned by the same family, Arnkell goði. This episode is of particular importance in the saga, rivalling only the *Fróðárundr* for its length and susceptibility to being seen as an independent story unto itself. Vésteinn Ólason has voiced his opinion in regards to this, saying that students of *Eyrbyggja saga*, "will probably agree that its real strength lies in its parts rather than in its impression as a whole."¹⁵² He also says that the *Máhlíðingamál*, "forms a kind of sub-strand in the saga as a whole, and as elsewhere in *Eyrbyggja*, the part functions in the whole, but simultaneously lives an independent life of its own."¹⁵³

This strand in *Eyrbyggja* is broken into two parts by a short episode about Ingibjörg Ásbjarnardóttur's brideprice and dowry, which Tin-Forni, a Kjalleklingur, was supposed to save for her, but he had somehow never managed to hand it over at the appropriate time. The legacy of betrayal established by Ketill flatnefr shows through in the climax of the Kjalleklingar family downfall. Another important facet for our discourse is the fact that the majority of the Kjalleklingar are unable to attend due to severe weather across Hvammsfjörðr, recalling their uproar at the old Þórsnessþing when the narrator explicitly employs the knowledge of the family's connection to the other side of Hvammsfjörðr to benefit their numbers.

¹⁵² Vésteinn Ólason, "Máhlíðingamál," 187.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 188.

Vésteinn Ólason advises us, there are two aspects appearing in this episode as the female and the male; and two spheres, the mythical and the social.¹⁵⁴ These aspects and spheres move together, the female corresponds with the mythical, and the male corresponds with the social. The episode moves from the mythical to the social, from the craft of a malicious witch to the legal proceedings that bring it all back to social order. We could also liken the mythical to the spiritual and the social to the corporeal in terms of Augustine's three visions. Vésteinn Ólason advises that in these type of *landhreinsun* folktales the evil is washed away, and in this case when the antagonists are done away with, the cleansing has been complete, as the evils that have caused it have been washed away.¹⁵⁵

Máhlíðingamál I

The episode begins with Snorri and his mother Þórdís settling in at Helgafell, while his uncle comes to live with him to help out with the farming. Már is his father's half-brother, as after Þorsteinn Þorskabítr dies, his mother Þóra has Már by Hallvarðr. Snorri's full adult description is then provided,¹⁵⁶ followed by an introduction to his half-sister, Þuríðr, who is married to Þorbjörn digri (the Thick or Stout) and lives at Fróðá. It is then explained that Þorbjörn digri had a prior marriage with Þuríðr Ásbrandsdóttir, sister to Björn Breiðvíkingakappi (Champion of Breiðavík). The sons from the prior marriage are Ketill kappi, Gunnlaugr and Hallsteinn. Gunnlaugr becomes the victim of the proceeding *Máhlíðingamál*.

There are a number of connections we can see in the lead up to the problems that face the people in attempting to understand what happens to Gunnlaugr. First of all, as Torfi Tulinius has advised us, Snorri has an immensely strong and close relationship with his mother. We

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 190.

¹⁵⁵ It is interesting to note that the protagonists Geirríðr, Auðr, and Þórarinn are all mentioned in Landnámabók including the situation that develops, but there is no mention of the antagonists, Oddr and Katla. "Landnámabók."

¹⁵⁶ Like Egill Skalla-Grímsson, as a protagonist, Snorri goði enjoys a full description both in his youth and as an adult.

have a pair of binomials here in terms of paternal and maternal legacies introduced as well. The father (Þorgrímur Þorsteinsson) has a **half-brother** (Már Hallvarðsson) **born to his father's mother** (Þóra) and step-father (Hallvarður), and he has a **half-sister** (Þuríður) **born to his mother** (Þórdís) and his step-father (Björkr). His father's half-brother, Már, takes over the farm, and his half-sister Þuríður leaves the farm to live at Fróðá where she replaces a previous Þuríður. The previous Þuríður was not only a wife to the farmer of Fróðá but a sister to Björn Breiðvíkingakappi.

Unlike Björkr, Már is no threat to Snorri because he does not bear the paternal legacy as heir to Helgafell. On the other hand, his half-sister bears the full right to a maternal legacy, in this case a changing disposition to the men around her, a sense of prudence in misfortune, and a keen eye for the turning tides of fortune. The nicknames for Björkr and Þorbjörn are interesting, both being “digri”, meaning thick or fat. This is an adjective also used for Þórólfr bægifótr later on when he is reinterred, “blár sem hel ok digr sem naut.”¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, like Snorri, it can be assumed that Björn Breiðvíkingakappi has had a strong and close relationship with his full-sister. In her absence he chases the affections of Þuríður Barkardóttir, just as Gunnlaugr looks for attention elsewhere. Þorbjörn's father was Ormr inn mjóvi, and was the man who settled the land at Fróðá, and in addition to this parallel name in Geirríður's family, we see a parallel in Þuríður's husbands' names as well.¹⁵⁸ Geirríður's daughter is Guðný, she is married to Vermundr mjóvi, and both of Þuríður's husbands so far have the nickname *digri*.

One might ask what is in a name. Especially in regards to pseudo-historical accounts, but it is the contention here that like people, characters are a syllogism created by the melding of their maternal and paternal predecessors. However, arguments need to be put into place to

¹⁵⁷ Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Eyrbyggja saga*, 169–170.

¹⁵⁸ The syllogism here is difficult to guess, but these names do appear to appropriate some sort of genus with two different species. Especially in terms of Björkr and Þorbjörn, who are flat characters that tend to the traditional masculine role in a blood feud society, and have little to no success.

manage how these characters differ from and alter their ancestral features. It is therefore meaningful in a text like this to manage a view of the names used, as nicknames especially are given to people for particular reasons, and our scribe(s) would have utilized the common features associated with these names to mould their view of this history. A similar question is how intentional the weaving together of these arguments into a tale was for the Icelandic cleric. We can only speculate, but what is assured is the influence of Christian philosophy was not a mere moot point in the opinion of the medieval cleric.

Torfi Tulinius offers a glimpse at the medieval mind in matters of the supernatural in “Framliðnir feður”, utilizing Francis Dubost’s ideas on medieval romances with support from Jacques Le Goff’s observations concerning the learned medieval person’s views on such matters.¹⁵⁹ The positive and negative elements for the medieval cleric lie at polar opposites, the positive defined as *miraculosa* and the negative as *magica*. The Christian view of the world defines the former as belonging to the realm of God, and the latter has the devil behind it. When encountered with something that is obviously not of a godly nature but cannot be clearly attributed to the devil, a new classification that moves between both spheres was coined called *mirabilia*.

Geirríðr’s son, Þórarinn svarti, is married to a woman named Auðr. Geirríðr has no visible husband but is not said to be a widow, and she is knowledgeable in magic (*margkunnig*). There is another woman called Katla, a widow with a son named Oddr. They live at Holt, a farm between Mávahlíð and Fróðá. As Ármann Jakobsson reminds us, Geirríðr has a maternal legacy of generosity and kindness, as her grandmother, mentioned previously, offers all travellers a table and food.¹⁶⁰ This appears enough to bring Geirríðr into a sphere of positive

¹⁵⁹ Torfi H. Tulinius, “Framliðnir feður,” 291–292.

¹⁶⁰ While the idea of *mirabilia* in terms of medieval Icelandic literature is Torfi Tulinius’, Ármann’s article is of interest in speculation of the *Máhlíðingamál* in terms of gender and the contrast between

mirabilia in her ability to utilize magic. Auðr's actions also prove to shed light on Þórarinn's household as firmly in the realm of positive *mirabilia*.

The *Máhlíðingamál* begins with Gunnlaugr Þorbjarnarson making frequent visits to Geirríðr at Mávahlíð, often with Oddr Kötluon tagging along. Gunnlaugr is interested in knowledge about magic (he is said to be *námgjarn*), and appears to be more comfortable learning such things from Geirríðr than Katla. The latter jokingly asks if he is petting the old lady's crotch, while Gunnlaugr denies such a reason for making his visits, coming to the defence of Geirríðr, saying that Katla has no reason to call her an old woman (*kerling*) as she is not much younger than her. Katla says that Geirríðr is not the only one who has magical knowledge. She appears to be jealous of the attention Geirríðr is receiving from the young man. Neither Katla nor her son are described as personable people, though Katla is said to be easy on the eyes.

When Gunnlaugr is found bruised, bloody, and his skin torn from bone, Oddr speaks up and says that it was Geirríðr who had ridden him, and most believe his deceitful story. But as Vésteinn Ólason indicates, one who is implicit in the actions of a witch or dominated by her should be considered either amoral or irresponsible.¹⁶¹ While Gunnlaugr might be said to be irresponsible in his curiosity towards magic, he appears neither to be amoral nor irresponsible in eluding the temptation to stay overnight with either woman. However, Oddr is consistently amoral in his deceit and lies. In the case of Gunnlaugr, the same dialectic could be posited as that of the English idiom "curiosity killed the cat" does. In the case of Oddr, Sir Walter Scott

public and secret ancient lore. These two types of ancient lore could be correlated with the positive and negative *mirabilia*. Ármann Jakobsson, "Two Wise Women and Their Young Apprentice," 80.

¹⁶¹ "... the witch is a threat to society, and a man who is dominated by a witch, whether he be her lover or her son, is irresponsible and amoral." Vésteinn Ólason, "Máhlíðingamál," 190.

might be consulted in the phrase from his poem *Marmion*, “Oh, what a tangled web we weave
 \ \ When first we practise to deceive!”¹⁶²

Gunnlaugr is a pitiable young man who lost his mother and frequents the homes of older ladies, seeking some kind of knowledge, or perhaps the root of it is a crude grasp for attention. His step-mother is a woman born of a mother who betrayed her own brother in seeking revenge for her husband. After she succeeded in having her brother killed, she attempts to kill the man who committed the act and spurns her new husband, her dead husband’s brother, by allowing her son to reclaim his paternal legacy, subsequently divorcing the new husband. Þuríðr has a maternal legacy of deceit and betrayal that appears twice more in our saga, first when she has an unsuitable affair with Björn Breiðvíkingakappi, and the second when she covets another woman’s bed. To drive it home, Þórdís’ bones are translated along with Snorri’s at the end of the saga and they are said to be as dark as singed sheep heads, “*svá svart, sem sviðin væri*”.¹⁶³ Gunnlaugr is obviously unable to deal with the loss of his mother and is attempting to find a suitable replacement, as Þuríðr is not what he expects. As Ármann Jakobsson points out, following Derek Brewer’s ideas on the English family drama, the two witches play surrogate mothers.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Canto VI, XVII in *Sir Walter Scott’s Marmion*, 206; It is intriguing to think of Scott’s own fondness for *Eyrbyggja*. “Abstract of the Eyrbyggja-Saga.”

¹⁶³ Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Eyrbyggja saga*, 184; Jenny Jochens feels that Guðný would have looked upon Þórdís’ bones with more empathy than those of Snorri’s. While this may be true I am not convinced that this was the saga author’s intention when including the information regarding the blackened bones. Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society*, 10; Cf. the use of darkened bodies to illuminate their evil nature, e.g. describing a decomposing dead body as blue, a colour used more for darkness in the Icelandic language. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Eyrbyggja saga*, 169–170; blár, lýsingarorð, fornt/úrelt: dökkur, svartur; blár sem kol, Mörður Árnason, Laufey Leifsdóttir, and Árni Böðvarsson, *Íslensk orðabók*.

¹⁶⁴ Ármann Jakobsson, “Two Wise Women and Their Young Apprentice,” 85; For more on Derek Brewer’s studies see his *Symbolic Stories*.

Þorbjörn attempts to bring social order to spiritual problems, but is unable to do so because he has no access to the tools necessary to defend against the spiritual forces at hand. Katla counters by having Oddr point the finger elsewhere in a mythical sphere, making it impossible for Þorbjörn to succeed in this matter. Thus, like Bqrkr digri, Þorbjörn digri is unable to ward off the machinations of a woman in the throes of seeking vengeance. It is also here where Snorri suffers his greatest defeat, when he is unable to win favour at the þing in his case against Geirríðr.¹⁶⁵ Snorri suffers this defeat because he has yet to find a way to resolve spiritual matters, which as a *goði* he is supposed to be able to do.

Máhlíðingamál II

In the first part of this episode the sphere is spiritual, whereas in the second part the reader is gradually pulled further into the temporal actions of a legal sphere. In the first part, society comes to the defence of the wrongly accused but no cleansing is performed. The source of power for a witch is her sexuality, and Katla being the more attractive of the two appears also to be the more powerful. Although she appears to respect Geirríðr's ability to see through her deceptions towards the end of the episode, she clearly overestimates her own abilities and underestimates Geirríðr and her ability to use magic for positive and more pro-social aims.

The social sphere requires the assistance of the mythical to resolve the issues at hand in this episode. It is Geirríðr who provides that help. Here we have another instance where two sides on the positive side of the spectrum must come together to defeat the forces on the negative side of the spectrum. Arnkell represents the social or the temporal sphere, and unlike Þorbjörn, he is able to achieve success because he has access to the tools needed inside the mythical sphere, his sister's knowledge of magic. Snorri acts in this episode only to serve his sister's interests, and so the negative facets of the other characters on his side don't directly

¹⁶⁵ "... ok ónýttisk málit fyrir þeim Snorra ok Þorbirni, ok fengu þeir af þessu óvirðing." Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Eyrbyggja saga*, 30.

reflect on him.¹⁶⁶ However, he fails in this episode because he too does not have access to the mythical or spiritual sphere.

Þórarinn's homestead represents a positive nature to *magica*, especially shown by his wife Auðr's actions in attempting to stop the fighting, losing her hand in the process. While Auðr complements the social good, Þórarinn is socially irresponsible because he lets his mother command him.¹⁶⁷ This is resolved within his poetry, showing the torment that besieges him in his actions. Þórarinn's social irresponsibility is also born out in his change from peaceable to warlike, and this is the sphere that his poetry moves in. Like the cleric who took up arms in the Sturlung Age, Þórarinn must wrestle with the personal implications of such actions. While Auðr is a mirror reflecting Christian ethics, her name especially calling into mind the piety of Auðr djúpauðga.

When Katla performs her curse on Arnkell she injects the maternal legacy into the paternal, causing a fork in the problems that occur thereafter, and allowing for the dual climax that we see later on, the *Fróðárundr* and the episode of the bull, Glæsir. The maternal legacy continues on through Þuríðr. Despite the fact that she never acts maliciously, she is socially irresponsible a number of times throughout the saga, and her link to this episode is cemented with Þórarinn's mention of her in his poetry. Katla injects the paternal legacy with the mythical when she curses Arnkell, saying, “þú Arnkell [...] mátt eigi af þinni móður illt hljóta, er þú átt enga á lífi, en um þat vilda ek at mín ákvæði stæðisk, at þú hlytir því verra af feðr þínum en Oddr hefir af mér hlotit, sem þú hefir meira í hættu en hann; vænti ek ok, at þat sé mælt áðr lýkr, at þú eigir illan fǫður.”¹⁶⁸ She clearly moves the discourse here from the maternal to the paternal.

¹⁶⁶ Vésteinn Ólason, “Máhlíðingamál,” 188.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 190–191.

¹⁶⁸ Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Eyrbyggja saga*, 54.

The Poetry of Þórarinn svarti

The male victim in the second part is clearly Þórarinn. He is persecuted by both Þorbjörn and Oddr, and his poetry has at times something reminiscent of an echo of Boethius' queries to Lady Philosophy. There is argument about whether the *vísur*, as they are attributed to Þórarinn himself in *Eyrbyggja*, were actually created by him, another author in the 12th century, or perhaps even a 13th century *skáld* using archaisms for effect. Russell Poole concludes on the side of the 12th century *skáld* who created a full-length poem for embellishment to a telling of Snorri goði's deeds,¹⁶⁹ saying that the *skáld* of the 13th century would hardly have had the necessary diachronic understanding of his language to choose which monosyllables to treat disyllabically by etymology.¹⁷⁰ His choices were rather, in Snorri Sturluson's terms, *leyfi* (poetic license).¹⁷¹ What Poole's analysis tells us about the 13th century author is that he took Þórarinn's poem and applied its pieces freely through his narrative. How pleasurable it must have been for the 13th century dialectician to use such poetical responses to prose queries. It must also be pondered whether the 12th century original was influenced by Boethius with the poem's call to a woman in vv. 14 and 19 that have been difficult for scholars to explain.

There are three women represented in the poem which we can identify with symbolic women in *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Geirriðr in v. 3 represents the muses of poetry that Lady Philosophy must drive away, the mysterious woman of vv. 14 and 19 is Lady Philosophy herself, and Þuríðr is Fortune in vv. 16-17. Lady Philosophy is the woman of reason and comfort that both Þórarinn and Boethius seek through their evaluation of the events that lead to their persecution. Þórarinn appears able to accept his fate through her counsel just as much

¹⁶⁹ Poole, "The Origins of the Máhlíðingavísur," 281.

¹⁷⁰ Poole includes a lengthy discussion of the disyllabic treatment of certain words in the Máhlíðingavísur. *Ibid.*, 256-260.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 258.

as Boethius does. Þuríðr is attached to the enjoyment of life and worldly effects in stanza 16, and in 17 she is portrayed as a beautiful dancer who tempts others to the same. Although in this case she will not “jeer drunkenly”.¹⁷² Compared to *The Consolation* these traits are well connected to the female embodiment called Fortune in that work. Fortune is said by Lady Philosophy to spread false happiness with worldly temptations.

I am convinced that adverse fortune is more beneficial to men than prosperous fortune. When Fortune seems kind, and seems to promise happiness, she lies. On the other hand, when she shows herself unstable and changeable, she is truthful. Good fortune deceives, adverse fortune teaches. Good fortune enslaves the minds of good men with the beauty of the specious goods which they enjoy; but bad fortune frees them by making them see the fragile nature of happiness. You will notice that good fortune is proud, insecure, ignorant of her true nature; but bad fortune is sober, self-possessed, and prudent through the experience of adversity. Finally, good fortune seduces weak men away from the true good through flattery; but misfortune often turns them around and forcibly leads them back to the true good.¹⁷³

The *Máhlíðingamál* connects quite directly in this way to the *Fróðárundr*. Þuríðr shows her true colours when bad fortune strikes her. In her actions with Þórgunna, she shows soberness and prudence by providing a roof over her head for little charge. She awaits a time when she can take advantage of good fortune, the same that causes bad fortune for Þórgunna and her death at the outset of the coming *Fróðárundr* episode. An event that in course causes bad fortune again for Þuríðr, as she takes ill from the evil surrounding the farmstead. Afterwards she disappears from the saga until the end, when Björn Breiðvíkingakappi, now a stranger in a

¹⁷² These conclusions have been determined from Einar Ól. Sveinsson’s notes in *Eyrbyggja saga*, 49–50 and Russell Poole’s analysis in “The Origins of the Máhlíðingavísur,” 250.

¹⁷³ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, 1962, 40.

mythical land, provides a ring for her and a sword for Kjartan. This mystical event in light of our current argument suggests that her fortune will change yet again from a spiritual power.

In Lars Lönnroth's look at "the clerical mind" in his book on *Njáls saga*, he attempts to reconcile the nature of Christian didactic goals and their use of traditional saga style. He pits Christian divine providence against the more traditional ideas of fate and fortune, coming up with a syllogism of these ideas into what we know of as saga literature, in contrast with the native saga tradition the cleric had as a source. He sees the "clerical mind" as providing rich inner lives to the stock traditional characters of Gunnarr and Flosi, providing them with moral dilemmas while committing the egregious acts that they do.¹⁷⁴ Þórarinn is no exception to this as we have seen. Heather O'Donoghue has provided convincing argumentation that the poetry in *Eyrbyggja* has two distinct structural roles, one belonging to the realm of character discourse, and the other belonging to historical documentation. Þórarinn's poetry belongs to character discourse, and this feature of the text is in contrast to the typically historical driven documentary use of skaldic verse found elsewhere, such as in kings' sagas, although by no means completely unique to our saga.¹⁷⁵

Fate itself, and the need for a character to come to terms with their own fate is a pervasive feature of saga literature. In our search for arguments, it is not surprising to see that divine providence should lead the "clerical mind" when seeking to come to some syllogism between traditional native ideas and Christian ideals. It is also no surprise that Boethius can easily be linked to such ideas, as when Pope Benedict XVI gave a speech in 2008 in Paul VI Audience Hall, he said:

It is precisely because of his tragic end that he can also speak from the heart of his own experience to contemporary man, and especially to the multitudes who suffer

¹⁷⁴ Lönnroth, *Njáls Saga*, 104–164.

¹⁷⁵ O'Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 78–135.

the same fate because of the injustice inherent in so much of “human justice”. Through this work, *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, he sought consolation, enlightenment and wisdom in prison. And he said that precisely in this situation he knew how to distinguish between apparent goods, which disappear in prison, and true goods such as genuine friendship, which even in prison do not disappear. The loftiest good is God: Boethius – and he teaches us this – learned not to sink into a fatalism that extinguishes hope. He teaches us that it is not the event but Providence that governs and Providence has a face. It is possible to speak to Providence because Providence is God. Thus, even in prison, he was left with the possibility of prayer, of dialogue with the One who saves us. At the same time, even in this situation he retained his sense of the beauty of culture and remembered the teaching of the great ancient Greek and Roman philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle – he had begun to translate these Greeks into Latin – Cicero, Seneca, and also poets such as Tibullus and Virgil.¹⁷⁶

And so our saga character, though steeped in native tradition has been thrown into the fray of Christian didactic teachings about divine providence, and “the clerical mind” has molded this into the saga utilizing the discourse provided by a 12th century poet.

Þórarinn svarti precludes the end of the *Máhlíðingamál* with v. 19 which again speaks to a woman. This woman again typifies Lady Philosophy in her role. In Einar Ól. Sveinsson’s transliteration of the poem in his edition, the first line is: “Eigi er svo, kona, að það sé fyrir illvirki, að menn eru rændir lögum...” [Isn’t it so, lady, that it is for evildoers, that men are robbed of laws...]¹⁷⁷ This then connects the dialectic of divine providence with another related dialectic of man’s free will, both wrapped up in questions of a teleological nature. And if Boethius is seen by Christian doctrine as speaking to God when he speaks to Lady Philosophy,

¹⁷⁶ Benedict XVI, “Boethius and Cassiodorus.”

¹⁷⁷ Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Eyrbyggja saga*, 56–57.

so too we can assume was Þórarinn when he calls to an unknown woman. That these ideas are wrapped in the garment of womanhood is not all that surprising, seeing that the Augustinian monk would have sought a relationship with the Virgin Mary.

The Horses Found and a Dispute about Sheep

Continuing on through our saga, it is found that Þorbjörn digri's horses had been held back by Þórarinn's stallion, and were snowed in and killed due to it. An interesting argument develops here, whether Þórarinn and his family were in the end actually responsible for the problems that occur. How much responsibility does Þórarinn bear for his horse's actions?

Interestingly, this chapter begins with one pastoral problem and proceeds to introduce another that sparks a larger problem that in its conclusion sees Snorri's half-brother sent away. The latter problem also appears to answer the argument presented by the former in dialogue. Már Hallvarðsson led a group of Snorri's people (*heimamenn*), and a man named Helgi is the shepherd of the group. A relative of Vigfúss Bjarnarson, a man named Björn, sees Helgi leading some of Vigfúss' sheep away, and says, “[s]lundasamliga dregr þú sauðina í dag, Helgi.” [Disserviceably do you take the sheep today, Helgi.] In response he receives from Helgi, “[h]ættara mun yðr þat [...] er sitið í afrétt manna.” [riskier will that be for you, you are all situated in people's common pasture.] Björn then responds, “[h]vat mun þjófr þinn vita til þess[.]” [What must your thief know in respect to that.]¹⁷⁸

What is being argued here again is the responsibilities of those with a common pasture. The two cases are argued in a single chapter by similarity. In both cases the offenders are accused of thievery, but what is really at stake here is one's responsibility to take care to allow others their fair share of the common property and that the ownership of each individual's animal property be respected. From similars we can say that if one does not take care to only

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 58.

retrieve his own stock from common pasture and takes another's along with, that property is as good as destroyed for the owner. At the same time, if one does not take care, allowing another's property to be destroyed on common pasture, it is as good as thievery. These two cases are argued from similars by their quality.

The argumentation turns then to what should be done when such a problem occurs, and the answer again leans to proper legal procedure, rather than blind vengeance. At the *Dórsnessþing*, Snorri makes a counter-suit against Björn for the rash behaviour he demonstrates by lunging at Helgi with a shepherd's crook and wins the case, and does not pay any compensation for the wound Björn received by Helgi's sword. Here we have a question in two cases revolving around the genus of the matter, intemperance is a vice, the genus is vice and the species is intemperance just as Boethius says that justice, courage, and temperance, as well as wisdom are a number of species of the genus virtue.¹⁷⁹ It is safe to assume because of the outcome of the latter case that Þorbjörn was in the wrong for rashly attacking Þórarinn's family in the former case, though guilt for the destruction of property in two different manners might be established in either of the two cases.

In the end, Snorri wins the case against Þórarinn but Þórarinn is able to escape to a place where he will never be persecuted again, like Boethius when Lady Philosophy consoles him, showing how the temporal world of the living holds false happiness in fortune, and that misfortune teaches. He is said to go with Vermundr to Trondheim, then leaves there with Álfgeir to go west. We might assume that he is heading to the Hebrides because Álfgeir is originally from there. The Hebrides receives some attention in this saga, from the "Prologue" we have Ketill landing there and his children accepting the new religion, then in the *Máhlíðingamál* we have a Hebridean captain who takes a persecuted man to his final resting place. The Hebrides could be said to symbolize Iceland's future, a land of Christian

¹⁷⁹ Boethius, *Boethius's De Topicis Differentiis*, 52.

Norsemen, and this comes back around when Þórgunna arrives from the Hebrides shortly after Christianity has been accepted as the religion of Iceland. She counters Þórarinn as he moves away to find peace from an external struggle, while she shows that Christians must wrestle with torments through their own inner struggle with piety against temporal distractions. It is said in *The Consolation* that those with great possessions are plagued with the inability to rest from protecting them from those that covet them.¹⁸⁰ And surely Þórgunna is plagued by this evil, as Þuríðr's actions attest in her coveting of Þórgunna's bed furnishings, and it could be said that this is the evil that corrupts the farm at Fróðá.

Eiríkr rauði

Again we embrace a small amount of brevity in our analysis and move along through our story. In the minor episode revolving around Eiríkr rauði, Snorri becomes an aid at the request and promise of Víga-Styrr. Styrr's promise is to offer Snorri aid in the future. In return, Snorri is bidden not to join an attack on Eiríkr. Snorri accepts and Eiríkr is able to escape on his famous voyage to Greenland. This cements Snorri and Styrr's relationship.

Eiríkr kills the sons of Þorgestr inn gamli while retrieving the *setstokkar* (posts that were placed between the middle of the domicile and the walls) for his home. Eiríkr does not attend the *þing* and Styrr is his only supporter present, though he attempts to take as much support as possible away from Þorgestr. Included in this attempt to persuade people not to support Þorgestr is his offer to Snorri goði. Here it is beneficial for our discourse to mention the names of those that were Eiríkr's supporters that helped him prepare his vessel for departure: Þorbjörn Vífilsson, the Þorbrandsson boys from Álptafjörðr, and Eyjólfur Æsuson from Svíney. This is the first venture where Snorri and the Þorbrandssynir collaborate together.

¹⁸⁰ "What a blessing worldly riches are: when you have them, you have lost your safety!" Book Two, Prose 5 in *The Consolation of Philosophy*, 1962, 30–33.

The *Berserkjamál*

Shortly afterwards, Víga-Styrr asks Snorri goði for advice in removing a threat to his legacy. Styrr is unable to hinder a *berserkr* named Hallr from making advances on his daughter, Ásdís. The most interesting feature of this exchange is that the advice is given on Helgafell. The holy mount is said directly by Snorri to be the best place for giving advice because counsel given on Helgafell always comes to be of good use.¹⁸¹ However, no other counsel is recorded as having occurred on the mount other than the advice given to Styrr to resolve his problem with the *berserkr*. This is stated by Snorri as a per se true proposition, and it appears to hold, despite the violent behaviour that follows from it. Víga-Styrr enhances his family legacy by aligning himself with Snorri goði, and thus becomes the most successful of the Kjallesklingar in political matters. Here we also have a point in the saga where Snorri begins to reach out to the spiritual, and positive things develop from it.

This minor episode is of particular importance to the saga for this reason, Snorri begins moving closer to a better relationship with the spiritual realm, leaving his maternal legacy behind and embracing his paternal legacy fully in resting his life in the hands of the holy mount where his forebears hold dominion. In parallel, just as Þórarinn svarti had to move beyond his maternal muse, so too must Snorri. He was on the wrong side of the spiritual realm at the outset of his rise as witnessed by the events regarding Geirríðr, but moves closer to a better position by harmonizing the spiritual with the temporal. Thus, moving from a negative *mirabilia* in the *magica* sphere to a positive *mirabilia* in the *miraculosa* sphere. It can be argued that the *berserkr* is an entity on the negative side of *mirabilia* in the *magica* sphere, whereas Geirríðr was on the positive side of *mirabilia* in the *magica* sphere.

¹⁸¹ "... þau ráð hafa sízt at engu orðit, er þar hafa ráðin verit." Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Eyrbyggja saga*, 72.

An Attempt on Snorri *goði*'s Life

The Quarrels with the *Kjalleklingar* come to a close when Vigfúss í Drápuhlíð sends his strongest slave to kill Snorri. Vigfúss is son in law to Gunnfríðr Þórólfsdóttir bægifóts. This is an extension of the previous dispute about sheep. It was Vigfúss' sheep that Helgi, Már Hallvarðsson's shepherd, was herding away. This is then an extension of that dispute, and it ends with Már being sent away for his having killed Vigfúss.

Snorri is slowly being relieved of the negative maternal legacy that surrounds him. With Már gone, things are loosening from its grasp, he only has Þuríðr to deal with in this regard, since she returned to live with him at Helgafell after Þorbjörn had died. He ends up marrying her off a second time, although he must fight to keep her out of trouble when she has an amorous affair with Björn Breiðvíkingakappi. Some pity should be granted Þuríðr, as she seems quite controlled by her brother. Her fate is not so dissimilar from her mother's, as she shuffles from one marriage to the next, her brother controlling the suitor all the while. As Jenny Jochens advises, it was the Church that brought women the right to choose their spouses.¹⁸² This fact may play a role in how these characters are handled in saga narrative, allowing the argument that they should have a right to choose. This connects to Björn Breiðvíkingakappi's later appearance where he provides a sword to give to Kjartan, whom we can assume is his son by Þuríðr, arguing that as Björn connects with his son spiritually, this connection will manifest itself corporeally as well. This argument is also held up by the actions of Kjartan as the champion of Fróðá.

The Connection to Fróðá and Beyond

Snorri is unable to bring the spiritual and the temporal together completely in his actions as a *goði* under the heathen religion. In spiritual matters, other than the grace granted him by the holy mount where he presides, he is of little use. It is when he realizes this after the

¹⁸² Jochens, "Consent in Marriage," 169.

conversion to Christianity that he becomes the powerful *goði* that he is known for. His actions against Arnkell prior to the conversion are of little value to him in the spiritual sphere, as it is Arnkell that is connected to positive *mirabilia* due to his connection with his sister and his opposition to his father. The author(s) make a valiant attempt to laud Arnkell despite his ignorance of Christ's salvation, another example of the desire to place praiseworthy ancestors outside of damnation.

There is a dialectic involved in how the Church saw its role in society and legal affairs. Stephen of Tournai expressed it quite eloquently when he spoke of how Gratian's *Decretum* and canon law in general brought the lay and the ecclesiastical together. Christ is the king, and the people are separated into two orders, the lay and the clergy. In the *Fróðárundr*, as Torfi directs our attention, there are three elements that make up the solution to the problems faced by the people of Fróðá, and these elements are divided appropriately between the lay and clerical offices.¹⁸³ This is all done at the counsel of Snorri *goði* and three men take a leading role, Snorri's son Þórðr kausi, Kjartan, and a priest that Gizurr hvíti sent Snorri. This is the axis where Snorri's inability to control spiritual matters comes to a close, including his need to control his sister. Despite Björn Breiðvíkingakappi's final attempt at influencing the spiritual sphere from afar, by sending his son Kjartan a sword, Snorri moves on to bring further order in the temporal realm throughout the remainder of the saga. The sword however is a reminder that the spiritual sphere can attack from within, as it is a symbol of Kjartan's nature developing from his paternal legacy.

Final Remarks

Society Must be Supported by all its Constituent Parts

After the dust has settled, the Kjalleklingar dispute ends with the marriage of Snorri *goði* to Ásdís Styrsdóttir. With this marriage the ties between the Þorsnesingar and the Kjalleklingar

¹⁸³ Torfi H. Tulinius, "Political Echoes," 58.

are strengthened, and there is no threat to Snorri here any longer. The threat begins to come from Þórólfr bægifótr's progeny with Vigfúss' attempt on Snorri's life.

None of Þorgrímr goði's sons take up the gauntlet of *goði*. Vermundr supports Arnkell and Víga-Styrr supports Snorri in the *Máhlíðingamál*. The opposing *goði* switches from Vermundr's father to Arnkell, rather than Vermundr himself, because he is unable to hold up his paternal legacy. When Þorbjörn digri is killed, Arnkell provides cover for Vermundr, taking Þórarinn in, so that Vermundr will not be seen as siding with Þórarinn in this issue. Vermundr is however in the end attached to the issue and is sent away with Þórarinn. While away, Vermundr gets in league with the *berserkir* and brings them back to Iceland with him. In this issue he proves to be the less capable politician and leader compared to his brother Víga-Styrr. Where Vermundr is unable to act to take care of his own problem, Styrr is able to secure his family's success with the most successful *goði* in the region, rather than making a futile attempt to grasp power for himself, prudence is on his side in this matter.

In the temporal sphere, it is not only the *goði* who must support his farmers and accept the consequences of their plight, but the farmers must choose who to support, and they too must accept the consequences of not only their own actions, but their leader's, and the actions of their relatives as well. When Vigfúss makes his attempt on Snorri goði's life, though it was ill advised, the issue has to be followed through by legal means. Vigfúss' wife Þorgerðr is forced to travel to a number of different relatives to find a way to have her husband's life compensated. Vermundr and Styrr provide no aid to the widow and she is forced to ask Arnkell to fight for compensation, which he does gladly, saying that there is no need to incite him into standing for his relatives, as Þorgerðr is his sister's daughter. Arnkell's action proves successful, and Snorri pays compensation and Már is sentenced to lesser outlawry, or three years abroad. It is here that Arnkell establishes his authority in legal disputation over the Kjalleklingar as a whole. He has become the de facto standard for a *goði*, mostly because he is willing to fight for others in need in the temporal sphere and accepts the help of others for his

lack of access to the spiritual. Arnkell truly is what Lars Lönnroth termed, the noble heathen.¹⁸⁴

Arnkell comes to the aid of his sisters' progeny more than once, showing a disposition to aid the women in his family. It is of interest here to note that when Arnkell meets his demise, it is up to women to act legally for compensation, and it is then that it is decided that the uninitiated in legal matters (women and children) must never be the ones to take on such a case, due to the mishandling of the affair. This also adds to the idea that Arnkell had access to the spiritual through others, recalling the connection Vésteinn Ólason places on women and the mythical, but took up the temporal gauntlet on his own. After his death, there is only the spiritual to protect him, but it is not enough.

The Ecclesiastical Aids in Spiritual Matters

Until the coming of Christianity to Iceland, it was the *goði* that was required to provide aid in spiritual dilemmas. The *Máhlíðingamál* diametrically opposes the *Fróðárundr* in its resolution, and the ability of the parties involved to fight a spiritual battle. The dialectical argument formed here is that without Christianity, Icelanders were incapable or at least handicapped in fighting such a battle. Although Þórólfr Mostrarskegg is able to contend with spiritual affairs quite prodigiously, he is after all the first noble heathen of our saga, he is unable to pass this power on through his family. By contrast, Snorri is unable to contend with spiritual matters but realizes this and allows for ecclesiastical aid during the early years of Christianity, freeing him up to take care of the temporal matters of his age. Arnkell is a noble heathen that is able to handle temporal matters with ease, and has access to the spiritual through others, but without formal organization his end comes quickly and undefended. And in the end, now that

¹⁸⁴ Lönnroth makes an excellent argument for the reconciliation of pagan law and tradition, holding up the noble heathen as a syllogism for this through Christian doctrine. *Njáls Saga*, 136–149.

Christianity has come, all the people can use their free will to choose more peaceful solutions, as their defence in this life and the next is assured through God.

Conclusion

There is more than enough historical and textual evidence to support the idea that clerical writing in Iceland was influenced by European education during the 12th and 13th centuries and beyond. Perhaps at times we might be tempted to view it from the perspective of unconscious or sub-conscious influence on the author(s) of *Eyrbyggja*. However, despite the episodic nature of the saga at hand, there is a clear will to weave the story together through salient and logical patterns. One episode influences the other to create a grander picture almost as diverse as life itself,¹⁸⁵ at least through the eyes of a being held down from a perfect intellectual vision by the flesh that retains her. Nonetheless, what we have here is the syllogism of the events involved from the perspective of a learned friar or friars who lived during the 13th century.

This study can only be aided by further inspection, and further correlation of a larger body of evidence, especially involving the lay works of the Icelandic monasteries, with an eye for their intended receiver. That is to say, we must focus on the fact that the authors of these tales intended to disseminate a message to a larger public body. The intent was not to laud the clerical office in these works, but to help touch society spiritually through this form of entertainment (*til skemmtunar og fróðleiks*). We must be careful then not to directly equate the *Icelandic Family Saga* with that of the *exempla* in that it was intended to pass on instruction, but recognize that there is a parallel use of such tales as *exempla* to weave a broader story, that

¹⁸⁵ This is a more positive echo of Turville-Petre's conclusion that, "[Eyrbyggja] has none of those excellencies of construction which are admired in many sagas. It is a series of scenes and stories which follow the disordered course of life itself." *Origins of Icelandic Literature*, 242.

fulfils a wider spiritual role for the community. The future is hopeful for a modern syllogism of the oral Icelandic tale, the learned Icelandic cleric, and the tales they weaved on calfskin.

Appendix I

Boethian Terminology

*The terminology below was helpful in analysing the text at hand. Although much of it may seem fairly simple and straightforward, the connections between these terms and the subtle differences in Boethius' definition of them may aid the reader as much as it aided me in the close reading conducted for the segment of our saga discussed here.*¹⁸⁶

accident – most things inhere in another via accident, it is simply that they have been observed to be so. Aristotle defines 9 accidents at the beginning of *The Organon* which was available to Augustine in Victorinus' translation *The Ten Categories*. This is not expounded upon in Boethius' commentary but is referred to.

argument – a reason (*ratio*) producing belief regarding a matter in doubt.

argumentation – the expression (*elocution*) of the argument is called argumentation.

dialectic – a method of argumentation based on a general *thesis*

differentiae – differentiae are maximal propositions that reveal how topics differ between each other, and are topics themselves, e.g. capable of perceiving or rationality is a differentia of man.

definition – contains genus and at least one differentia, e.g. an animate substance capable of perceiving is a definition for man.

extrinsic topic – an extrinsic topic is a proposition taken not from the terms presented in the question but from without, thus extrinsically. Despite their not inhering directly, they

¹⁸⁶ All the terms and examples are taken directly from Eleonore Stump's English translation. Boethius, *Boethius's De Topicis Differentiis*.

provide arguments for questions, e.g. the maximal proposition: what seems true to everyone or the many or the wise should be accepted knowledge. The way that this topic differs is that it is accepted knowledge, and thus the topic is called **from judgement**.

from similars – arguments formed based on the ability to qualify objects as either having the quality of similarity or the quantity of parity, or equality.

genus – a type or group, e.g. an animate substance.

hypothesis – also called causa or case, a question involving persons, times, deeds, and other circumstances, e.g. was Cicero rightfully thrust into exile at a time of uncertainty for the republic because he had put to death Roman citizens without the command of the people? This type of question belongs to the orator.

intrinsic topic – an intrinsic topic is a proposition taken from the terms presented in the question, e.g. an animal is an animate substance capable of perceiving.

maximal proposition – propositions known per se that require no proof from outside impart belief to all arguments, e.g. the question whether rule by a king is better than rule by a consul. It can then be said: rule by a king lasts longer than rule by a consul, when both are good; but a good that lasts longer is better than one which lasts a short time; therefore, rule by a king is better than rule by a consul. This argumentation contains its maximal proposition that a good that lasts longer is of more value than one which lasts a shorter time. This type of proposition is known, and so it requires no further proof from outside and can itself be a proof for other arguments. This proposition therefore contains a complete proof, and since the argument comes about because of it, it is rightly called a topic, that is, the foundation of an argument.

property – these are adjectival, e.g. a man has eyes, a mouth, and a brain, along with all the other properties of the general subject in question, such as an evil man has different properties from the good man.

proposition – an expression containing a truth or falsehood

question – a proposition in doubt, e.g. are trees animals?

rhetoric – a method of oral speech that deals with cases or *hypotheses*

syllogism – discourse in which, when certain things have been laid down and agreed to, something other than those things agreed to must come about by means of the things agreed to. e.g. every man is an animal; every animal is a substance; therefore, every man is a substance. A syllogism moves from universals to particulars, made up of true propositions creating in it an unchangeable truth.

thesis – the kind of question which asks about and discusses things stripped of relation to other circumstances; dialectical question, e.g. a simple dialectical question: is pleasure the greatest good? or should one marry?

topic – a maximal, universal, principal, indemonstrable, and known per se proposition, which in argumentations gives force to arguments and to propositions.

Appendix II

The Scholastic Fathers of Iceland

Also included is this list of the scholastic fathers of Iceland to aid the reader in seeing some of the deeper connections between Iceland and the Latin education of Europe during the 11th to 14th centuries.

- Haukdælir
 - Ísleifr Gizurarson (1006 – 5 July 1080)
 - His father was the greatest of the proponents for the conversion (Gizur inn hvíti)
 - Travelled with Ísleifr to Saxony and sold his son to learning with the aid of a nun at Herford Abbey
 - Bishop of Iceland at Skálaholt
 - Founded the school at Skálaholt
 - Jón Ögmundarson helgi (1052 – 23 April 1121)
 - Taught first by Ísleifr, then went abroad and studied in Denmark and Norway
 - Came back to Iceland at the same time as Sæmundr fróði
 - First Bishop of Hólar 1106
 - Gizur Ísleifsson (1042 – 1118)
 - Greatest instigator of the tithe in Iceland 1097
 - Also educated at Herford Abbey
 - Founded a centre of education (*menntasetur*) in Haukadálr
 - Ari fróði (1067 – 9 November 1148)
 - Was educated in Haukadálr – The school of Hawkdale as William Morris says
 - Wrote *Íslendingabók*
 - His father died by drowning in Breiðafjörðr
 - Grew up with his grandfather, Gellir, at Helgafell until 6 years of age
 - Fostered by Hallr Þórarinsson in Haukadálr
 - Stayed in Haukadálr for 14 years
 - Gizur Hallsson (1125 – 27 June 1206)
 - Lauded for his quick thinking and great knowledge
 - Sat long at Skálaholt
 - Main source for the author of *Hungrovaða*
 - In *Haukdæla þáttur the farabók (itinerarium) pílagríms (Flos peregrinationis)* is attributed to him
 - Hallr Gizurarson (d. 1230)

- Taught at Haukadalsr
- Early 13th c. lögsögumaðr – inherits the position from his father
- Abbot of Helgafell
- Author of Eyrbyggja according to William Morris
- Oddaverjar
 - Sæmundur fróði Sigfússon (1056-1133)
 - Received an education in Franconia
 - Ari fróði Þorgilsson names him as a source in *Íslendingabók*
 - His lost work on Norse kings is thought to have been written in Latin
 - For a long time the most important centre of scholarship stood at Oddi (*lærdómssetur*)
 - Eyjólfur Sæmundsson (d. 1158)
 - Educated by his father
 - Fostered and taught Þorlákr helgi
 - Þorlákr helgi (1133-1193)
 - Received an education in Paris and England
 - His education in Paris was at the Abbey of St. Victor
 - Helped establish Þykkvabæjarklaustr, an Augustinian monastery of the Victoran order
 - Páll biskup Jónsson (1155-1211)
 - Educated in England
 - Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241)
 - Educated exclusively at Oddi
- No familial affiliation
 - Jón Halldórsson (d. 1339)
 - Grew up in Bergen, raised in a Dominican monastery
 - First Nordic student in Paris and Bologna
 - Theology in Paris and canon law in Bologna
 - Bishop at Skálholt (1322-39)
 - Some of the exempla in the *Íslensk æfintýri* collection are attributed to him

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