OUTLAWRY
in the
ICELANDIC FAMILY SAGAS

Joonas Ahola

Academic dissertation to be publicly discussed,
by due permission of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Helsinki,
in lecture room 5 (Main building), on the 24th of May, 2014 at 10 o’clock.

ISBN 978-952-10-9906-9 (paperback)
ISBN 978-952-10-9907-6 (PDF)
Preface and Acknowledgements

This study is the result of a research process that started years ago. In a sense, it started in the heaths of northern Iceland on a motorbike in the early summer of 1998 after I had spent an academic year in Reykjavik. It crossed my mind that the narratives about the Icelandic saga hero Grettir the Strong actually resembled the poems about the Finnish-Karelian epic hero Kaukomieli. I approached this issue in my MA thesis Two Heroes of the Nordic Epics: Kaukomieli and Grettir the Strong (2000).

I decided to dwell into this issue also in my following graduate studies. Already at an early phase, I realized that it would require a more critical approach if I intended to argue anything plausible concerning the reasons to the similarities between the biographies of the two heroes. This is because they are separated by thousands of kilometers, several centuries and an evident cultural boundary. I understood that to show historical connections between traditional narratives requires the significations of the compared items to be addressed. Therefore, in my Licentiate thesis Islantilaissaagan monitasoinen rakenne: Grettis saga Ásmundaronar (2005), I ended up discussing the narrative structures within which Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar signifies its title hero, Grettir the Strong.

These significations proved to be diverse already within Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar’s internal systems of signification. In order to understand the saga more thoroughly, I felt that I also need to understand its narrative discourse. As Grettir the Strong is one of the most emblematic outlaws in the saga literature and as outlawry or banishment is a central connecting factor between Kaukomieli and Grettir the Strong, it proved necessary to understand how outlawry is treated in the saga literature in a more general sense. Not much research has been conducted on this issue and it became the topic of the present study. Indeed, my perception of outlawry that was originally predominantly based on Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar has changed remarkably.

On basis of this study, it is possible to understand individual outlaws in the saga literature from a somewhat new perspective, and in addition, this study will hopefully benefit comparative study between the outlawry in the saga literature and corresponding phenomena in other cultures. In addition to providing answers, the research process has evoked new questions.

I want to express my gratitude to my supervisors, docent Lauri Harvilahhti and Academician, professor emerita Anna-Leena Siikala, for supporting me through the writing process. I also want to express my gratitude to the preliminary examiners of this thesis, professors John Lindow and Gísli Sigurðsson, who gave many valuable comments to the
eventual manuscript. Furthermore, I owe special gratitude to docent Frog whose help has been crucial in the final phases of this process. I also want to thank those colleagues with whom I have been able to discuss matters relevant to this research.

This study started under the wing of the Graduate School of Cultural Interpretations. It has also been financially supported by the Finnish Cultural Foundation, Eemil Aaltosen säätiö, Letterstedtska fonden and the Icelandic-Finnish Cultural Foundation, for which I want to thank them.

Finally, I want to thank my relatives and friends for sharing also the difficult moments during the process of this study.

Fribacka, April 2014
Joonas Ahola
## Contents

Preface and Acknowledgements .................................................................................. 2

**Part I: An Approach to Outlawry in the Family Sagas** ........................................ 9

1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 10
    1.1 Previous Research ................................................................................................. 12
    1.2 Research Questions and the Organization of this Book ........................................ 14
    1.3 Sources .................................................................................................................. 18

2 Saga Literature ............................................................................................................ 20
    2.1 Literary Branches of Saga Writing ........................................................................ 21
    2.2 The Family Sagas .................................................................................................. 25

3 Law Texts .................................................................................................................... 49

4 Theoretical and Methodological Approach ................................................................ 55
    4.1 The Saga World ...................................................................................................... 55
        4.1.1 The Saga World and the Real World ............................................................... 63
    4.2 The Traditional Outlaw .......................................................................................... 65
    4.3 Traditional Referentiality ....................................................................................... 70
    4.4 Frames of Reference .............................................................................................. 74

**Part II: Outlawry in the Law and Saga** ................................................................. 77

5 Outlawry as a Legal Sanction ...................................................................................... 78
    5.1 Legal Institutions .................................................................................................... 79
    5.2 Compensating a Damage ....................................................................................... 81
    5.3 Forms of Outlawry ................................................................................................. 84
    5.4 Offences that Exposed One to Outlawry ............................................................... 89
    5.5 Legal Process .......................................................................................................... 94
    5.6 Putting Outlawry into Effect ............................................................................... 96
    5.7 Mitigation ............................................................................................................. 99
    5.8 Justification of the Sentence ............................................................................... 101
    5.9 Conclusion: Outlawry as Lawful Revenge ......................................................... 102

6 The Outlaw as a Narrative Character ........................................................................ 105
    6.1 Tragic Biographies of Outlaws ............................................................................. 107
        6.1.1 Gísla saga ....................................................................................................... 107
        6.1.2 Grettis saga .................................................................................................. 110
        6.1.3 Harðar saga .................................................................................................. 112
        6.1.4 The “Outlaw Manuscript” ............................................................................ 114
14 The Heroic Tradition ................................................................. 334
14.1 The Concept of the Hero......................................................... 335
14.2 The Pattern of a Heroic Biography .......................................... 338
14.3 The Hero’s Mythic Adversary .................................................. 341
14.3.1 Trolls and Outlaws .......................................................... 343
14.4 Heroic Poetry .................................................................. 345
14.4.1 Two Heroes of the Heroic Poetry ........................................ 347
14.5 The Legendary Sagas .............................................................. 350
14.5.1 Heroes of the Legendary Sagas .............................................. 352
14.5.2 Heroes in the Legendary Sagas and in the Family Sagas .......... 357
14.6 The Outlaw Hero ................................................................. 357
14.6.1 The Monster-Slayer Story Pattern ...................................... 359
14.6.2 Berserks as Adversaries of the Hero ..................................... 362
14.6.3 The Bear as an Adversary of the Hero ................................. 364
14.6.4 The Heroic Death ............................................................. 365
14.7 Conclusion .................................................................. 367

15 Historical Texts – The Kings’ Sagas and the Contemporary Sagas .......... 369
15.1 The Kings’ Sagas ................................................................. 369
15.1.1 The Tragic Fugitive King Óláfr Haraldsson .............................. 370
15.1.2 The Fortunate Fugitive King Sverrir ..................................... 373
15.1.3 The Pioneering Fugitive Jarl Gōngu-Hrólfr ............................ 376
15.1.4 Conclusion ................................................................ 378
15.2 The Contemporary Sagas ......................................................... 379
15.2.1 Outlawry in the Contemporary Sagas .................................... 381
15.2.2 Aron Hjörleifsson .............................................................. 383
15.2.3 Conclusion ........................................................................................................... 390
16 Concluding Remarks: Outlawry in the Icelandic Family Sagas .............. 392
Bibliography .................................................................................................................. 405
  Sources........................................................................................................................... 405
  Literature....................................................................................................................... 410
Appendix 1: Outlaws in the Family Sagas – First Name.............................. 448
Appendix 2: Outlaws in the Family Sagas – Saga............................................. 451
Appendix 3: Outlaws in the Family Sagas – Outcome of Outlawry .......... 454
Abstract......................................................................................................................... 459
Part I

An Approach to Outlawry in the Family Sagas
1 Introduction

In the Middle Ages, on the small, rugged island of Iceland in the middle of the North Atlantic, there lived a people who produced a vast amount of literature. This literature, written on calf and sheep skins, largely corresponded to that of the continental Europe being written for religious and legislative purposes: sermons, biblical treatises, saint biographies and law texts. Besides texts in these conventional literary branches, from the early thirteenth century until the middle of the fourteenth century, Icelanders wrote extensive prose narratives about their own ancestors, warriors and chieftains who lived during the turbulent time approximately three hundred years earlier. These stories are referred to as the Sagas of the Icelanders (in Icelandic Íslendingasögur) or as the Family Sagas.

Medieval Icelanders shared with us the conception that Iceland was first settled in 870 A.D. It subsequently took approximately sixty years for the settlement to be complete.1 The period that the Family Sagas describe, the “Saga Age” (sögúöld), spanned approximately from 930 to 1030 AD. This period was significant in Icelandic history for many reasons. For example, Iceland undertook governmental organization in 930 with the founding of the General Assembly, alþing, at the same time that the entire island had become inhabited according to Íslendingabók. Pressure to accept Christianity increased towards the end of the tenth century and in 999 or 1000, Christianity was accepted as a state religion by a common decision made at the General Assembly. In other words, the Saga Age was a period when the Icelanders lived in an organized society by abiding by their jointly agreed laws and norms, before the external influence of the Christian church began in the eleventh century and before the Norwegian Crown began to have direct influence on the way of life in Iceland from the thirteenth century onwards. According to the prevailing consensus among researchers, the Family Sagas were written between the first decades of the thirteenth century and the middle of the fourteenth century, and the saga manuscripts were copied throughout the centuries up to the twentieth century.

The Icelandic Family Sagas paint an image of a people who populated an island so remote that mutual social fumbling became their main occupation. As they had limited resources for wealth, and as their societal organization guaranteed that excessive power over others was not an accessible goal, what became highly valued was personal honor.

---

1 This information is provided in the two major historical authorities in medieval Iceland that were written in the twelfth and thirteenth century, Íslendingabók and Landnámabók.
In other words, possessing property, power and capabilities did not suffice to make one a respected individual if one did not succeed in maintaining one’s honor. Indeed, the Family Sagas are mainly stories about respectable farmers who struggled to maintain their honor within the small, but all the more complex, social networks. However, it is important to note that the protagonists in the Family Sagas are usually members of the wealthier social strata: independent farmers or chieftains from respected families.

Sagas also depict men who had lost everything after they had violated the social norms that were manifested by the law. As a consequence, these men were driven to the margins of the remote society as outlaws. Outlawry and outlaws were not a marginal phenomenon in the medieval Icelanders’ conceptions about their past; they appear in almost all the Family Sagas that have been preserved to this day. As the Family Sagas focus profoundly on the feuding among Icelanders in the tenth and the eleventh centuries, and this feuding predominantly took place on the juridical stage at their legal assemblies, summoning another individual on a charge of outlawry often appears to function as a convenient substitute for unmitigated violence in these processes. This holds true especially in those Family Sagas such as *Njáls saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga* that focus particularly on court procedures.

Outlawry was as close to a death sentence as the early Icelandic law could establish. No one was permitted to help the outlaw in any way, and the outlaw could be killed by anyone without fear of legal consequences. In spite of the severity of the sentence, the law subjected people to outlawry on rather slight grounds, which in the Saga Age society meant that virtually anyone who participated in social encounters could be summoned and convicted for even a momentary loss of temper. The Family Sagas demonstrate that outlawry was regarded as a tragic disaster for an individual as the ultimate juridical punishment. In general, a saga character who had been sentenced to full outlawry had the option of one of two scenarios: either he could remain in Iceland to be killed, or he could leave and take his chances elsewhere. Only in exceptional cases could those scenarios be compensated for and the sentence invalidated after the conviction.

The centrality of outlawry and outlaws in the saga narratives varies. In some instances, outlaws appear only as transient subsidiary characters, whereas other Family Sagas contain extensive passages in which they have a central role, and there are some sagas that are even dedicated entirely to biographies of individual outlaws. Outlawry serves as the core of the biography of the protagonists of three Family Sagas that have been established as what are referred to as the “Outlaw Sagas,” namely *Gísla*
saga Súrssonar, Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar and Harðar saga Grímkelssonar. In these sagas, most of the narration focuses on the adventures and the escapes of the celebrated main characters who eventually face violent and tragic deaths.

Outlawry also plays a major role in other biographical Family Sagas in addition to the Outlaw Sagas. However, in these sagas, the outlawry of the main character(s) does not govern the narration (as, for instance, in Fóstbræðra saga), outlawry does not lead to the main character’s death (Gunnars þátr Piórandabana), or the adventures in outlawry do not take place in Iceland (Króka-Refs saga). In some instances, the sentence seems to be a deserved condemnation of a true villain, whereas in other instances, the sentence is depicted as an unjust misjudgement at court, or as an outcome of a crude play of fate. Despite the vast differences in representation, outlaws form a distinct group of narrative characters with a recognizable appearance, pattern of behavior, qualities and skills, and who had preferred places of sojourn.

1.1 Previous Research

Many scholars have studied outlawry in saga literature over the last century, although mainly from the perspective of social and legal history. For example, Konrad Maurer and Vilhjálmur Finsen, professors of law, attempted to reconstruct the old Icelandic law as a systemic entity by focusing on the legal formalities that were involved. Both scholars approached saga literature as being supplementary information to the legal codes (Maurer 1910; Finsen 1873). Andreas Heusler attempted to reconstruct an overview of the legal and social history of medieval Iceland in which he primarily relied on saga literature. Heusler’s interest was in legal practices. He considered saga accounts to be more reliable sources of legal practices than law texts, and law texts to be rather clumsy attempts at creating theory on the basis of praxis (Heusler 1911, 223 ff.; see also Miller 1990, 230–231). Heusler’s work was rather exhaustive and he was able to make generalizations on the basis of individual episodes in the saga texts by combining them with passages in law texts. His reading of outlawry in the Family Sagas is very thorough and has been useful for this study as well.

William Ian Miller likewise reads the Family Sagas as reports of actual events, and he attempted to outline the juridical premises for these narratives. However, his readings are limited to the social mechanisms and expectations as depicted in the Family Sagas, and not to the narrative basis of saga writing. He articulates this in a most succinct way: “[T]he
facts I am talking about are those things which attain the status of fact in the narrative, which in turn may or may not have been fact in the so-called real world” (Miller 1988, 753, n. 1). Legal historians Ólafur Lárusson (1958) and Martine Stein-Wilkeshuis (1986; 1991) discussed outlawry as a part of the medieval Icelandic legislation. Gabriel Turville-Petre’s article Outlawry (1977) introduced the terminology surrounding outlawry and demonstrated the potential polysemy behind the variety of its designations. Óskar Halldórsson (1977) studied outlawry in saga literature in terms of “social banditry,” a concept borrowed from Eric Hobsbawm’s renowned book, Bandits (1972). Halldórsson focussed primarily upon one saga, Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar. The concept does not indeed apply to many saga characters. Another approach was offered by Frederic Amory (1992), who approached the differences in depiction in the legal texts and saga literature and emphasized the negotiable, flexible nature of carrying the law into effect in the saga literature.

These studies approach the narratives about outlawry in the Family Sagas mainly as expressions or reflections of the reality behind the texts. Historical anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup (1985, 136–154) demonstrated the centrality of outlawry in the Icelanders’ worldview through the parallelism it had with expressions of conceptual outsideness in other sources, especially those that were mythical. Agneta Breisch (1994), who was inspired by the studies of Kirsten Hastrup, discussed the changes in the conceptions of outlawry in Iceland from the Saga Age to the thirteenth century. According to Breisch, the concept of outlawry shifted from an issue that existed between parties on a horizontal social level to an issue that required a higher authority to implement. These contributions, as anthropological approaches, did not focus on the different mechanisms of signification that were attached to the saga narratives. These contributions would have benefited from such a study for extended source criticism.

From the narrative point of view, outlawry has been studied mainly in connection with individual sagas. The studies conducted on Gísla saga discuss, among other things, the relations between the two extant versions of the saga and they analyze the literary quality of the saga. This has been partly connected to the questions surrounding the differing versions, which have evoked extensive discussion. The heroic title

3 The following need to be mentioned here: Holtsmark 1951; Foote 1963; Andersson 1968; Pálsson 1974; Clover 1981; Meulengracht Sørensen 1986; Ólason 1999; Kristjánsdóttir 2004.
character of *Grettis saga* in particular has received attention and Kirsten Hastrup (1990) embedded this heroic character into the historical contexts in which the saga was reproduced and received. The important debt that *Grettis saga* has to contemporary European literature was reported by Odd Nordland (1953) and Robert Glendinning (1970), whereas for instance Kathryn Hume (1977) and Carol Clover (1986) discuss the episodic, somewhat non-linear plot structure of the saga, which indicates that this saga is based on oral traditions. In contrast, *Harðar saga* has received relatively little scholarly attention.

1.2 Research Questions and the Organization of this Book

This analysis is an attempt to construct an overall picture of outlawry and especially of its collective meanings and cultural significance as reflected in the depictions of outlawry in the Family Sagas and in other contemporary literary sources. The historical narratives that the Family Sagas were based on had a significant role in the lives of Icelanders at the time of saga writing, and therefore the study of these sagas also provides insight into this life. Sagas both affected and reflected how Icelanders conceived of themselves as well as others, and how they viewed their surroundings. Indeed, outlaws were part of the Icelanders’ reality in the time of saga writing. Therefore, people’s fears and hopes regarding outlaws during the period of saga writing were reflected in the saga literature in which outlaws appeared as narrative characters.

The ways that outlaws were depicted in different texts and the ways that these depictions are to be interpreted depends on what kind of a text is in question. In theoretical terms, the meaning of an utterance differs in different textual genres. For instance, to offer an example from folklore study, the dead are conceived and represented in a rather different light in jocular tales (Apo 1986, 157–158) and belief narratives (Koski 2011) and both these representations differ drastically from any actual experiences with the dead (Koski 2011, 23–24). In chapter 1, I will therefore first attempt to answer the question of what type of attitude the writers of the Family Sagas and their audience adopted towards the subject matter that was treated in the sagas. The Family Sagas and shorter saga texts, referred to as *Íslendingaþættir*, form only a part of the

---


5 Sture Hast’s introduction to his edition of *Harðar saga* (1960) and Schottmann 2000 should however be mentioned here.
corpus of texts in prose that were produced in medieval Iceland. To evaluate how significant the Family Sagas were to the Icelanders, chapter 2 presents a definition of the narrative genre of the Family Sagas both in relation to the other branches of literature and with respect to the purposes of their production, their functions and their intended audiences. I will argue that even as literary works that were recorded in writing by individuals, the Family Sagas depended upon a tradition-based signification, especially concerning the conventional forms of narration that are recognized in a wider sample of saga texts. Chapter 3 introduces the medieval Icelandic law texts and their position within the conceptions of the history of Icelanders during the period that the sagas were written. The world depicted by the Family Sagas, the Saga World, belonged to the past. That time was, however, connected to the Icelanders’ sphere of experience that existed during the time that the sagas were written. In chapter 4, I will discuss the theoretical prerequisites of this Saga World, a particular set of collectively shared conceptions about history, and the readings that make it possible to interpret different aspects of it. Whereas the concept of Saga World has been generally adopted, very little research has been conducted on this subject as such. I will discuss the Saga World thoroughly in order to define my position in relation to the historicity of saga literature, viewed as the Family Sagas’ reliance on historical “facts.” In these terms, my position differs somewhat from that adopted in the earlier research on outlawry in the saga literature. The Saga World will be discussed here as a collectively shared set of conceptions among the Icelanders at the time of saga writing. This set consisted of conceptions about particular events that occurred during the Saga Age, about how the world in general functioned then, about the relations between the reality they lived in and this past, and about how this past was appropriate or customary to discuss.

The second part of this study explores the contemporary conceptions of outlawry that are interpretable in the light of the law texts and of the primary sources of this study, the Family Sagas. Even though the focus of this study is on the saga narratives, outlawry was a juridical sentence or status and defined by the law. In chapter 5, I will address the types of conceptions about the legal basis of outlawry in the Saga Age that prevailed during the period when the sagas were written. I will endeavor to answer this question by depicting the legal institutions, by providing a juridical definition of outlawry and by depicting the legal process that led to passing the condemnation of outlawry. This will be based on the law and on the saga texts. I will also analyze the societal basis and function of outlawry. Considering that outlawry appears extensively
throughout the Family Sagas, it is necessary to study as wide a corpus of these occurrences as possible to be able to make reliable generalizations.

To answer the question of which functions and roles outlawry has in these narrative environments, in chapter 6 I will depict the diversity of outlawry in the Family Sagas by categorizing its manifestations according to how it affects the outlaw’s character. I will suggest three categories: tragic outlawry, fortunate outlawry and pioneering outlawry. Additionally, I will introduce cases separately in which the sentence was passed by the king of Norway. The conventional characteristics of outlaws and the narrative elements that are repeatedly applied in the narratives about outlaws in the Family Sagas are introduced in chapter 7. These characteristics and narrative elements will be applied in the later analysis of other literary genres. The narrative elements (such as motifs) that were used in connection with outlaw characters more than once and especially as sets of regularly connected elements are most significant in this respect. These form the core of the traditional narrative characterization of the outlaw as closely as we can ascertain with the available material.

Chapter 8 explores the typical narrative structures of the Family Sagas in which outlawry serves different functions. For example, the role of an outlaw as a narrative character affected the manner in which he was depicted, and the traditional narrative structures provided the audience with expectations within which to evaluate the narrative character’s actions and within which these actions obtained significance. However, the individual manifestations of outlawry that occur in the Family Sagas cannot explain each other endlessly. Instead, the understanding of an individual manifestation of outlawry in the saga literature requires that it is studied in relation to other appearances of outlawry in the contemporary texts that are treated as an entity. The uniformities recognized in this entity represent general characteristics of outlawry in relation to which individual manifestations of outlawry in a narrative saga text had meaning and significance.

The question considered here is which general conclusions can be drawn on the basis of the legal and narrative texts concerning the medieval Icelandic conceptions on how outlawry affected an individual. I will address this question in chapter 9 by analyzing the impact upon an individual within the social structures of the Saga World, and I will also discuss the manifestations of some of these structures in the genealogies and their effect upon the “horizon of expectation” (Jauss 1982) in chapter 10. Next, chapter 11 presents a discussion of how outlawry limited the space in which an individual could move and what types of
associations outlawry received from the space in which the outlaws were expected to dwell.

These generalizations predominantly remain on a descriptive level because they are based on the same sources that they are supposed to explain. Therefore, the generalizations need to be studied in relation to other contemporary sources. The third part of this study concentrates on the question of how these other sources reflected and affected the medieval Icelanders’ evaluations and attitudes towards outlawry in the Family Sagas. Moreover, the roles of outlawry in the narrative structures of the Family Sagas and the outlaws’ social and spatial positions are meaningful factors in interpreting other literary sources. For comparative purposes, the significant elements of outlawry are reduced in this discussion to the notions banishment, rejection and marginalization.

Chapter 12 deals with the potential attitudes towards outlawry in the texts that were used and produced within the clerical environments and in exegetic readings. Next, in chapter 13, I will survey the similarities between the outlaws in the Family Sagas and different characters in mythological texts, focusing on different groups of mythological beings and the social and spatial features associated with them that are comparable with outlawry. Chapter 14 explores the concept of heroism in connection with Icelandic heroic texts and the effect of the heroic tradition upon the depiction of characters in the Family Sagas. This is followed by a brief introduction in chapter 15 of two historically oriented groups of sagas, the sagas about Norwegian kings and the sagas that deal with incidents in Iceland that were contemporary to or recent in the time of saga writing. This chapter discusses the royal Norwegian examples of narrative characters who are said in their biographies to have been banished, rejected and marginalized at some point in their lives. This chapter also discusses the way that Icelandic outlaws were told about soon after their time, before enough time had passed for the narratives about them to crystallize. From two rather different angles, these two groups of saga narratives shed light upon the systems of signification and centrality of the narrative conventions that were applied to representing outlawry in the Family Sagas.

Quite a large number of individual outlaws are referred to in this study. To clarify which outlaw character is being discussed in each case, there are three appendices included in the end of this study. These appendices list those outlaws that are introduced by name in the sagas and whose biographies have served as grounds for this study. In Appendix 1, these outlaws are listed in alphabetical order together with references to the saga chapters in which their biographies are primarily told. Appendix 2 comprises an alphabetical list of the Family Sagas in
which these outlaws appear together with references to the respective outlaws. Appendix 3 lists these same outlaws according to the categories that are introduced in chapter 6. These appendices are intended to provide a practical referential context for the reader.

The law and legal consequences of actions assume a central role in the world that the Family Sagas depict. As a collection of principles of acceptable conduct that was collectively agreed upon among Icelanders, the law was a significant factor in forming the collective identity of medieval Icelanders (Hastrup 1985, 136) as were the sagas undoubtedly as well. Hence, the legal sentence that excluded an individual from society and from the protection of the law was important in marking the boundaries of society. The cultural centrality of outlawry is evident in the frequency of references to it in the Family Sagas and, as I will argue in this study, in other contemporary literature. This study will therefore present a comprehensive survey of a phenomenon central to the Family Sagas, a phenomenon that has received relatively little attention in scholarly discussion. At the same time, this study participates in the discussion concerning the definition of saga literature as being between the oral and literary traditions. It also offers a theoretical approach to the concurrent reception of saga literature that thus far has been rather neglected. The purpose of this study is not, however, to provide an exhaustive interpretation of any particular narrative about outlawry in the Family Sagas, but rather, to demonstrate their potential polysemy and to provide some tools that can be used to interpret them.

1.3 Sources

I have primarily based this analysis upon the editions of the Family Sagas in the Íslenzk fornrit series. These are diplomatic editions. The editorial aim in that series was to apply a philological analysis to the available preserved manuscripts. This was undertaken to prepare editions that would reconstruct the original saga texts as closely as possible. The philological approach is manifested, for instance, in the preference of the earliest available manuscripts as sources for the editions as well as those versions of the sagas that could be argued on philological grounds to be the closest to the originals. The editions in the series nevertheless give accounts of the main divergences between different manuscripts.

These editions do not provide the information that is required in all approaches, such as information about orthography, illustrations or manuscript abbreviations. However, for the current approach in which I attempt to analyze a large corpus of texts, their use is relevant. The
Íslensk fornrit series is a standard edition in saga scholarship – the scholarly discussion concerning the contents of the sagas predominately refers to it as a source and the possible requirements for emendations following from the new knowledge achieved through research are detectable by references to these editions. Occasionally, scholarly discussion has questioned the accuracy of these editions and suggested some corrections. I will indicate these corrections when necessary.

The recent scholarship in editorial criticism has tended to highlight the differences between individual manuscripts. The present study assumes an approach that cuts across such variation – exploring matters that are similar across manuscripts and even across different sagas. However, the study of divergences is extremely important even in this approach. Each version of a text is equally important – indeed, from the current perspective, it is not easy to find valid criteria to value one version over another (see e.g. Bragason 2000, 269). I will discuss the variation between the versions of the most important sagas for this study in chapter 6.

I will refer to individual sagas by name and by the chapter in the edition that is being used (listed under Sources in the bibliography). Referring to the chapters instead of page numbers allows the reader to access to translations and to other editions more easily, although it should be noted that not all editions are necessarily consistent in this chapter numbering. However, the references to Landnámabók and Sturlunga saga point to the pages in the used editions. All translations are made by the present author unless otherwise mentioned.
2 Saga Literature

In this chapter, I will define and introduce the Family Sagas in which outlawry appears as a subject as sources of the present study. Many different types of texts, including those in narrative prose form, were produced in medieval Iceland. I will discuss how the Family Sagas can be defined as their own category and how this group differs from other groups of texts. When evaluating the contents of the texts, it is important to ascertain who wrote them and also for whom and for what purposes they were written. This will be outlined in this chapter to the degree that it is possible to do in general terms. I will also address the issue of to what extent the Family Sagas can be presumed to reflect actual oral traditions and collective conceptions.

Literacy and writing technology were introduced to Iceland by the Church in the eleventh century. At the dawn of secular writing, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Church already possessed an available means of literary production. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, literary activities were still predominantly a clerical occupation, although there is evidence of learned laymen as well. For example, The First Grammatical Treatise, written in the mid-twelfth century, was an attempt at standardizing the medieval Icelandic orthography. Moreover, The First Grammatical Treatise lists different types of vernacular writing in contemporary Iceland as follows: lög (law), ættvísi (genealogy), þýðingar helgar (holy interpretations, i.e. exegesis), and historical fraði (lore) (Lönnroth 1964, 11–12). By historical lore or fraði, the author probably referred to the earliest Icelandic historical text as we know it, Ari Þorkelsson’s Íslendingabók, or a similar text.6 Fraði as a word refers to knowledge about history. This knowledge, which prevailed in the historical lore that was transmitted orally, mainly served as the basis for the saga narratives (Meulengracht Sørensen 1993a, 49).

The term saga is used generally to refer to any medieval Icelandic narrative prose text written in the vernacular. The writing of saga texts apparently began in the late twelfth or the early thirteenth century and continued until the middle of the fourteenth century. The word saga is derived from the verb at segja, “to say,” and it means a story or a tale. In medieval Icelandic texts, the word “saga” referred to an oral narrative,

6 Íslendingabók is about the key moments in Iceland’s history up to the time it was written by Ari fróði Þorkelsson around the year 1122. This work is among the first vernacular writings in Iceland.
and later it also referred to a written narrative of a certain length (Nordal 1952, 180). Robert Kellogg (1994) noted that the term *saga* was also used in medieval texts in the sense of biographical lore. Whereas sagas were tales of considerable length, short tales were called *þáttr* (pl. *þættir*), literally, “a strand in a rope.” There are two meanings of the word *þáttr* with reference to literature. The first is a cycle or passage in a larger narrative, as suggested by the term itself, although independent of the larger narrative to the degree that it was conceivable as a separate story. The second meaning is an independently presented short story. (Harris 1972.) However, it is difficult to pinpoint the difference between a short saga and a lengthy *þáttr*.

2.1 Literary Branches of Saga Writing

Scholars have divided sagas into groups and have basically labeled these groups in terms of their thematic content. The standard division of the sagas is into Kings’ Sagas (*konunga sögur*), Family Sagas (*Íslendinga sögur*), Bishops’ Sagas (*byskupa sögur*), Contemporary Sagas (*samtíða sögur*), Legendary Sagas (*fornaldarsögur Norðrlanda*) and Sagas of Chivalry (*riddarasögur*). The Kings’ Sagas are biographies of Norwegian kings. These were probably among the first secular narratives that were written in Iceland. The Family Sagas are narratives about the chieftains and farmers who lived in Iceland immediately after the settlement of the island, from the late ninth century to the early eleventh century. The Bishops’ Sagas consist of biographies of the Icelandic bishops. These sagas concentrate on the feats of their protagonists as religious leaders. The Contemporary Sagas are narratives about the events in Iceland during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and therefore differ from other sagas in recounting events relatively close to the time that they were written in the thirteenth century. The Legendary Sagas, as the genre title suggests, are heroic and fantastic narratives set in an obscure ancient past of Scandinavia and Europe. Finally, the Sagas of Chivalry include both translations of European romances and indigenous reformulations of their literary features.

This “standard system” of saga genres has proven to be sustainable to the present day with only minor modifications. According to Joseph Harris, this sustainability has been enabled by the “simple conventionality” of the system and its “compromise between incorporation of a maximum number of common features or combinations of common features and a maximum number of texts”
(Harris 1975, 430). In the recent handbook *Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (ed. McTurk 2005), the saga literature is correspondingly categorized into Royal Biography, Family Sagas, Christian Biography,7 Sagas of Contemporary History (*Sturlunga saga*), Sagas of Icelandic Prehistory (*fornaldarsögur*) and Romance (translated *riddarasögur*) as well as Late Prose Fiction (*lygisögur*).

Medieval Icelanders did not focus on the formal categorization of saga texts, and if they did so, it is rather self-evident that this categorization was inconsistent and made according to different terms from those suggested by later scholars. Lars Lönnroth (1964) strongly criticized the established convention of the standard saga divisions and suggested another system based on the emic, indigenous terms found in medieval texts that had parallels in European literature. In contrast, Joseph Harris (1972) supported the suitability of the “standard system” as a set of analytic genres that are suitable for the purposes of research.

Medieval codices contain texts that would be currently divided among the different groups of saga literature. The common denominator among the texts in codices is “almost always” based on similarities in content, not on the generic distinctions that modern scholars see between the texts, as Lars Lönnroth (1965, 7) has emphasized. A depictive and apt example is the manuscript compilation AM 556a 4to that is referred to as Eggertsbók. This manuscript consists of a Saga of Chivalry, *Sigrgardís saga frækna*, and also of the three Outlaw Sagas that belong to the Family Sagas. The common denominator for these sagas would be that they all provide accounts of the adventures of a solitary hero in a hostile land. Eggertsbók can also be seen as a collection of the Outlaw Sagas with a supplementary story which, in the eyes of the compiler or someone who supervised him, was suitable to be included in the manuscript. Likewise, Elisabeth Ashman Rowe’s work (2005) suggests that the codex Flateyjarbók, which is from the late fourteenth century, was compiled from texts that shared the thematic element of reflections of the relationships between the Icelanders and the kings of Norway, notably kings Óláfr Haraldsson and Óláfr Tryggvason. On the other hand, some manuscript codices, such as the Vatnshyrna or Möðruvallabók, which are collections of Family Sagas, indicate that the Family Sagas were indeed considered to be a group by medieval Icelanders themselves and not only by modern scholars (Harris 1972, 24).

---

7 In this edition, the categorization of Christian Biography deals with the biographies of the saints who were both native and foreign as well as the Bishops’ Sagas.
These attempts to define a genre system within the Icelandic saga literature have naturally affected my initial approach to the material and the selections made from it. In this study, I will discuss outlawry as it appears in prose narratives that are set in a certain period of time in the history of Iceland, between the late ninth and the early eleventh centuries, which can be referred to as the “Saga Age.” These texts are called the Family Sagas and the Þættir of the Icelanders (Íslendingaþættir, on which see Harris & Rowe 2005) in the “standard system.” This selection of texts follows Sigurður Nordal’s (1952, 181) division of saga literature that is based on the temporal and spatial setting of the narratives. Nordal grouped the sagas into Contemporary Sagas (samtidssagaer), located in Iceland and written soon after the events that they describe; the Family Sagas (fortidssagaer), located in Iceland and the events described occurring in the Saga Age; and the Sagas of Ancient Times (oldtidssagaer), located in Scandinavia and Europe in the time preceding the settlement of Iceland. Nordal’s Sagas of Ancient Times corresponds to the Legendary Sagas of the “standard system.” Nordal notes that all these branches of saga literature provide accounts of the saga writers’ and their audience’s forefathers, but each group of saga literature is different in its historical mode.8

Saga texts drew on diverse sources and models. In their form, they are mixtures of different narrative conventions. Due to the lack of comparative oral texts, we recognize these conventions as being derived from the different saga genres (Meulengracht Sørensen 1993a, 51).9 The Family Sagas as a category of literature can be classified by a distinct set of features, but there are texts that stand in relation to this categorization as borderline cases, which is typical of any artificial typology (Briggs & Bauman 1992, 132). In a rather polemic article, Lars Lönnroth offers an

---

8 Torfi Tulinius (2000, 529) considers Nordal’s principle to be adequate, but to these two “concrete” principles of generic differentiation he adds those of religion, the supernatural and social status. With these, he apparently suggests that it is possible to further define the genres of the Bishops’ Sagas, which are a distinct group within the Legendary Sagas (see Tulinius 2005), and the Kings’ Sagas. The Family Sagas fall between the extremes of the Legendary Sagas and the Contemporary Sagas with regard to religion (the ancient protagonists were heathen, the contemporary protagonists Christian). In addition, the presence of the supernatural is another factor that modally sets the Family Sagas between the Legendary Sagas and the Contemporary Sagas: the Legendary Sagas are occupied with encounters with the supernatural, while the Contemporary Sagas are virtually silent concerning them and merely use dreams when engaging otherworldly incarnations. However, whereas the Legendary Sagas introduce characters with a fixed social status, the Family Sagas are mainly preoccupied with a change in social status.

9 For instance, Bjarnar saga, Barðar saga Snæfellsáss or Grettis saga have features not only of their own saga group, the Family Sagas, but also of the Legendary Sagas in their orientation towards the fantastic (a brief survey regarding this orientation as a generic factor for the Legendary Sagas is conducted in Tulinius 2005).
extreme argument concerning the possibility of referring to the Family Sagas as a genre and contemplates whether the constituent elements of these sagas, which obviously include narrative units that represent different genres, should be read accordingly: “There simply is no formula by which the whole genre [of sagas] can be explained for the simple reason that there is no genre, or to be more precise: there is not one genre but several, combined and merged in various ways by individual writers” (Lönnroth 1975, 425). This notion of constituent units that call for different readings is important for understanding a saga text. However, Lönnroth’s approach is flawed in that he does not define the saga entity as being a formal unit that affects the meaning of its constituent units. Quite correctly, Theodore Andersson, who determined the conventional structural pattern that depicted in most Family Sagas, warned against splitting a saga text in this way (Andersson 1975).

Margaret Clunies Ross (1998, 50) disagreed with Lönnroth, observing that “saga” is a literary genre but that its subdivisions cannot be considered to be distinct genres because they do not represent unique features in comparison to other subdivisions, which is a minimum requirement of a genre (see also Fowler 1982, 54–74). According to Clunies Ross, the different branches of saga literature have descriptive distinctions, but they lack actual generic distinctions, which means that they should be considered as mere subgenres of the broader genre of saga literature (Clunies Ross 1998, 52–53). The concern of Clunies Ross was apparently that an artificial genre classification within the bulk of saga literature would mislead interpretations by concentrating on distinctions between these groups instead of studying the saga texts as representatives of the same literary field. For Clunies Ross, the distinctions between the different groups of saga texts were formal. However, considering the different branches of the saga literature as subgenres of the “sagas” implies that all these groups would consist of expressions in a similar mode, that they would use the same narrative strategies, and that they would refer to the same narrative world. This position is not unproblematic.

It is hardly possible to state that the narratives in all sagas, despite significant similarities in form, were understood in a similar way. Whereas the formal differences between the different branches of saga literature are small, this does not mean that the differences are non-existent or are merely descriptive if they invoke greatly differing readings. For instance, in order to conduct a deed that was acknowledged as heroic in a Legendary Saga, a hero had to defeat a dragon or a monster, or even an element of nature such as fire. In order to gain recognition as a hero in a Family Saga, it sufficed to defeat a berserkr
(see chapter 14.6.2) if the scene took place in Norway, or merely a quarrelsome neighbor if it took place in Iceland. Therefore, “saga” is a genre in the same sense that “novel” can be considered a genre (see Bakhtin 1990, 3–8). Despite the similarity in form, the different branches of saga literature as categorized above require different types of reading. As folklorist Alan Dundes reminds us, the formal similarity between two narratives does not directly indicate their belonging to the same genre, as is the case of folk tales and myths (Dundes 1964, 110; see also Bauman & Briggs 1992, 137). In other words, the genre distinction is wholly dependent upon content criteria, and the Family Sagas are to be considered a distinct genre when approaching their semantic contents.

2.2 The Family Sagas

The Family Sagas and the þættir are prose narratives in the vernacular with occasional verses of poetry. In modern printed fromats, their length varies from a few dozen to several hundred pages. Approximately forty texts that are counted among the Family Sagas have been preserved, and there are approximately fifty shorter stories (þættir) that offer accounts of the Icelanders in the Saga Age (Harris & Rowe 2005). There are saga texts in codices from as early as about 1250 A.D., but no original manuscripts seem to be extant: all preserved manuscripts are copies of earlier ones. Furthermore, each extant saga text has a different transmission history and carries traces of alteration to varying degrees. A consensus among scholars is that the first Family Sagas were written in the late twelfth or early thirteenth centuries and that new Family Sagas

10Each extant saga manuscript has a history of many stages of copying. This copying was never fully loyal to the original and led to different versions of the narratives. For example, during the course of copying, individual scenes were expanded or abbreviated, deleted or added. The methods and interests of the copyist-authors varied and each saga developed into a synthesis of the materials and insights of numerous writers in different contexts. In this sense, attempts to guess the date of origin of a saga may seem futile. However, alterations to a text were for the most part minor and the whole remained generally intact. Each act of copying was in a sense an act of approval, confirming the validity of the contents. Furthermore, the date of the first recording of a saga into writing is also a date that marks the establishment of that saga’s (literary) tradition. Attempts by philologists to create copying histories or stemmas seek to determine the relationship between individual extant versions by means of comparative study. With the earliest extant manuscripts, a reasonably consistent opinion of their dating can be determined with a relative exactness by codicological, paleographical, etc., methods, as points of departure, although the dates of origin for several narratives remain disputed.
The Family Sagas describe social encounters between people from a relatively small group of Icelandic families who were embedded in the historical surroundings of Saga-Age Iceland. The Family Sagas pay particular attention to depicting the temporal proceeding of the plot correctly and to locating the narrative within the history of Iceland. The approach to time and space, or the chronotope (Bakhtin 1990, esp. 84–85), of the Family Sagas is generally similar to that found in the historical texts and in the Contemporary Sagas.

The Family Sagas utilize formulaic opening phrases such as *Maðr hét...* (“A man was called...”) and its derivatives, which are typically followed by a description of the referent’s lineage and by the history of settlement in the geographical location in Iceland that will serve as settings for the narrative. This formulaic opening situates the narrative in a frame that is temporally, spatially and socially precise.

Additionally, the Family Sagas connect the events they describe to the correct temporal framework through references to concurrent conditions whose temporal position was commonly recognized. These references can be referred to as *extratextual anchors of time*. Such anchors include the reigning kings in Norway, the current high officials (law-speakers) in Iceland, the dates of deaths of significant chieftains, or significant events – battles and political upheavals – that occurred in Iceland or in Norway. Correspondingly, the earliest Icelandic historical text, *Íslendingabók* of Ari fróði Þorgilsson, placed the turning points in the history of Iceland on a wider historical time continuum by relating them to the reigns of the highest officers of the Norwegian crown and of the Church. Another extratextual anchor of time for saga narratives was provided by genealogical lore: the saga writers posited the narratives temporally by counting the generations from the Settlement Period to the time of the events being described. This provided a rather good approximate dating for these events.

---

11 Vésteinn Ólason (1993) has described the traditional periodization of the writing of the Family Sagas as follows. What is referred to as the classical period of saga writing took place between 1220–1300 A.D. *Egils saga* was one of the earliest while being written around 1220–1240 (if its author was Snorri Sturluson, as the general consensus holds); *Njáls saga* was one of the last sagas written during this period, having been dated between the years 1275–1290. Many of the classical sagas have been dated on the basis of their influence on Sturla Þordarson’s (Sturlubók’s) version of *Landnámabók*. These postclassical sagas were written in the fourteenth century and later. The most famous of them is *Grettis saga*; other sagas addressed in this study and that are categorized as post-classical sagas include, for example, *Harðar saga*, *Króka-Refs saga* and *Finnboga saga ramma*. (Ólason 1993, 334.) For a list of generally accepted dates of origins for the Family Sagas, see Ólason 2005, 114–115.

12 Often the characters travel abroad, usually to Norway or to the British Isles, but the events in focus take place in Iceland, the immediate exceptions being *Egils saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða*. 
In addition to these extratextual anchors of time, the Family Sagas place great emphasis on *intrapreational anchors of time*, in the sense of the means by which the temporal order and progression of events in a saga narrative are articulated. Such expressions of temporal relations between events vary from basic deictic expressions such as “earlier” or “later” to more elaborate expressions such as “after a winter passed” or the explicit counting of years. The Family Sagas often show attempts at consistency between the extratextual and intratextual anchors of time. In *Grettis saga*, for instance, the consistence between the extratextual and intratextual anchors of time is remarkable in spite of the saga’s diffuse and episodic nature.\(^{13}\)

The Family Sagas focus on social conflict. The reasons for these conflicts in these sagas, as Theodore Andersson has noted, consist of losses that one party has caused to another. These losses generally occur in one of four areas: love, property, honor, or life or limb (Andersson 1967, 12). The Old Icelandic laws regulate quarrels over property and the compensation for violent assaults. Love and honor were also touched on in these laws, although to much less extent, but in the Family Sagas, love and honor are directly connected to many material conflicts. Since social reputation was at stake in all saga narratives, the primary motivator for instigating action creating conflict in the saga literature is, indeed, honor. The role of honor extends beyond being a mere framework for inciting conflict, as in the case of an insult, as will be discussed in chapter 9.3.

\(^{13}\) Tying the narration of *Grettis saga* to extratextual anchors in time can be illustrated with the following: Ch. 14: Grettir was ten years old; Ch. 82: he was 14 when he killed Skeggi (Ch. 16); Ch. 37: Óláfr Haraldsson became a king a year before Grettir’s second journey to Norway (Óláfr’s reign started 1016); Ch. 82: Grettir was 20 years old when he killed Glámr right before this voyage to Norway, so he was 19 in 1016; Ch. 82: Grettir was 25 years old when he was sentenced to outlawry (Ch. 46) and that he lived a total of 19 years as an outlaw before he was killed the same year that Steinn Borgestsson was appointed as a law-speaker (Ch. 77) and in that same year, Skapti lógsögumaðr and Snorri godi died (Ch. 76). According to *Íslendingabók*, Steinn Borgestsson was appointed in 1031; the year is linked to the time continuum by the year of death of King Óláfr Haraldsson, 1030 (Stiklastaðr battle) (*Íslendingabók*, Ch. 8). The 19 years that Grettir lived as an outlaw after he killed Skeggi in Ch. 16 include the three-year banishment (*fjörbaugsgardr*). According to the very consistent extratextual hints or references, Grettir lived from 996 to 1031. Beginning from the first mention of Grettir in the saga, it is possible to follow the passing of years through observations provided in the saga. Lapses of time between episodes and scenes is systematically described using formulaic expressions such as “then a winter passed,” “spring came,” “in the autumn…,” etc., and the narrative has only a few such expressions which are less clear. The time when episodes take place fits the time frame given by the extratextual references so well that it is obvious that the writer was following a very precise plan for sketching Grettir’s biography in relation to certain anchors in time, the most important of which apparently being those represented in the saga (Ch. 82).
An event needed to be exceptional in some sense to become worthy of narration. Psychologist Jerome Bruner has expressed this on a cultural level, using the term *folk psychology* to refer to the collective conceptions of reality: “It is only when constituent beliefs in a folk psychology are violated that narratives are constructed... When things ‘are as they should be,’ the narratives of folk psychology are unnecessary” (Bruner 1990, 39–40). In other words, stories are told of remarkable events.14 “The function of the story is to find an intentional state that mitigates or at least makes comprehensible a deviation from a canonical cultural pattern” (ibid., 49–50). A social conflict was such a deviation from a pattern for the Saga Age Icelanders. Interpreted in this sense, with all their violent encounters, the Family Sagas actually celebrate social stability and peace, which must have been the ideal in people’s everyday lives. The Family Sagas were written at a time when the current conditions (such as political power) needed justification and mitigation. The past could be used as a reference matrix that made the current conditions comprehensible.

What was *sögulegt* or “saga-worthy” (*Bjarnar saga Húdælakappa*, Ch. 2), considered worth including in a saga in native terms, can also be defined by the expression of the opposite that is provided in the Family Sagas. For example, the repeating formula of “and then it was peaceful” (*ok var þá kyrrt*) and its variations are illustrative. This type of single formula made it possible to skip whole seasons in narration by merely mentioning that “nothing worth telling” occurred, or that everything was calm.15 Typically, the events that were recounted in relation to this formula would be tightly connected to the main conflict in the saga.

Social conflict not only provided the subject matter for the Family Sagas, but also for their conventional narrative structure. According to Theodore Andersson (1967), a central theme and a structural determinant of any Family Saga was a conflict that evolved into feuding between farmers or farmer-chieftains and their reference groups. Andersson contends that the description of a conflict proceeds in the Family Sagas by following a stereotypical pattern that has the following six recognizable phases: introduction, conflict, culmination, arbitration, reconciliation, and aftermath.16 However, this pattern proposed by

---

14 Cognitive studies of narrative have pointed out that propositions that clash with one’s previous knowledge, i.e. that appear exceptional, become the most memorable narratives for a person (Dijk 1976, 554; Dijk 1977).

15 In *Egils saga*, the expression is used in an active sense of not raising a conflict: “Lét konungur þá vera kyrrt” (Ch. 5), “Egill lét þá kyrrt vera á því hausti” (Ch. 57), etc., which especially emphasizes the expression as being connected to a saga conflict.

16 Lars Lönnroth (1975, 420) denies the relevance of the conflict pattern as a generic feature of the Family Saga because it is possible to recognize it in some of the Kings’ Sagas and in
Anderson did not depict adequately all of the sagas that it was derived from.  

Whereas Andersson suggested the feud model to have served as an overall pattern for a saga structure, his pupil Jesse Byock (1982) suggested that instead of determining the structure of whole sagas, these phases served as constituent units of smaller narrative structures within a saga. Byock proposed that the model of this pattern of saga narration derived from actual court practices. Altogether, the conventional proceeding of a social conflict and its formal arbitration seem to have formed the structural backbone of the narrative in many Family Sagas (for discussion of these structural models, see chapter 8.3.1).

Within the given framework of feuding, Carol Clover (1982b, 612–613) divided the Family Sagas into two groups, biographical and communal. In this classification, the biographical sagas concentrate on single individuals, usually poets (Egils saga), lovers (Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu), outlaws (Grettis saga) or strong farmers (Víga-Glúms saga). The þættir, in their limited scope, are almost exclusively biographical, although some of them resemble miniature feud sagas (such as Porsteins þáttir stangarhöggs; see Harris & Rowe 2005, 471). The main characters in the Family Sagas are seldom presented simplistically; instead, the successive narrative contexts bring out different aspects of their characters during saga narration. This fact has been considered to be one element in the realistic appearance of the sagas. The Family Sagas introduce the characters before turning to the action but in the biographical sagas, the main protagonist in particular is usually depicted exhaustively. For example, his ancestors are introduced to an exhaustive extent and his personal history, such as his youth, is given attention. In other words, the protagonist is thoroughly introduced before turning to the focal events in the saga. The protagonists of biographical sagas

some Legendary Sagas as well. The pattern is not genre-specific, indeed, but it is still can be claimed that the pattern as a traditional narrative model better depicts the Family Sagas.  

Theodore Andersson admits that Vatnsdæla saga, which resembles a chronicle as a compilation of the separate and independent vicissitudes that are connected to each other by their association with a location and a prominent family in the area, is an exception in this theory.

The essential difference between the structural patterns of Andersson and Byock largely derive from their different conceptions of saga narration. Andersson constructs his theory on the sagas as stories that could be narrated in a non-linear order, whereas Byock’s pattern serves primarily to analyze them according to the expressive, non-linear surface narrative. Lars Lönnroth (1976, 82–83) discerns aspects of the objective appearance of saga literature on the basis of Wayne Booth’s (1961) theory and divides them into four categories: neutrality, impartiality, unemotionality and experimentality. At best, these categories are all simultaneously present in saga narration, and at least emotionlessness is a category that characterizes all saga narration.
remain predominantly in focus throughout the saga narrative, and they are depicted in a favourable way. In the aftermath or epilogue of a biographical saga, the subsequent generations of the main character may be given supplementary attention. Communal sagas deal with communities, not individuals. Carol Clover referred to them as “chronicles of community feuds” (Clover 1982b, 613). The focus here is on the feuds that expanded to affect a large portion of the members of the society or of the families that were considered to be significant in the saga-writing period. Good examples of this type of community chronicles, which consist of a series of numerous succeeding and overlapping feuds in the region as their focal matter, are Eyrbyggja saga and Vatnsdæla saga.

Instead of being descriptive categories, the biographical and communal approach can be considered to be narrative modes that even overlap genre boundaries. Recently, Theodore Andersson has modified his earlier, rather simplified approach to the formal structure of the Family Sagas. Whereas Andersson had previously argued that the conventional pattern of a feud’s progression was the thematic core of all Family Sagas, he now included feuding as one of three distinct modes. According to Andersson, these modes are: 1) the biographical mode which is especially dominant in the Kings’ Sagas, the Bishops’ Sagas, the Skálds’ Sagas21 and the Outlaw Sagas; 2) the regional or chronicle mode; and 3) the feud or conflict mode (Andersson 2006, 17–18). Lars Lönnroth had noted the same already earlier, when he made the following observation: “While some Íslendingasögur are structured as family chronicles, others are structured as biographies (ævisögur) or as stories about one particular conflict between two feuding parties” (Lönnroth 1975, 425). These modes are therefore aspects of the general historical mode of the Family Sagas and are best understood as intentional states of the saga texts for both the writer and the audience. The different modes can be intermixed in a saga text, and therefore the same passage can serve simultaneously as a segment of a protagonist’s biography, as an account of a regionally significant event, and as a function or phase in the process of a feud or a series of feuds. The modal approach focuses on the thematic plurality of the Family Sagas, and serves to understand the saga writers’ premises to select and compose material for narration.

20Northrop Frye (1957) introduced the idea of different narrative modes as differentiators between literary genres. See also Fowler 1982 for a discussion on literary modes as a tool for understanding the reception of literature.
21See Clunies Ross 2000b for a further definition of this group of the Family Sagas.
All of the writers of the Family Sagas have remained anonymous (except perhaps for that of Droplaugarsona saga\(^ {22} \)), which can indicate that the saga writers did not consider themselves to be authors or creators of the text in the way we currently understand the concept of author today. The saga writers observe their topic from a distance and they never speak in the first person.\(^ {23} \) This results in the “objective style” that characterizes the Family Sagas and other saga genres.

Even though it is not known who exactly wrote the Family Sagas, certain general aspects can reasonably be attributed to them. For instance, the cloisters were important places for saga writing. Finnur Jónsson (1923, 280 ff.) noted that a majority of the Family Sagas were located in the close proximity to the major cloisters such as Möðruvellir and Munkaþverár. Sigurður Nordal even developed a theory of different “schools” of saga writing that were centered at the major cloisters. These were the historically oriented southern school (Sunnlenzki skólinn), the clerically and fantastically oriented school of Þingeyrarklostur (Þingeyrarklostri) and the school of Borgarfjörður (Borgfirzki skólinn), which was founded by Snorri Sturluson who had been influenced by both of the other schools (Nordal 1933, lxiii–lxvii). The supporters of Nordal’s theory were later labeled as being members of “the Icelandic School” (Aðalsteinsson 1991, 123). Nordal’s theory was based mainly on stylistic criteria and remains necessarily speculative but it reflects how important scholars have considered the impact of monasteries to have been.

However, it is probable that laymen also produced texts. This is indicated by the immense number of manuscripts produced in medieval Iceland. For example, Halldór Hermannsson (1929, 19) has estimated their number to have increased to as many as seven hundred by the middle of the sixteenth century. According to Sigurður Nordal (1952, 8–15), this would have been possible only with the participation of laymen in the process. As there was an ample supply of surplus skins for material and ample spare time in the winter for literary activities, literature became a common, non-elitist occupation in medieval Iceland. Nonetheless, Nordal’s premises for this rather romantic picture, which is

---

\(^{22}\) This makes a reference to Þóraldr Ingjaldsson as its narrator (the one who dictated the saga). There are countless speculations and suggestions regarding the authors of certain sagas, such as Snorri Sturluson for Egils saga, but none of them is directly referred to in the texts themselves, nor are they exhaustively demonstrated (Sigurðsson J. V. 1999, 12).

\(^{23}\) Except perhaps in Færeyinga saga, Ch. 14, where the saga writer states: “Here I bring to my saga that Þóralfur was the name of a farmer…” (Þar tek þá til sogni minnar, að Þóralfur hét bóndi […]). Similar expressions are encountered in many of the sagas but they rarely occur in the active voice. This is because they are meant to serve as connecting narrative devices without special evaluative or expressive content.
also reflected in Hermann Pálsson’s book entitled Sagnaskemmtun Íslendinga (1962), have been questioned (e.g. Lönnroth 1964, 43; Lönnroth 1976, 168–170).

Even if the production of the saga texts was predominantly a clerical occupation, the motivation for the production of a saga text and the interest in it hardly sprang initially from the clerical scribe. Lars Lönnroth (1964, 60) states that the writers of the earliest texts in Iceland were said to have written (rita, skrifa) their texts, whereas the authorship of later texts was termed as having said, or having dictated them (segja, segja fyrir, láta rita, etc.). During this stage, the saga narrator may have either narrated the story verbatim to a scribe, or he may have provided a broad outline to a scribe who then converted it into a narrative (Lönnroth 1964, 61).

The contacts were close between the monasteries and the lay people. Clerics and church officials were mainly Icelandic and they were from the leading families (Vésteinsson 2000). They had no pressure to separate themselves from their family roots and thus, the general interest in writing family histories was also present in the clerical environment. Gísli Sigurðsson suggests that writing down the law resulted in political turmoil in which the legal authority was removed from the authorities in oral legal lore and given to those who possessed literary tools. This shift from oral to literary sources must have affected the whole culture. (Sigurðsson G. 2004, 57–59.) Furthermore, the interest of the Church and the clerical environment was not only to support the Christian doctrine but also to support the status of the Church in Icelandic society. According to Sigurðsson, the Church deliberately took advantage of their control over written media in the writing of the central institutional texts, the laws, and the representatives of the Church also attempted to guard their interests by participating in other literary activities, such as the writing of vernacular history (Sigurðsson G. 2004, 90–92). Even if representatives of the Church did not deliberately attempt to increase the power of the Church by converting spoken lore into written text, as Sigurðsson suggests, the clerical surroundings undoubtedly affected the resulting texts, as will be discussed in chapter 12.

Not all narrative genres were similarly conceived of by all Icelanders, and only few were recorded in writing: writing was neither an easy nor an inexpensive enterprise. The general subject matter of the Family Sagas implies the writers’ fields of interest and that of their intended audience. The Family Sagas are particularly occupied with the settlement period and the first settlers, with the events connected to this settling as well as with the settlement processes. The protagonists of the Family Sagas are, to a notable degree, chieftains and other members of
remarkable families. When people were known for their legal expertise, the Family Sagas often note this even when that expertise had no function in the plot; legal skills were “in themselves almost always sagaworthy [...] The saga genre itself attests to the cultural obsession with law. Saga plots generally deal with legal issues.” (Miller 1990, 227; see also Burrows 2009.) The surface of the narrative consists of laconic and witty dialogue, colorfully described battles, verses of highly esteemed skaldic poetry, brisk adventures, determination, courage and rather dark humor. In conclusion, the Family Sagas appear as a literature intended for men occupying the higher strata of the society. These were people who could appreciate clever and witty moves at law courts. These men also comprehended the sensitivity of every single utterance to the interlocutor’s honor, and they could identify with the harsh, violent and ambitious chieftains and wealthy farmers and their vigorous sons who are the main characters in most Family Sagas. After all, it was in the interest of the chieftains to reinforce the loyalty of their subordinates and to warn against questioning or challenging the prevailing social order.

The Icelandic elite attempted to imitate continental aristocratic customs, which is demonstrated by the images of kingship as expressed in the Kings’ Sagas (Jakobsson 1997, esp. 295–301). In Europe, it was members of the aristocracy who first had vernacular histories written in the Middle Ages (Tulinius 2002, esp. 45–46), and we can assume that also in Iceland, the initiative to have vernacular histories recorded in writing was first put forward by members of the higher strata of the society.

Saga narratives, even though possibly intended for an audience in the highest social stratum, could nevertheless be appreciated and enjoyed by members of all social strata. This is because the appreciation of a good narrative, such as an epic with shining armor, fierce battles and stately behavior, did not depend on social status. The Family Sagas were written in a style that resembled oral narration and even if one could not appreciate all nuances of legally oriented sequences, the lively and entertaining surface level of the narration must have been enjoyable in itself. Orri Vésteinsson (2000) describes how the Icelandic elite gradually dissolved during the late thirteenth century, a period when saga writing was at its height. According to Torfi Tulinius, the diminishing of the social elite at this time meant that the ideological standpoint of the Family Sagas needed to be located outside the sphere of the social elite. Tulinius suggests that the Family Sagas questioned the social model that they represented and that was the ideological basis for the prevailing but collapsing social order. (Tulinius 2000, 536.) Indeed, the Family Sagas are multilayered, skillfully narrated and their background is multifaceted.
to the degree that it is possible on a general level to draw different and even mutually contradictory conclusions concerning the motives for writing them.

The impact of a single writer’s contribution to the outcome of a saga text has undoubtedly varied in each case. This input seems strongest in the thematically and structurally most coherent Family Sagas, such as *Gisla saga* and *Egils saga*. Earlier literary studies, which relied upon a view of the Family Sagas as creations of their writers, paid special attention to their thematic unity. This meant that the individual episodes and passages were analyzed in relation to their relevance to an overall plan. Even in Theodore Andersson’s (2006) recent study, the literary history of the Family Sagas is organized on the basis of both their subject matter and thematic approach, which are interpreted as inventions of the saga authors. Andersson’s study is based on the hypothesis that the saga writers’ selection of subject matter and their approach to it were firmly grounded in the historical and literary context of the time they were written. Stephen Tranter (1987) analyzed the structure of the main compilation of the Contemporary Sagas, *Sturlunga saga*, as a meaningful work created by the compiler. Tranter made an observation that applies to the writing of the Family Sagas as well: “The act of compilation is not one of neutrality. It implies selection, and that implies value judgment” (Tranter 1987, 2). However, as the subject matter of the Family Sagas was diverse and as saga production was an enterprise that involved numerous parties, the impact of an individual on the contents of a saga text must have been limited. Úlfar Bragason (1988, 268) stated that there prevails “a consensus among critics that there is a value-system and ethical norm in the sagas as a group. Accordingly, the saga writers must have followed certain principles of selection.” On this general level, these principles are, indeed, to be considered collective rather than individual.

The Family Sagas seem to have avoided sharp divergences from existing historical texts, such as other saga texts or *Landnámabók*. This may indicate that written texts had a certain authority. Slavica Ranković points out that the saga writers critically evaluated between the different versions of traditions that were available to them. Ranković does not believe that a saga writer simply invented material for his narration, but that “it seems more plausible to conceive that he would have been in tune with these established sensibilities” (Ranković 2006, 171). In other words, the saga writer had to limit his poetic freedom to fit within the boundaries of traditional knowledge.

The value of narrative integrity may have been relatively low for the intended audience of the Family Sagas. During the period of saga
writing, the settings and circumstances in which the Family Sagas were received assumed the possibility of constant digression from the core story plot. The Family Sagas are based on historical lore that can be presumed to have been performed publicly. Linda Dégh (1989, 115–119) has emphasized that the folk tales in Hungary were never performed univocally, with a silent audience listening to a narrator. Instead, the narrator was constantly interrupted by commentary and questions concerning the tale. There is every reason to believe that the occasions of historical narration in medieval Iceland had similar elements of interruption that resulted in explanations, digressions and commentaries concerning the narrative, coming both from the members of the audience and from the narrator himself. A reflection of this dialogue may be preserved in the saga texts as digressions. Saga reading was a form of public entertainment, as sagas were read aloud. The subject matter was directly relevant to the audiences in many ways, and it can be presumed that the audiences were occasionally aware of alternative versions of the stories that were told. Therefore, there is a possibility that the saga copyists even made amendments to the manuscripts on the basis of the discussions surrounding public readings of the saga texts. The saga writers may even have been encouraged to include material that was not crucial to the plot itself, but that was of general interest to the audience.

Despite the influence that the saga writers had on the form of their craft, they predominantly relied on a historical tradition. For this reason, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (1977, 76) has referred to the saga writers as “stewards of tradition.” The narrative tradition was the basis for literary activities also elsewhere in Europe. Anthony Spearing, discussing Chaucer, notes that in medieval culture:

[… ] the normal assumption seems to have been not that every story expresses an individual human consciousness but that stories have a kind of autonomous existence in a realm of their own, and the role of the poet can be somewhat like that of […] not a producer but a trafficker in products that always already exist (Spearing 2001, 728).

This existence, of course, could only occur in commonly shared knowledge. The social hierarchy in Iceland was relatively relaxed, at least in principle, and in comparison to that found in continental Europe.²⁴

²⁴ Even if it has been emphasized that power and property were not evenly distributed, the law stipulated that every free individual (most of the population belonged to this category) had the same rights despite their differences in wealth and esteem. In practice, however, this ideal was not upheld. For further discussion, see chapter 9.
Even though the Family Sagas are generally unanimous about central historical events, individual sagas do not always agree with one another. On a general level, especially in the basic conceptions about the Saga Age, the sagas mainly correspond. The differences appear to follow the requirements of the individual narrative. On a more specific level, however, more variation becomes easily recognizable as resulting from a writer’s narrative strategies, and from the interests of the different groups behind the saga narration. Gísli Sigurðsson’s study (2004) indicates that the differences in the ways that the Family Sagas refer to the Saga Age may follow the natural variation of oral narration connected to the boundedness of narration to particular situations. Furthermore, the oral narratives were performed in a collective that consisted of individuals. Social collectives are often carriers of differing temporal horizons and collective memories and this means that the narratives of these collectives are not necessarily uniform (Giesen 2004).

Slavica Ranković characterizes a written saga as an “instance of its distributed self” (Ranković 2007, 297). In other words, each rewriting of a saga is a link in the chain of the saga’s totality. She compares the process of rewriting sagas with the process of continuous performances in oral narration: “traditional narratives also exist beyond any particular instances, and so they are at the same time products that have ‘no “author” but a multiplicity of authors’” (Ranković 2007, 297–298, quoting Albert B. Lord 1960: 102). This view emphasizes the impact of different interest groups on a text during the history of its transmission.

The writer who compiled the first saga text had his sources; scribes copied the saga text and each time, it was altered to differing degrees. Furthermore, in typical medieval fashion, the saga texts were undoubtedly read aloud to the audience. In a sense, all the interest groups who participated in the distribution of the text contributed to the performance of the saga. In addition to the immediate interest groups, each instantiation in the distributed authorship of a saga involved an awareness of other groups whose interests might be touched upon more or less directly by the saga narrative, such as specific families or the inhabitants of particular areas. This awareness affected each “saga performance,” and thus the interest groups, or the distributed authorship behind the production of each written saga text, left their marks on that text. The text was altered each time it was copied not: the scribes’ goals were not invariably to faithfully copy the available exemplar as accurately as possible. The difference between a “writer” and a “scribe” is therefore only relative.

If distributed authorship is a descriptive term for the multiplicity of contributions to the development of a text as a diachronic process,
**multivoicedness** is a term that describes the synchronic plurality of voices of different contributors to saga narration in each reproduction.\(^{25}\) The generic diversity of the constituent units in a saga narrative reflects the diversity of the voices that a single saga text is based on. The historical oral tradition behind saga narration could not have been uniform. The Family Sagas drew upon biographies, family histories, local histories and key elements in the history of Iceland. These all speak simultaneously, commenting on one another, as well as supporting or disagreeing with each other. Indeed, multivoicedness seems to have been an acknowledged and even expected feature in saga narration, which was indirectly suggested in an illustrative utterance in *Grettis saga* (Ch. 46), spoken by the law-speaker Skapti: “A story is half told if only one tells it.”\(^{26}\)

Even univocal traditional material could generate oppositional readings and retellings. Sometimes the differing views on events are expressed within a saga text. As a simple example, in *Grettis saga* (Ch. 66), the saga writer tells about the conflicting opinions concerning whether the troll who fought Grettir Ásmundarson had turned into stone or had died in its cave. Two similarly conflicting opinions concerning the fate of a saga character are presented in *Reykdæla saga* (Ch. 3), which expresses two alternative fates for the outlawed Eysteinn: whether he had burned himself along with his farm or had traveled abroad. Two sagas may, of course, also disagree in details that are less important for the narrative, such as is the disagreement between *Víga-Glúms saga* and *Reykdæla saga* regarding whether the weapon named Fluga was a sword or an axe. It is therefore clear that an individual saga text did not offer all conflicting opinions surrounding its narrative, and that the saga writer was making selections. These selections included when to explicitly acknowledge multiple opinions and conflicting views, which should not be underestimated as a rhetorical device that contributed to the saga narrative’s appearance as an anonymous and objective collective text.

Differing narrative perspectives could produce inconsistencies between different sagas in accounts about particular events or personae. For instance, *Gunnars þáttur Þiðrandabana* (Ch. 4) states: “Some have told that Helgi Droplaugarson was on this journey with Þorkell, his relative, but we do not know if this is true.”\(^{27}\) This account may refer to *Fljótsdæla saga* (Ch. 18), in which Helgi Droplaugarson is indeed a

\(^{25}\) C.S. Lewis referred to the result of the interweaving of numerous separate themes in medieval continental romances as a “polyphonic narrative” (Vinaver 1971, 72–73).

\(^{26}\) “[E]r hálfsögð saga, ef einn segir.”

\(^{27}\) “Nú er þat sumra manna sögn, at í þessari ferð hafi verit Helgi Droplaugarson með þorkatli, franda sinum, en eigi vitum vér, hvárt satt er.”
central figure in the retinue of Þorkell Geitisson during the event in question, or it can refer to a narrative tradition that Fljótsdæla saga was based on. Whatever function it served, this account appears as a commentary on the reliability of this source. Helgi Droplaugarson was a famous saga character in the East Fjords and the eponymous hero of Droplaugarsona saga. His presence in the event accounted and his hostility towards the eponymous hero of Gunnars þátr Þiðrandabana are politely questioned. Perhaps this was because the saga writer feared that an account of the controversy between these two saga characters would give the upper hand in terms of sympathy to someone other than the hero in the narrative. Nevertheless, this comment does not serve the narration and seems to be incited by interests other than the fluency of the narrative.

The differences in the depiction of the specific outlaws in the different saga texts may also follow differences in ideas and views that reflected contemporary societal developments to a greater or lesser extent. These depictions also change diachronically during the transmission of manuscripts, as Emily Lethbridge (2007; 2010) has demonstrated with Gísla saga. The general insignificance of the differences between the various versions of a saga does not, however, reflect constancy or uniformity in the sets of ideas that were expressed by the scribes but rather a relatively greater respect for the text’s integrity.

In Slavica Ranković’s terms, the numerous interest groups behind a written saga – the deliverers of the traditional subject matter and all copyists of the text together with their interes groups – could be referred to as participating in the work’s distributed authorship. This approach emphasizes that a saga text was not based on any one individual’s perspective despite the fact that only one hand at a time could hold the pen that put the text into writing. In contrast, Kári Gíslason describes the saga writers’ impact on the text in terms of combining different sources and their own agendas, which he describes as multi-functional authorship. As Gíslason states, such authorship was required “to integrate what today might be viewed as contradictory functions: scribal and didactic, historical and creative” (Gíslason 2009, 23–24). The inventiveness of authorship was nevertheless mainly limited to formal expression and to combining available materials, as Carol Clover (1982a, 202–204) has noted. However, the distributed authorship of the Family Sagas ensured that those insights that were expressed in a saga text that were not generally accepted did not survive long in the transmission history of the text (if the sum of the insights of the individual members
of that distributed authorship can be understood as constituting general acceptance).

There have been many designations in the scholarship for the men and (possible) women who were responsible for recording the saga narratives in writing. These designations depend on a researcher’s aims and point of departure. Terms such as scribe, compiler or the more neutral sagaman, have all been adopted to emphasize the role of these individuals as recorders of collective lore without personal authorial intentions. In contrast, those who have wanted to underscore the literary efforts and impact of these individuals have preferred the term author. I have chosen to use the term saga writer as a relatively neutral term between these two extremes. This term is intended to refer rather to the narratives’ dependence on collective and traditional conceptions than on authorial freedom, even if the Family Sagas in their written form are results of authorial selection, arrangement and representation (see e.g. Lönnroth 1976, 41).

Sagas are relatively complicated compilations or intertwinings of narratives that are derived from numerous sources, and they therefore can be considered to be a secondary genre, a narrative genre that applies or utilizes the formal and semiotic features of other (primary) genres (Bakhtin 1986, 62–66). As Margaret Clunies Ross (1998, 48) has formulated it, the Family Sagas represent different types of discourse in a dialogic manner. Lars Lönnroth (1976, 206–207) likewise noted that saga writers appear to have been highly aware of different generic conventions in their treatment of the particular constituent motifs and themes of the Family Sagas. Conventional narrative elements could be adapted for multiple narrative purposes. In general, the saga writers probably preferred source material that supported their overall subject matter. These included the narratives that were somehow connected to the social conflict in question, the main character’s biography, or the local history. Even though the saga writers performed selection among their source material, the type of the available source material eventually had an impact on the primary mode of the text.

An academic debate arose in the nineteenth century regarding the extent to which the Family Sagas were the conscious production of individual authors as opposed to representing traditional narratives. Andreas Heusler introduced two concepts that became labels of the two standpoints concerning the origins of the Family Sagas. These concepts attested to the dependence of the saga writers on earlier writings: according to Heusler (1913, 53–55), the bookprose (buchprosa) in the Family Sagas were passages that had a direct connection to earlier texts, whereas freeprose (freiprosa) referred to passages where the writer had
frer hands and supposedly was influenced by traditional narratives. Heusler also expanded the concepts to represent two respective scholarly views about the compositional methods of the saga writers in general. He referred to those researchers who believed in the oral roots of the Family Sagas as “free prosaists,” and to those who considered these sagas as literary creations as “book prosaists.”

Even though these concepts were rather rigid, they were quickly adopted (Mundal 1977, 157). National romantic ideas were heavily involved in the discussion, and the bookprosaists came to be labelled as the “Icelandic School” because the most vigorous defenders of the Family Sagas as individual artistic creations were Icelandic (Byock 1994, 184; Aðalsteinsson 1991). Heusler himself did not consider bookprose and freeprose as being opposed or mutually exclusive, but the scholarly field took them up as opposites. Many researchers chose one of these two orientations, which they were partly forced to do because any discussion tended to occur within one of these two frameworks. These two opposing positions defined the discussion in saga scholarship for decades, and the discussion continues to some extent up through the present day. (Mundal 1977, 266–275; Andersson 1964, 116–119; Sigurðsson G. 1997, 177–180.)

The division of the Family Sagas’ source material into literary and traditional is significant because Literacy Theory in its classical form, as proposed especially by Jack Goody & Ian Watt (1963), Walter Ong (1982) and Eric Havelock (1986), posits that oral and literary cultures are profoundly different and mutually exclusive. However, the “Great Divide” between the oral and literary cultures was already questioned, for instance, by Ruth Finnegan (1977), and more recently was especially problematized with particular regard to medieval texts by Joyce Coleman (1996). Coleman argues that during the Middle Ages, European cultures were still largely oral cultures, as literacy was mostly limited to the higher strata of society and written texts had only a marginal role in the totality of cultural expression. Even written texts were delivered orally. According to Carol Clover, this was largely the situation in Iceland as well (1982a, 191–194) and Gísli Sigurðsson points out that it took a long time for people to accept the precedence of the written word over the testimony of the wise (Sigurðsson G. 2004, 47). In addition, Stephen Mitchell (1987, 413) has suggested that a saga is a compromise between written (or learned) and oral (or popular) cultures. Mitchell argues that the saga literature was part of a living, diverse narrative culture and that therefore it is not wholly appropriate to speak of sagas as though they were literary “end products” of a narrative tradition. Medieval Icelandic narrative culture consisted of both literary and oral features.
Saga narratives are compilations of narrative elements that are interwoven in a way that results in a larger entity. The idea that sagas were compiled of the smaller narrative components referred to as þættir was not completely new in the late nineteenth century. However, the Swedish poet A.U. Bååth developed this idea into a classical theory in 1885. Bååth analyzed four Family Sagas to demonstrate that they were compiled of þættir and that they were formed into complete works by using fate as a binding element. According to this theory, the constituent elements of a saga were native traditional narratives. Lars Lönnroth adopted the view of smaller constituent units of the Family Sagas but emphasized that European literary culture provided a background for Icelandic literary culture, including saga production. Lönnroth claimed that the genre terminology in Icelandic texts, predominantly adopted from Latin origins, reflected the constituent elements in saga compilation. By utilizing medieval concepts for literary compilation, Lönnroth (1964, 30–31) suggested that the saga text is to be understood as consisting of smaller narrative units of ættvisi (genealogy), ævisögur (biographies), jarteiknir (miracles), daemisögur (exempla), and other units in different modes (such as battle scenes, speeches, dialogues, and so on). However, in his thorough study on Hrafnskels saga Freysgöða, Tommy Danielsson (2002, 304) states that literary and oral traditions lived so long alongside each other that it is impossible to discern them from the extant texts. In a recent article, Danielsson expresses a belief that the subject matter of the Family Sagas had been narrated in an oral tradition in a very similar long form (Danielsson 2008, 30). Even if the “patterns of action” and the “system of composition” were traditional in saga narration, like Lars Lönnroth (1976, 42) has suggested, the sagas as they exist today are something other than traditional oral narratives. Gíslí Sigurðsson (2004) has stated that with only the written sagas available, there is no way back to the oral traditions behind the sagas in whose composition all source material has been modified and conformed to suit the formal and narrative requirements of the written saga genre.

Sagas are written literature and produced in the clerical environment that was essentially literary. Many of the saga writers were even educated in Continental Europe, and were therefore familiar with eclesiastical writings and continental literature. The formal education that these writers received conferred valued on the authority of their written texts, especially among potential saga writers who were themselves being educated in (and indoctrinated into) the rising book culture. The historical traditions behind the Family Sagas were independent of written sources, but as written sources became available, it is only natural that the writers, who conducted their work within the
literary culture, resorted to them. Philological study of the Family Sagas has revealed a large number of textual connections between saga texts and it is obvious that saga writers regularly used existing saga texts as their sources. In other words, for the saga writers, the written texts appear to have been authorities (Danielsson 2002, 51–52), although it is unlikely that those written texts had similar authority within the concurrent oral traditions.

Konrad Maurer was the first to explain the connections between the subject matter in different Family Sagas on philological grounds. In his study on Hænsna-Þóris saga (Maurer 1871), Maurer applied the philological methods used in research on the Bible to the Family Sagas. He denied any traditional structural form as a basis of the saga and claimed instead that the writer had used his sources freely. Björn M. Ölsen (1911) examined the textual connections between Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu and other Family Sagas, on the basis of which he was able to date the saga to the end of the thirteenth century, which was much later than was customarily believed.28 In his influential treatise Dating the Icelandic Sagas (Sveinsson 1958), Einar Öl. Sveinsson emphasized the importance of evidence-based criteria for dating the Family Sagas, by which he meant evidence found in other written texts. Sveinsson acknowledged oral traditions as sources for saga writing, but he also warned against resorting to hypothetical oral sagas in reconstructing the literary history of individual Family Sagas. Correspondingly, the editors of editions in the publication series of the Family Sagas, Íslenzk fornrit, concentrated mainly on detecting the sources of the Family Sagas, the relationships between these sagas and the relative order of each saga’s first appearance in writing. Only the evidence of the literary sources remains, and thus these received emphasis, even though the editors were in general well aware that the Family Sagas may have been influenced by oral traditions. It is evident that oral tradition was also a source for the saga writers, even if only indirect knowledge about it is available. In other words, the lack of evidence does not justify denying the oral tradition’s existence.

The Book of Settlements, Landnámaábók, was an authoritative work for the saga writers. An early version of this work was probably compiled in the twelfth century. It represents genealogical traditions from every district of the island, arranged in a clockwise progression around the island. This is a list of the settlers of Iceland which also includes some events connected to the settlers and their descendants.

---

28 Even though Finnur Jónsson considered sagas to be individual and unique artistic creations, he emphasized the role of oral tradition in the creation process of sagas (Jónsson 1923, 272–284).
although these are mainly concentrated in the settlement period. Although Landnámabók appears neutral in its accounts, its illusion of ideal objectivity hardly differed from the later Family Sagas, except perhaps in that its manner of laconic and concise expression limited possibilities of tendentious representation. The oldest preserved Landnámabók text is a fragment of AM 371 4to, Sturlabók (beginning of fourteenth century). This manuscript served as a source for the manuscript called Hauksbók, together with another, referred to as Styrmisbók, which has however not been preserved to our day. (Jóhannesson 1941, 140–170.) The compilers of all the extant redactions of Landnámabók added material from numerous sources; the policy in compiling seems to have been rather inclusive than selective (Benediktsson 1986, lii–liv). Occasionally, the Family Sagas affected the contents of the redactions of Landnámabók. We do not know the variation in contents of the different redactions of different times because those contents were constantly being elaborated. However, the additions appear mainly to be expansions in the narration.

The general appeal for conformity between historical writings such as Landnámabók and the different saga texts indicates that a written text had certain authority in the eyes of the saga writers. This principle was also considered to be necessary in the citation of laws. An illustrative point is in the principle of Augustinian exegesis, which aimed at a coherent religious doctrine. Here, the most generally accepted view or the most respected authorities were to be followed, and if these disagreed, they were to be respected as equal authorities.29 A reference to the authority of a written text could serve as an authenticating device for the rest of the text, as Joyce Coleman (1996, 12) suggests was often the case in medieval Europe. However, in an oral culture where genealogical lore was traditionally preserved in oral form, that oral tradition must have held a similar authoritative position. The principal source for saga narratives seems to have been found in the historical traditions.

The oral tradition was a primary source for the saga writers but it remains unclear to which extent this tradition refers to actual events in the Saga Age. Vésteinn Ólason states,

---

29“he will apply this principle to the canonical scriptures: to prefer those accepted by all catholic churches to those which some do not accept. As for those not universally accepted, he should prefer those accepted by a majority of churches, and by the more authoritative ones, to those supported by fewer churches, or by churches of lesser authority. Should he find that some scriptures are accepted by the majority of churches, but others by the more authoritative ones (though in fact he could not possibly find this situation) I think that they should be considered to have equal authority.” (On Christian Teaching, Book II, VIII 12: Augustine 2008, 36.)
The majority of scholars would probably agree with this statement: the consistency of the saga canon as a whole, with regard to the world described and its inhabitants, is best explained by the existence of a continuous oral tradition about persons and events in the first centuries after the settlement (Ólason 1993, 334).

The oral narrative culture within which the Family Sagas were written must have been diverse. Even though the core of saga narration was acquired from the tradition of oral history, only a limited range of this narrative tradition was applied in saga writing. Another challenge is that we cannot know exactly in which form, or about which subject matter, the historical traditions were narrated. All knowledge that we have of the oral traditions of medieval Iceland remains speculative, whether it is based on concurrent literary sources, or on indications that are provided by systems of oral traditions in later, in some way comparable, societies. Nevertheless, the constituent elements of the saga narratives have invoked some suggestions.

It is quite certain that there were oral narratives and verses about the subject matter that ended up in the saga writings, invented and circulated in Iceland over the course of time between the Saga Age and the period of saga writing. The Family Sagas are a secondary genre by their expression, and their constituent genres have mainly been differentiates as passages that are distinguishable from their narrative surroundings, that are recognizable from comparative materials, or that can be identified through the internal evidence of the saga text itself. For instance, F. York Powell (1894, 100–101) listed the following tradition-based sources for saga writers: indigenous folk-tales and foreign folk-tales, tales of giants, tales of ghosts, tales of bandits or outlaws, tales of bear-Sarks [berserks], and tales of single combats and of sea-roving. He also listed “the amplification of a fact into a narrative,” and “the amplification of a verse or allusion into a narrative,” forged verses, scraps of old law and amplifications of personal or place-names. This vast list is insightful, even if it remains rather preliminary than comprehensive.

It is worth noticing that Powell noted the traditional basis of many of the narratives about outlawry in the Family Sagas. On the basis of the recurrence of the stereotyped accounts about outlaws in the written Family Sagas, Theodore Andersson has likewise suggested that these represent oral traditions akin to biographical traditions. Andersson also lists other forms of oral tradition of which there are signs in the Family Sagas: ghost stories and sorcerer stories, genealogical traditions,
traditions about regions and traditions about particular families, about lawsuits, about armed conflict, and place-name traditions. (Andersson 2006, 16–17; 2008.)

Other indications also exist of prevailing oral historical traditions outside of the written histories. Historical texts, such as Landnámabók, contain many instances that assume a reader will have prior knowledge of the subject matter addressed. It can be reasonably inferred that such assumed knowledge commonly circulated in the contemporary oral tradition (Helgason 1934, 112–113). The same principle holds true of the Family Sagas (Sigurðsson G. 2004, 247–249). The Family Sagas regularly refer to oral traditions. Formulaic phrases, such as “Most people say…,” “People say…,” etc., imply an oral tradition as a source even though the expressions themselves seem to have gradually turned into conventional clichés over the history of saga writing (Liestøl 1930, 33–34). These formulas invoke a narrative situation that invites the audience to make evaluations of the described events against this collective evaluation; the saga writer seeks authority through a traditionalizing act. The formulation of a message in a traditional way, traditionalization, gives the text a stamp of collectivity and this can be used (and is used) in the Family Sagas as a rhetorical device. Indeed, Richard Bauman (2004, 32) notes that “the rhetorical effect of traditionalization through the weaving of interdiscursive ties is what is significant: this process endowes the sagas […] with a distinctive element of social groundedness and force.” In other words, the saga writers could prefer tradition-based subject matter and expression both as a source and as a compelling rhetorical device.

According to Franz Bäuml (1987, 39–41), when a formal feature characteristic of oral narration appears in a written text, this does not mean that the text is a record of oral narration but instead, that the text represents an attempt to rely referentially upon oral tradition. Sagas occasionally refer directly to oral traditions as sources of individual passages and different sagas sometimes narrate the same events in such different ways that they are more likely to draw independently on an oral tradition than to develop from a common written source, as has been discussed above (see also Liestøl 1930, 35ff.; Sigurðsson G. 2004, 244–245). Moreover, verses of skaldic poetry embedded in these narratives sometimes contradict the surrounding prose. Heusler (1913, 70) has pointed out that if the saga writer could freely formulate his narrative, he would have conformed it to the poetry, which was fixed in form (see also Liestøl 1930, 189). The inconsistencies of a saga narrative testify to an impact on the narrative that stands beyond the saga writer. Furthermore, the anonymity of the saga writers, which has been discussed earlier, can
be considered to be an indication of the text being conceived as traditional as opposed to a work of individual artistry (Heusler 1913, 61).

Information about the oral narration in medieval Iceland has only been preserved in the sagas themselves, hence this information is reflexive in nature, subordinate to the narrative environment in which it appears. For example, in Eiríks saga rauða (Ch. 8), narrative entertainment (sagnaskemmtun) is mentioned as a pastime for the long winter months, but mentioning this functions in the narrative to lay a foundation for events that take place on such an occasion. The Contemporary Sagas have been considered more reliable as descriptions of actual social practices. According to Íslendinga saga, Sturla Þórdarson traveled to Norway to enter the service of King Magnús in 1263. He accompanied the king on a sea voyage and in exchange for his quarters, he told the ship’s crew a story about a troll named Huldr. Sturla’s story was “better than anyone had heard it told earlier” and when he told the story again to the queen the next day, the saga says that it took him most of the day. Later, he told the king the “sagas” of both the king himself and his father, King Hákon. (Sturlunga saga, pp. 765–767.) Sturla later became one of the greatest writers of medieval Iceland – actually, he wrote the account above himself. Sturla Þórdarson’s account of his narrative feats at the king’s court corresponds to the conventional narratives about the Icelanders who gain the recognition of a Norwegian king (see chapter 6.4). Nonetheless, Þórdarson’s account indicates that such a scenario about an Icelander gaining recognition from a king for his skills in narration was at least considered possible, if not common, by his intended audience. More generally, this account indicates that narration was recognized as an activity in which skill could be acknowledged.

A similar to that in Sturlunga saga is found in the earlier Morkinskinna, which indicates that this idea was not new in Sturla’s treatment. The story in Morkinskinna describes how an Icelander was in the court of King Haraldr harðráði, entertaining the court for months. As the autumn came to an end, the Icelander fell silent, and the king asked why. The Icelander stated that he only knew one more story and that he dared not tell it because it was the saga of the king himself. King Haraldr ordered the Icelander to save the story for Christmas. The Icelander eventually told this saga over the thirteen days of the Christmas holiday. As the saga came to an end, the king asked where the Icelander had learned it. He replied that he had learned it over several years from a certain Halldór Snorrasón who had been with the king on the campaigns recounted in the saga. (Jónsson F. 1932, 192–200.) These accounts indicate that oral saga narration was considered one skill among many
skills that was prominent when Icelanders met the king, and as such that narration was an appreciated skill. Furthermore, the account in Morkinskinna indicates that an oral saga could be of considerable length. However, as these instances of saga narration are represented in the context of a literary narrative, it is also possible that the texts referred to a reimagining of the oral tradition of saga narration on the basis of current oral readings of written saga texts.

Nevertheless, the skills of the Icelandic narrators were acknowledged in Scandinavia. In Gesta Danorum (completed around 1200 A.D.), Saxo Grammaticus mentions that the Icelanders “devote all their time to improving our knowledge of others’ deeds, compensating for poverty by their intelligence” (Davidson & Fisher 1979, 5). Saxo and the monk Theodricus (writing in the twelfth century) both mentioned Icelandic narrators as important sources for their histories written in Latin (Helgason 1934, 115–116).

One important piece of information concerning the common performance contexts for oral saga narration occurs in Þorgils saga ok Haflíða, which is one of the Contemporary Sagas. An oft-quoted passage in this saga recounts a wedding feast that was held at Raykjahólólar in 1119. According to this passage, sagnaskemmtun (narrative entertainment) was one form of entertainment at the wedding alongside dancing and wrestling. The saga tells that a certain Hrólfr, who was present at the event, told the saga about Hrómundr Grípsson. Hrólfr himself is told to have compiled (saman setta) the saga and to have attached several verses to it. According to the saga, King Sverrir had heard the same saga and had considered it to be a most entertaining lygisaga, “lying saga.” Hrólfr’s performance was also judged to be skillful by the audience at the wedding, and many people present could trace their lineage to Hrómundr (Sturlunga saga, p. 22).

The formal features of saga literature testify to roots in oral narration. According to Knut Liestøl (1930, 91–100), the style of saga narration offers evidence for an oral tradition that was very close in style to the written texts. The style of the literary saga seems to have appeared as a completely developed form that was ready to be performed, which requires that the style already had a venue in which to develop its preliterary form. Liestøl also drew attention to features in saga texts and their structure that, according to him, are the result of oral processes and are comparable to the narrative features found in Norwegian folk tales (sogor). Moreover, according to Liestøl, the unpolishedness, repetition and the large share of genealogies were all indicators of the text’s dependence on oral sources (Liestøl 1930, 25–32).
The Family Sagas are literary works, and in that regard they began as creations of individual writers. The production of manuscripts required, however, several actors and many interest groups behind the scenes. The manuscripts were transmitted through copying, and this copying caused alterations to the contents. Even though these alterations were usually minor, they demonstrate the potential of the scribes to alter the contents of a saga when the contents did not correspond to current conceptions or preferences. Those saga texts that were sufficiently intriguing and entertaining, and that did not diverge too sharply from collectively approved conceptions about history (expressed in earlier authoritative writings and historical traditions), had the potential to attain popularity, and to be preserved rather intact through the transmission of the text. The topics and the subject matter of the narratives in the Family Sagas mainly sprang from the oral historical tradition, and the sagas were produced as literary works within that same narrative culture. These narratives were composed for an audience that was accustomed to oral narration. In this study, I will focus upon the expressions of collective conceptions that are repeatedly expressed in the narratives of the Family Sagas: literary expressions that engaged the vernacular (predominantly oral) culture as a frame of reference.
3 Law Texts

The conceptions of outlawry as expressed in the Family Sagas were based upon thirteenth-century conceptions of law in the Saga Age. In order to understand the outlawry of the sagas, it is first necessary to be familiar with the juridical premises underlying it in law texts and the relationship between the thirteenth century law texts and the Saga Age. In this chapter, I will introduce the available law texts in the compilation called *Grágás* and their connection to the Saga Age of centuries earlier, both in the conceptions of modern legal historians, and in the conceptions of the saga writers and their audience.

For the laws in Iceland during the period that preceded Iceland’s submission to the Norwegian king in 1264, the main source is a law compilation *Grágás* (“gray goose”). The origins of this rather peculiar name are unknown, by the middle of the sixteenth century but at the latest, this name was used to designate the collection of laws (Lárusson 1958, 124). These laws have been preserved in two major manuscripts, GKS 1157 fol (Konungsbók) dating back to 1250–60 and AM 334 fol (Staðarhólsbók) dating back to 1260–70 (Karlsson et al. 1992: xiii–xv). The laws in these manuscripts do not form a unified corpus, but are overlapping and contradictory in many instances. Comparison of the manuscripts reveals that Konungsbók is the more concise of the two. The accounts in Staðarhólsbók are in many instances more elaborate and yet and this manuscript lacks whole sections that are included in Konungsbók (Dennis, Foote & Perkins 2006, 15). Staðarhólsbók also contains the law collection of Járnsiða, which was issued by the Norwegian king in 1271. Staðarhólsbók and Konungsbók were private rather than official law collections (Sandvik & Sigurðsson 2005, 225; Miller 1990, 43).

These collections contained many detailed laws, and they show clear attempts to present formally the articulated rules for all possible spheres of life down to the most trivial detail. In Konungsbók, the laws are divided into fifteen sections (Dennis, Foote & Perkins 2006, 15–16) and twelve of these are present in Staðarhólsbók. The topics of the sections in Konungsbók range from Christian laws to assembly procedures, the treatment of homicide, compensations for a killing, regulations concerning legal offices, regulations governing inheritance, the responsibilities of dependents and of marriage, property, and regulations for the investigation of suspected violations.
These laws seem to have been created on the basis of actual, experienced cases rather than deriving from general principles (Miller 1990, 223). However, the style of these law texts is unlike contemporary Icelandic narration. The law texts are highly detailed, technical and reflective, but they are often difficult to follow. Furthermore, Grágás is notably literary in comparison to Scandinavian laws. Ölafur Lárusson (1958, 132) believes that the stylistic change took place when the laws were recorded in writing. Peter Foote discusses the archaic stylistic features of law texts that are evident in the corresponding Scandinavian texts and the possibility that these were omitted in the codifying process. He suggests that, “a safer conclusion might be that the dense, business-like style of the laws as we have them is after all close to the style of the laws in their oral existence” (Foote 1977b, 207). In any case, the constitutional paragraphs that served as the basis for societal structure (such as the quarter division and court construction) probably offer an approximate image of the original tenth–eleventh century laws (Ingvarsson 1970, 18).

The fact that diverse legal texts were copied in Iceland throughout the thirteenth century indicates that there was an interest in both ancient and contemporary laws (Boulhosa 2005, 49). An interesting question pertains to why these laws were still written down so late, and at great expense, when the society at that time was on the verge of submitting to the Crown of Norway. As Dennis, Foote & Perkins (2006, 14) have suggested, Icelanders “may well have felt the need to fortify themselves with a record of what was law in their country, or of what might be regarded as law”. The availability of the old law in a manuscript meant that, when necessary, it was possible to appeal to it. William Ian Miller argues that the codification of laws also served a nostalgic function and was part of the same project as the writing of Family Sagas, that is, to “record and preserve monuments” of the time when Icelanders were an independent people (Miller 1990, 43).

Law texts testify to the appreciation of laws, to the interest in them and to the knowledge about them that existed in thirteenth century Iceland. Furthermore, the existence of the texts implies that the old laws were appreciated even at a time when their relevance was diminishing in practice. As Miller observes:

The detailedness and complexity of the preserved laws proves of a great respect of law texts and legal system in Iceland. Icelandic obsession with rule articulation and categorisation is unique given the weakly differentiated classes and social strata, its utter lack of nucleated settlement, and its
undifferentiated economy. (Miller 1990, 8, and see also 255–257.)

The contemporary Icelandic perception is that the law was adopted from Norway. However, the initiative to implement a law came from the Icelanders themselves, and it is evident that the thirteenth-century Icelanders considered their law to be something that their ancestors, the first settlers, collectively agreed upon. In other words, their law was not something that an external authority forced upon them. Landnámabók attributes the genesis of the central institutions of the society to the introduction of the law. This involved the division of the country into quarters, three assemblies and main temples (höfudhöf) in each, and chieftains or godar, who were to announce judgements at assemblies and to direct lawsuits as well as to maintain the temples (Landnámabók, p. 315). In other words, the establishment of societal organization and the implementation of the law took place simultaneously.

According to Icelandic sources, a man named Úlfljótr visited Norway early in the tenth century and after his journey, introduced Icelanders to the law from the west-coast province of Gulaþing (Íslendingabók, Ch. 2, 7; Landnámabók, p. 313). As a consequence, the law was introduced into a whole new context that had no central authority, such as a king. Hence, the spirit of the law had to change drastically to conform to the local circumstances (Sigurðsson J. V. 2007). Gulapingslög was applied in Norway until 1260, when King Hákon introduced a new law code. However, the relationship between Grágás and what has been preserved of Gulapingslög is vague in so many respects that the relevance of a connection between them can be questioned (Lárusson 1958, 120). Preben Meulengracht Sørensen has noted the following:

Neither the Úlfljótr’s law nor information on the concurrent Gulapingslög has been preserved, and hence, we cannot ascertain whether Ari was correct. We do not even know whether the laws represented by the preserved manuscripts of Gulapingslög reach as far in the past as he argues. Grágás and the later Gulapingslög do not have any obvious similarities with one another. (Meulengracht Sørensen 1977, 45.)

This means that even if Úlfljótr’s law was inspired by an older oral form of the Gulapingslög, the laws later developed independently across

---

30Hverken Úlfljóts lov eller den oprindelige Gulatingslov er bevaret, så vi kan ikke se, om Ari havde ret. Vi ved ikke engang om Gulatingsloven er så gammel, som han forudsætter. Grágás og den senere Guladingslov har ingen påfaldende lighed med hinanden.”
susequent centuries so that comparison of the preserved texts contributes relatively little to understanding each tradition of laws.

There was a major difference between the outlawry in *Grágás* and in *Gulapingslög*. This means either that the adaption of *Gulapingslög* to the Icelandic circumstances also transformed the sense of outlawry, or that the passages concerning outlawry in *Gulapingslög* had changed after they had been used as a model for *Grágás*. However, anyone in Iceland who offended someone was only responsible to the suffering party, whereas in Norway, the person who committed the offence was primarily responsible to the king. According to *Gulapingslög*, a person who committed a deed that was serious enough to justify this status, became the king’s outlaw and the king confiscated the outlaw’s property. Everyone was obliged to prevent the offending person from escaping to the woods, and any delay in doing so would subject that person to a fine. In addition, whoever caught an outlaw was to deliver him to an assembly, or to the custody of a bailiff of the king, and the outlaw was then to be judged before a sentence upon him could be declared and carried out. (Larson 1935, 133, 141.) According to *Gulapingslög*, outlawry was not a judgment *per se* but a fugitive state, and the purpose of outlawry was to prevent the subject from avoiding the court.

Our knowledge of Icelandic law during the Commonwealth Period comes from written sources. This means that we have rather good access to the conceptions of law in the Saga Age that provided a basis for the works of the saga writers. The extant texts were largely derived from the series of copied law manuscripts that all appear to ultimately derive from the first written laws. It is nevertheless impossible to follow the evolution of the law over the centuries on the basis of the extant texts.

Peter Foote (1977b) argues that although the Icelandic laws are more elaborate and complicated in expression and structure than the Scandinavian laws that were written down in the fourteenth century, the Icelandic laws are based on oral legal texts. This means that the Icelandic law was preserved in a memorized form. The office of lawspeaker (*lögsögumaðr*) was an authoritative institution responsible for the accurate preservation of the law. From the establishment of the office until the introduction of the law called *Jónsbók*, when the office of lawspeaker was dissolved, all of the lawspeakers of Iceland are known by name. This indicates that the office enjoyed great respect. In addition, the oral tradition was the main source for *Grágás*, but the influence of twelfth and thirteenth century European laws has also been recognized (Rafnsson 1977; Foote 1977; Foote 1984: 155–64). Nonetheless, the differences or ingenuity of the Icelandic law in relation to the European counterparts is evident (see Stein-Wilkeshuis 1986).
Icelanders were aware that their law had evolved over the centuries. To attest to this, *Íslendingabók* (Ch. 7) describes the question of the Icelanders’ conversion to Christianity, succumbing to the will of King Ólafur Tryggvason of Norway. This event is depicted as one in which the Icelanders overcame the threat of having their people divided into two groups with two sets of laws, one for Christians and one for non-Christians. *Íslendingabók* celebrates the decision for a mass conversion as one that avoided internal political conflict rather than focusing on the event as a religious issue:

Then it was put to law that all people shall be Christians and all those in the country be baptised who were not already, but the exposure of children was to stand as in the old law as was the eating of horsemeat. People could sacrifice [to heathen deities] in secrecy if they wanted but were to be sentenced to minor outlawry if revealed. Only a few winters later, such heathenism as well as all others were abandoned. (*Íslendingabók*, Ch. 7.)

A few years later, duelling was abolished and the fifth court was established (*Íslendingabók*, Ch. 8; *Njáls saga*, Ch. 97).

On the other hand, the core of the law texts was highly conservative. This might have been because the earliest preserved law text fragments appear not to have been updated at any stage (Quinn 2000, 34; Sigurðsson J. V. et al. 2008). Some proportions of the law texts were written down quite early. For example, the tithe laws were the first laws that were put into writing and this occurred around the year 1096 (Lárusson 1958, 122). In 1117, a decision was made at the Law Court that all laws should be written down – and much of that was accomplished over the following winter (*Íslendingabók*, Ch. 10), probably beginning with the law on homicide (Quinn 2000, 33). Other important parts (such as the Christian laws) were recorded in writing from 1122 to 1134. Nonetheless, the comprehensive recording of the oral law in writing was probably never carried out completely.

Laws were preserved in both oral and written form. At the end of the twelfth century (Foote 1977b, 201–202), a need arose for a citation law, and Miller asserts that this apparently happened, “when a rich repository of oral rules met parchment and pen without an official body sufficiently powerful to rein in the energy of many legal experts” (Miller 1990, 225;
Putting the laws into writing also caused a major political shift, as the families with oral legal authority (office of lögsögumaðr) lost their higher relative position to those with access to the medium of writing, i.e. those with connections to the Church (Quinn 2000, 33–35). Gísli Sigurðsson (2004) states that this shift of prestige is still visible in far later historical writings, including the Family Sagas in the thirteenth century. In contrast, Dennis, Foote & Perkins (2006, 11–12) point out that at this time, the law was most likely still learned in the old-fashion way, through oral transmission.

The medieval Icelandic law was adopted in Iceland from the Norwegian model, at least according to the historical conceptions of medieval Icelanders. The law traditions developed independently in different directions, and the Icelandic laws were very different from Scandinavian laws, as is evident from the law manuscripts from the thirteenth century. The manuscripts of Grágás that were copied in thirteenth century Iceland were already understood as being historical – they referred to a bygone era of which the Saga Age constituted a part. These manuscripts and their close counterparts were a source of the conceptions about historical law for the writers of the Family Sagas. Furthermore, these manuscripts provide a picture of what types of conceptions the saga writers harbored concerning the juridical basis of the outlawry in the Saga Age. I will continue this discussion in chapter 5.

---

32 Compare the citation law in Staðarhólslóbók to St Augustine’s preference list of Scriptures: (On Christian Doctrine): “In the matter of canonical scriptures he should follow the authority of the great majority of catholic churches… to prefer those accepted by all catholic churches to those which some do not accept. As for those not universally accepted, he should prefer those accepted by a majority of churches, and by the more authoritative ones, to those supported by fewer churches, or by churches of lesser authority […]” (Augustine 1997, 35–36 (Book Two, 12.)
4 Theoretical and Methodological Approach

This study is an attempt to understand outlawry as it appears in the Family Sagas. To achieve this understanding, it is not sufficient to merely analyze the individual narrative passages that are connected to outlawry. This is because the meanings of a text are never fully articulated. Texts always have gaps of indeterminacy that require filling by the recipient (Iser 1971; 1984, 204–206). Umberto Eco calls texts “lazy machineries that ask someone to do part of their job […] At the level of discursive structure, the reader is invited to fill up various empty phrastic spaces” (1979, 214). This is especially true of the Family Sagas, which are notorious for their economy of expression. This study is an attempt to determine how to fill these spaces by relying upon the conventional, or traditional, dimension of the appearances of outlawry in the Family Sagas and the significance that is attested for outlawry through the referential relations of this dimension.

4.1 The Saga World

The set of conceptions about the past displayed in the Family Sagas was an entity that formed a “world” located in the past, during a period that differed temporally and qualitatively from the reality current for the both the saga writers and the saga audiences. Individual accounts of outlawry in the Family Sagas can be considered to be the tip of the iceberg, nine-tenths of which consisted of the collective conceptions about outlawry that remained submerged (see Scholes & Kellogg 1966, 91). Folklorist John Miles Foley argued that structural narrative elements, “command fields of reference much larger than a single line, passage, or even text in which they occur.” For Foley, a traditional text is “enriched by an unspoken context that dwarfs the textual artifact, in which the experience is filled out – and made traditional – by what the conventionality attracts to itself from that context.” (Foley 1991, 7–8.) The totality of the conceptions about the past regarding the aspects that were relevant to the production and interpretation of the saga literature, the “unspoken context” for the saga texts, will be referred to here as the Saga World. This concept refers to the world of the Family Sagas and not of other saga genres, although these worlds were interconnected in many ways. The term Saga World has been in frequent use in more or less the same meaning as applied here, applied in order to differentiate
the accounts in saga literature both from the thirteenth and fourteenth century Iceland of the saga writers and their audience and from Iceland in the ninth to the eleventh centuries. 33

Katharine Young34 uses the concept of Taleworld to designate the essential difference between the settings of a particular narrative (Storyrealm) and the world where these settings are situated:

The Taleworld is a reality inhabited by persons to whom events unfold according to its own ontological conventions. The Storyrealm consists of tellings, writings, performances, that is, of recounts of or alludings to events understood to transpire in another realm (Young 1987, 21).

The Taleworld is evoked in narration, and when it is a traditionally established and limited world, like the defined time and space of the Family Sagas, the audience is aware of its features. The narratives that are located in that world also have to conform to established features to the extent that they are plausible as accounts referring to this particular world. 35

The Saga World was a construction of collective conceptions about both specific knowledge and general conceptions of the Saga Age that were related to the present world and that were generated non-contemporaneously (see Giesen 2004, 28), simultaneously and predominately on the basis of the experienced present world. Specific knowledge concerned the individuals, families, relationships between families, historical events, political leaders, etc. in the Saga Age; General conceptions pertained to how life was back in the Saga Age and how the Saga World functioned politically, socially, economically, etc. The Saga World mostly consisted of common knowledge about certain persons, families and events in this definite period of time in the past and of conceptions about the proper treatment of these subject matters in terms of plausibility within the collective experience of the world. The Saga World guided the mode or approach of narration and served as

33 And actually, generally it is in rather common use although not defined, such as in Miller 1990, e.g. 1; Tulinius 2000; Allen 1971, 6; as a fictional world, for example, in Salus 1979, 141.
34 Katharina Young’s theoretical approach to the Taleworld has also been recently discussed in the doctoral dissertations of Kaarina Koski (2011, esp. 175–179) and Karina Lukin (2011, esp. 97–100), both conducted at the Department of Folklore Studies at the University of Helsinki.
35 Related concepts in literary studies are the following: text worlds, the contexts, scenarios or types of reality that readers construct in their interaction with the language of texts (Semino 1997); possible world is the ontological analogue of a stock of hypothetical beliefs (e.g. Stalnaker 1968); a fictional world appears as a set of compossible fictional particulars that is characterized by its own global, macrostructural organization (Doležel 1988, 484).
grounds for material selection and for its treatment in a narrative. As such, the notion of Saga World is close to the concept of the ethnocultural substratum of this tradition. Lauri Harvilahti describes *ethnocultural substrata* as “dynamic mental models for forming a network of fundamental elements of the ethnocultural characteristics of particular traditions” (Harvilahti 2003, 91). The Saga World was a source for saga narratives and these same narratives affected people’s conceptions about the Saga Age, hence contributing to the Saga World. The Saga World was a fictional world in the sense that it consisted of elements and structures that only partially belonged to the world experienced by saga writers and audiences, but just as it is impossible to differentiate between “fiction” and “fact” in saga literature, it is not correct to speak about a fictional world in this connection. Even though it was set in a relatively remote past that allowed obvious “fictional” elements, the Saga World was in many ways tightly connected to the Icelanders’ perceptions of their own ancestors’ past and to their own local environments.

In his essay entitled “Problems of Speech Genres” (1986), Mikhail Bakhtin proposed that the general categorization of a text’s frames of reference is bipartite. For Bakhtin, a text has meanings in the *textual and contextual spheres*. Thus, according to William Hanks (1989), this dichotomy in the meanings of a textual expression is one that exists between the *literal* (schematic) meanings or the *contextually derived* meanings. However, when the available evidence of the contextual sphere consists almost exclusively of expressions within the textual sphere, as is the case in medieval Iceland, this division is less relevant and the Saga World can be said to approach the textual sphere. However, the meaning of a text seems to be dependent on a contextual referential sphere, at least in reception. In his article on textuality, Bakhtin suggests that the boundaries of a text are, “best conceived as extremely permeable, incomplete, and only momentarily established” (Bakhtin 1986, 105), meaning that understanding a text requires knowledge beyond its boundaries and that, consequently, the extratextual world necessarily penetrates the text. The reception theorist Hans Robert Jauss has contended that, “the new literary work is received and judged against the background of other works of art as well as against the background of the everyday experience of life” (1982, 41). In other words, a saga text is neither separate nor independent from its extratextual reality.

Even fiction requires a certain amount of reality in order to be in some way conceivable. The reception theorist Wolfgang Iser (1993, 18) discusses the relations between reality and fiction in terms of the concepts of *fiction, factual* and *imaginary*. For Iser, the imaginary is the
result of comprehending the fictive in the factual context of a reader. Thus, the imaginary is not stated in the text, but is a product of reception. It is an interpretation of the text that is grounded in the receiver’s reality.

The Saga World, as a general set of overall conceptions about the Saga Age, was a conventional and collective dimension of an imaginary world that was situated in the past. As a consequence, saga narration needed a referential frame in the current reality to the degree that it could be recognized as a former period in the chronological continuum. Iser claims that any meaning in a fictive text is, “a pragmatization of the imaginary” because the receiver needs, “to cope with the experience of the imaginary” (Iser 1993, 20). The Saga World, as an interpretational framework, was therefore a familiar element to the saga audience as a set of collective knowledge (in narrative or other forms) related to the Saga Age and how this knowledge should be interpreted. In these terms, the Saga World was a pragmatization of saga narratives, consisting of the bulk of received narratives and of their organization in a way that corresponded with experiences and conceptions about “universal” facts of life based on experience in the daily lives of narrators and audiences.

By materializing the limits of the Saga World and the possibilities inherent in them, each saga narrative contributes to the formation of the Saga World as well as to the social structures that prevail in it. Each saga account also metonymically represents the entire Saga World (at the moment of reception) but does not conclude it. This entire Saga World can only be approached through the study of a large corpus of expressions that refer to it. The meanings in the saga literature were therefore created from the interplay between the gaps of indeterminacy in the saga texts and the Saga World. For the saga writers and other people who provided narratives about the Saga Age, the Saga World was a world of narrative potential that constantly evolved. Because the saga narratives include elements that had been adopted from both literary and popular culture, and because these elements had no direct connections to the Saga Age, the nature and limits of the Saga World were constantly being negotiated. For example, it is not possible to claim what exactly the saga audiences expected in terms of plausibility, but it is possible to state that those recognizably literary / popular elements that were sufficiently distant from their everyday experiences were also far from being plausible except perhaps within the Saga World. Furthermore, at a certain state, this distance could drift beyond the level of plausibility that was pertained to the Saga World to the point that the Saga World could no longer be used as a framework of interpretation.

The Saga World was identifiable through, for example, the following features: a) recognizable, visible settings that still formed the concrete
environment of the Icelanders, b) characters who were the Icelanders’ own ancestors, as well as c) the material and social surroundings that were considered to correspond primarily to the current situation. However, this world was also partly alien, odd and fascinating, a world in which people spoke in proverbs and verse and in which concepts such as honor and fate occupied a central causal role. What makes the Family Sagas especially interesting is their position between epic and secular narrative (as categorized by Scholes & Kellogg 1966, 28), which on the one hand contributes to the stories being intriguing, adventurous and mythical, and on the other hand, rendered these stories identifiable to their medieval Icelandic audience.

All the material in the Family Sagas does not seem to fully conform to the general level of plausibility that can be recognized in the saga literature, and the plausibility of a narrative for a receiver is in any case difficult to assert (see Finnegan 1992, 147–149). Concerning saga literature, Torfi Tulinius has observed that it is impossible for us to know to what extent the saga writers considered the narrative to be truthful, or to what extent truth was a relevant matter at all (Tulinius 2002, 217). However, the generic notion of a “lying saga” (lygisaga) expressed in Þorgils saga ok Haflíða implies that there were also sagas that were not lying from which these could be distinguished. In other words, this implies that there were sagas thought to deliver truths. This does not necessary mean that all other saga literature represented truth, but it is reasonable to suppose that the Family Sagas belonged to those sagas that were not intentionally “lying.”

An attempt at achieving uniformity in content with other historically oriented texts is evident among most of the Family Sagas. This implies an attempt to place each saga within the network of saga texts. These texts comprise an immanent network of events set in the Saga World, which was a construction that was only partially visible and which was constantly evolving in relation to both written sagas and oral narratives that dealt with the same subject matter (see also Kellogg 1994, 500). This network of events formed the historical proportion of the specific elements of the Saga World. However, occasional references to a recognizable reality, or to consensual history, do not necessarily mean that the saga narratives in question – at least all of them – would have been perceived as being unanimously factual. Attesting to this are the numerous examples of the differing accounts about the same events in the Family Sagas (Sigurðsson G. 2004, 20–245).

---

36 Given that it is unknown whether their authors regarded the events they were describing as real or not, it cannot be determined whether they were intended to convey any message beyond the level of sheer description of events” (Tulinius 2002, 217).
Plausibility or historicity in the Middle Ages did not fully correspond to our perceptions of it today. For medieval Icelanders, the line between history and myth was not sharply defined (Gurevich 1992, 108–109). As Patricia Boulhosa asserts, “A narrative which is considered less historical according to our idea of history was not necessarily considered a piece of fiction by a medieval Icelander” (Boulhosa 2005, 37; see also 29–36). Distance in time and space between the narrative topics and the saga audience allowed for liberties in plausibility. Likewise, Katherine Young notes that, as the distance from the audience grew, the Taleworld became excessively extraordinary (Young 1987, 238–241).

Mihail Steblin-Kamenskij (1973, 124–127) claimed that the generic divisions between the groups of sagas, guided by the temporal distance between the subject matter and the saga audience (cf. Nordal 1952, 181), also marked the historical reliability that was expected of a saga text by the current audience. This meant that the farther away the events described were – either geographically or temporally – the more supernatural and less plausible material was allowed in the saga narrative. Carol Clover argues that this likewise correlates with topics where social norms are subverted and with topics at crucial historical junctions (Clunies Ross 2002, 450). What is especially important concerning the outlaw characters in the Family Sagas is that, because their social status and surroundings belong to more distant spheres of reality than those of their decent contemporaries, the result is that more liberty concerning plausibility is allowed. The distance also increases as the character turns into a more stereotyped (= motif-attracting) representative of a group, especially if he belongs to the social margins and consequently can remain only a caricature of himself from the perspective of the generation that narrated about him. Implications of this kind of growth will be discussed below on numerous occasions.

If the narrative setting remains in the Saga World, the shift concerning plausibility can be discussed in terms of a shifting narrative discourse that may get its dominating frame of reference in another Taleworld. This shift in discourse takes place generally in deviations from the narrative sequence, or when a new narrative sequence begins. Such shifts in discourse are generally recognized in digressions, deviations from the “main” plot line, or in the expanded side plots. A shift of narrative discourse is often also marked by a formulaic

37 Mikhail Steblin-Kamenskij (1973) considered this division valid and to reflect differing conceptions about the past. He considered the contemporary sagas to represent a factual approach (what happened), sagas of ancient times to represent a fantastic approach (what could not have happened), and the Family Sagas to represent an approach in between these two, which was a syncretic approach. See also Young 1987, 56.
expression that is used for a shift of scene (“and now the saga turns to follow…”) or by the introduction of a new character, place, poem, or object (such as a sword). In structural terms, the shift in narrative discourse generally, but not always, follows a shift in scene (see chapter 8.1.1). Occasionally, a scene will gradually transition from one discourse to another. In those Family Sagas that have the chronicle mode dominating the narrative structure, there is less need for stylistic uniformity, and a shift in discourse seems to have been more liberally augmented.

The cyclic composition of Grettis saga is a case in point. In Grettis saga, each interpolated passage about the adventures of Grettir Ásmundarson adds to his overall characterization as a character of mythic quality, signifies the passage of time, and keeps him moving around the island. Each shift in discourse introduces a new frame of reference, which means that it invites a new type of interpretation and new types of expectations for the passage. For instance, the appearance of a saintly king in any saga narrative creates schematic expectations for the following events (see chapter 12.4.2), as do remarks such as the words of Þórhallr by which he warns Grettir from confronting the haunting Glámr: “He is unlike any human being.”

How the outlaw behaves in those events would then be evaluated in relation to the evoked set of expectations.

The Taleworld to which a narrative refers is not always fully clear. For instance, Grettis saga is a good example of how the limits of the Saga World, regarding its commitment to “plausibility,” were flexible and negotiable. Expressed in a narrative, the negotiation of the Saga World takes place in relation to the saga narratives in different modes (feud, biography or chronicle) and to narratives that referred to different Taleworlds. In addition to including narrative sequences that seem to refer to the Taleworld of folktales, Grettis saga applies the narrative conventions of the Family Sagas, of the Legendary Sagas, and of romances. In its entirety, Grettis saga would be best described as a type of tour de force of style potpourri, in which the narrative mode shifts with the topic that is generically charged, or is loaded with genre-specific associations. The saga is temporally located in the late Saga Age, and for the most part, the recounted events take place in Iceland. To a great extent, this saga deals with Grettir’s and his family’s confrontations with other Icelandic farmers. However, the last part of the saga, the semi-independent sequence referred to as Spesar þáttir, does not address these issues. The poetry in Grettis saga is skaldic, the character

38 “því at hann er ólíkr nokkurri mannlegri mynd.”
description is deep, and the saga shows clear attempts at naturalistic (realistic) narration. Nevertheless, as Stephen Mitchell (1991, 15–16) points out, the saga bears the marks of a Legendary Saga in its attitude towards the fantastic at the expense of the realistic. Fantastic elements are used to create a mysterious atmosphere, whereas these elements are generally used in the Family Sagas to produce a specific dramatic effect. In addition, the “folk-tale like” structure of Grettis saga as well as its vast use of poetry and wide geographic movement would all connect the saga to the Legendary Sagas whose Taleworld accepted more fantastic accounts.

The beginnings of saga texts adopt certain formulaic conventional expressions that establish the narrative in time and place, and set the tone or the key for the following text. This cues how the following passages are to be interpreted, even though the Family Sagas effectively utilize the genre-specific frames of interpretation of their constituent elements or modes. This means that even though the indicated situation-bound horizon of expectation is potentially shifting continuously from one scene to the next, every shift is subordinate to and obtains meaning from the overall mode of interpretation. In addition, the current subject matter guides how its treatment is to be interpreted and evaluated. In other words, action that occurs in a recognizably heroic mode is interpreted accordingly, but only within the limits of the mode of the context, the saga entity. The mode of the saga is indicated in the introduction of the protagonist and in the articulation of the current chronotope.

As the Saga World was not a stable, defined entity, but was instead set of conceptions about the past that was continuously discussed, the forms in which it was discussed were also in continuous flux. Hence, different subject matter was discussed in different modes. At the same time, the particular mode also always needed to adapt to the Saga World, and in its reception, the narrative was interpreted and evaluated in relation to the Saga World. This instability of the Saga World led to a semantic fluctuation in the conventional narrative elements, including the traditional outlaw narratives.

39 Charles Briggs and Richard Bauman describe the semantic potential embedded in a text of a secondary genre as follows: “Beyond opening up a range of possible interpretive relationships between generic precedents and the discourse being produced and received, mixing genres foregrounds the possibility of using intertextual gaps as points of departure for working the power of generic intertextuality backwards, as it were, in exploring and reshaping the formal, interpretive, and ideological power of the constituent genres and their relationship.” (Briggs & Bauman 1992, 154; see also Bauman 1986a, 78–111; 1986b)

40 Genres construct and respond to situation; they are actions, argues Devitt (1993, 578).
4.1.1 The Saga World and the Real World

Sagas were produced and consumed (written and received) in a definite cultural sphere that provided its representatives with a cultural framework in which to create meanings. Even though all these representatives cannot be assumed to have shared the same cultural values, they all shared certain cultural categories that organized their values. The basis for the Saga World therefore lay predominantly in the Icelanders’ personal experiences during the saga-writing period in Iceland. They realized familiarity, the continuum, between their time and the Saga Age. The literary theorist Wolfgang Iser (1993, 3) has argued that “Whenever realities are transposed into the text, they turn into signs for something else.” In other words, transposition makes those realities point to a “reality” beyond themselves. In literary discourse, according to Iser, this “reality” is the fictional world that is created in a text. In terms of the Family Sagas, the aspects of the narratives that the members of an audience found familiar from their own experience made the Saga World more concrete for them, and the narratives set in the Saga World reciprocally provided their everyday environment with new meanings.

In traditional literature, the new reality produced through the text is given through traditional models. John Miles Foley described the evolving result as a transposed image of reality: “traditional encoding of perceived reality is […] a transposition rather than a direct reflection of reality,” in which “‘reality’ is transposed into cognitive categories that endow each event and situation with traditional meaning” (Foley 1991, 52). This means that the tradition, from which the text springs, provides the keys to interpret the text. The implied audience\(^{41}\) of the Family Sagas consisted of persons with knowledge or with access to knowledge about political and legal maneuvers and their preconditions, such as the laws. The knowledge of these persons was not only supposed to concern the present, but they were also supposed to be aware of the differences between the present and the past, that is, between the saga-writing period and the Saga Age. The period of saga writing was the point of comparison as related to the aspects of similarity with and difference from the Saga World. Through the process of narration, these elements of similarity and difference were transposed into elements of the Saga World.

Sagas involved a process of contemplation; they were engaged in a dialogic interaction with people’s perceptions about the past that were also continuously affected by the changing surroundings. Óskar

\(^{41}\) Umberto Eco prefers the concept of model reader (Eco 1979, 7–11), whereas Wolfgang Iser prefers the implied reader (e.g. Iser 1984, 37–39).
Halldórsson wrote, “It seems to me that the author of Hrafnkels saga has treated old material with an eye to present events […] He was able to find the victorious chieftain-type in historical traditions concerning Hrafnkell” (Halldórsson 1989, 271). In their study of the jurisdictional descriptions in saga literature, Theodore Andersson and William Ian Miller suggested that,

it is safest to assume that the society of the sagas represents the society the writer was familiar with, that is, his own, adjusted to account for the stories and memories of his parents and grandparents, to which there might also be added genuine bits of preserved tradition from the time in which the narrative is set (Andersson & Miller 1989, 4).

While people could identify with the Saga World, they could also be alienated from it. In his discussion of the historicity of the Family Sagas, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson (1999, 34) states that “consciousness of the past was greater than was previously thought,” and that the thirteenth-century Icelanders indeed realized the differences between their present age and the Saga Age. Even though there was a continuum from the Saga Age to the period of saga writing in many branches of the society, the greatest societal changes took place at the conversion to Christianity and during the following political developments. These events separated the Saga Age from the period of saga writing.42

Both similarities and differences between the Saga World and the concurrent reality of saga writers and audiences are pointed out in the Family Sagas. The conceived similarities between the Saga World and the experienced surroundings represented continuity, whereas the differences represented interruption. The differences in particular functioned as markers of the Saga World, such as the colorful clothing, proverbial speech, the number and grandeur of weapons and the pagan

42Jón Viðar Sigurðsson argues for continuity in most areas of society, for example, in “kinship systems, in ways of resolving conflicts, ways of doing business, in what was considered acceptable and unacceptable conduct, in the level of generosity expected, and in the size of households” as grounds for studying sagas as testimonies of the life in the period of saga writing. Sigurðsson, like most other literary or historical anthropologists, assigns only minor relevance to the imaginary and narration-bound elements in sagas. Kinship systems and ways of resolving conflicts are defined in law texts, which were highly conservative by nature and hence seem very plausibly to have remained basically the same over the course of time. The size of the households was a question of economics, which correlated with the availability of resources, an evidently stable factor over the time as well. The different aspects of social interaction were connected to legal and economic issues. These were probably less uniform as the main subject matter of saga narration even synchronically, let alone diachronically, and could easily be detached from the realism of everyday life. Such features are therefore more likely to reflect conceptions about the Saga Age in the period of saga writing than to accurately reflect the Saga Age itself.
practices and beliefs that were recounted in narratives. Heathenism was often represented with disapproval, whereas nostalgic sentiments can also be recognized in approaches to the Taleworld as belonging to the past. Especially *Vatnsdæla saga* makes repeated nostalgic references to the past, manifested as authorial comments such as that it was the habit in olden times that “young men showed their worth” (Ch. 2)\textsuperscript{43} or “In that time, the sons of rich men had tasks (iðn) at their hands” (Ch. 22).\textsuperscript{44} These passages can almost be interpreted as critical comments on the state of things that the saga writer had observed. *Grettis saga* states that the fact that the men at the Hegraness assembly kept their word that they would let Grettir go in peace was proof of a higher moral stance (than that prevailing in the time the saga was written): “and one can observe from such an incident how faithful men were back then” (*Grettis saga*, Ch. 72).\textsuperscript{45}

The Saga World was a reflective surface between the past and present, and it constantly evolved as this relationship developed. The Saga World was not only a source of narratives: it was simultaneously being constructed according to the principles of the period of saga writing. These two ages engaged in a constant, reciprocal dialogue (Ólason 1998): the Saga World was expressed in the Family Sagas and these sagas contributed to the Saga World. Therefore, the hard surfaces of life such as the economic, ecological and political realities (Geertz 1973, 30) are an important aspect of the Saga World.\textsuperscript{46}

### 4.2 The Traditional Outlaw

As an element of the Saga World, the nature of outlawry was not only expressed but also produced in all its manifestations in the Family Sagas. The meaning of any concept is ultimately open-ended. Literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1990, 279–285) stated that every reference to an object invites knowledge of every previous reference to this object. In short,

\textsuperscript{43} “Þá girntust menn á nokkr framaverk […]”

\textsuperscript{44} “[...] þat var síðr ríkra manna barna í þann tíma at hafa nokkura iðn fyrir hendi.”

\textsuperscript{45} “[...] ok má þá af sílíku marka, hverir dyggðarmenn þá váru.” In addition, it should be noted that by the time *Grettis saga* was written, two generations had already lived in the new social order and that the attitudes towards the preceding social order were characterized by distant idealisation (see Ólason 1998, 186–190).

\textsuperscript{46} Clifford Geertz (1973, 30) suggests that the “hard surfaces of life”, such as economic and political realities, ought to be the primary target of ethnographic study, because any deeper levels are vulnerable to “intuitionism and alchemy”. Such a context-bound approach has been found necessary for the study of traditional and tradition-based texts as well (Foley 1995; Tarkka 2005).
Bakhtin argued that the meaning of this object is, synchronically, in the relationship of this reference to all others, and diachronically (from the receiver’s position), the same reference is a contribution to the knowledge of all preceding references to the object (see Bakhtin 1990, 276–277). Bakhtin calls the consequent heteroglot meaning (the object’s polysemy) the internal dialogism of a word. This means that the signified is the result of a multitude of relations between a sign and its referent (Bakhtin 1990, 279). Similarly, folklorist Albert B. Lord discussed the signification of the conventional expressions in Slavic oral epic tradition, pointing out that a theme of any breadth carries along an aura of signification which has been produced by all the contexts in which it has appeared in the past (Lord 1960, 148). Folklorist Anna-Leena Siikala observed that the korero narratives of the Cook Islands could only be interpreted in relation to other performances that applied the same discourse (Siikala & Siikala 2000, 221–222). There is a distance of both time and space separating the period of saga writing from the present day, but it is possible to understand the meanings that the saga literature transmits concerning outlawry by becoming acquainted with as wide a range of material as possible (see Tarkka 2005, 72–73), or with the heteroglot meanings attested to outlawry in the Family Sagas.

The term schema designates conventional knowledge about an object. According to schema theory, comprehension is an interactive process between the object and the receiver’s prior background knowledge concerning it. This theory has its origins in discourse analysis and cognitive studies, but it has been applied widely in literary studies. John Frow (2006, 83–84) describes the concept of schema as, “what allows us to infer the whole from the part, the kind of thing this is from the representation of a few of its scattered features.” Schemata are called cultural models by the linguist Teun Van Dijk (1991), and literary theorist Wolfgang Iser refers to them as the primary code, whereas the aesthetic object provides a secondary code (Iser 1984, 93). Jerome Bruner (1990) addresses the correspondences between psychological and narrative structures and calls the schematic expectations folk psychology, which he defines as follows:

a set of more or less connected, more or less normative descriptions about how human beings ‘tick’, what our own and other minds are alike, what one can expect situated action to be like, what are possible modes of life, how one commits oneself to them, and so on (Bruner 1990, 35).
Bruner considers this schematic system “as a system by which people organize their experience in, knowledge about, and transactions with the social world” (Bruner 1990, 35).

According to schema theory, in reception, the received information is interpreted in relation to its fit with the existing schemata within which it is given a place. In the cognitive sciences, this process is referred to as being bottom-up, because the interpretation is made from a detailed bottom-level to the more general top-level of the schemata. Nevertheless, a receiver begins making predictions about the forthcoming message as soon as schemata begin to be evoked. These predictions are made on the most general top level, and the received information is further interpreted according to the predictions. (Carrell & Eisterhold 1983, 556–559.) Walter Kintsch argues that the top-down and bottom-up processes are necessarily simultaneous, as the incoming information can only be understood on the basis of previous knowledge (Kintsch 1988; 2005).

F.C. Bartlett (1932), whose work has been the basis for the schema theory, pointed out the dynamic nature of all schematic structures (see also Frake 1977). Within cognitive literary theory, Ellen Spolsky (2002) likewise emphasizes the flexibility of cognitive processes and requires flexibility from the concepts that are applied in the study of reception of literature.

All appearances of outlaws in the Family Sagas both reflect on an aspect of the Saga World and contribute to it, but even the closest parallel appearances are not fully identical. Instead, they represent variation within the narrative applicability of outlawry in the Saga World. They are adaptations to the current requirements of the narrative environment but always include core elements of the schematic image. The words, stories and characters in a saga narrative had immediate referents, but the significance or meaning of those referents depended on their function in the flow of the narration that they appeared in.

As Jeremy Bruner has observed, “people do not deal with the world event by event or with text sentence by sentence. They frame events and sentences in larger structures.” (Bruner 1990, 64.) In another article, Bruner (1986) designates two types of cognition: paradigmatic cognition, which operates by recognizing objects as members of a category, and narrative cognition, which operates by combining objects in a way that results in a narrative (see also Polkinghorne 1995). It can be argued that this narrative cognition is a precondition for Umberto Eco’s observation that an audience makes forecasts concerning the future course of a narrative that it is receiving (Eco 1979, 214). These forecasts are based on the previous experience of narratives of apparent similarity and on the currently changing horizon of expectation as the narrative
The concept of a horizon of expectations was introduced by the reception theorist Hans Robert Jauss (1982). The horizon of expectations corresponds to the top-down process in the schema theory of cognitive sciences. The horizon of expectations refers to the set of conventional expectations that a reader has towards a literary work that provide a framework for the reader’s interpretation. Jauss introduced this concept as an aid for resisting the “prejudices of historical objectivism” (Jauss 1982, 20). He claims that in order to understand traditional aesthetics, it was necessary to turn to the reception of texts in their historical contexts. He suggests that the contemporary reception can be traced by posing “questions that the text gave an answer to, and thereby to discover how the contemporary reader could have viewed and understood the work” (Jauss 1982, 28). The appearance of an outlaw character in saga narration evoked an associative net of alternative frames of reference, each of which represented a respective horizon of expectations concerning the subsequent narrative. In other words, the actions in the narrative were interpretable within certain frames of reference that also provided models for how the narrative could proceed.

The evaluation of an individual outlaw character took place in terms of conventional expectations. These expectations differed in a complex saga narrative. The connection between the subject matter and the genre in saga literature was so strong that the introduction of the subject matter engaged a horizon of expectations for the audience. Because the Family Sagas were largely based on collective historical traditions, the saga audience had quite clear expectations of how the narrative would proceed.

On the basis of her survey of the long prose narratives in the modern world’s oral cultures, Carol Clover (1986) concluded that very little analogous evidence supports the view that long oral prose narratives that would be comparable in extent with the written sagas had existed in medieval Iceland. Following the suggestion by Robert Kellogg, Clover proposed that the traditional basis for the connections between the separate constituent elements of a saga text was found in immanent traditional knowledge. Clover referred to the sum of the traditional knowledge that was needed to construct an entire saga text as an immanent saga. This traditional knowledge included the scenes and

\footnote{Meir Sternberg (1978, 93–99) discusses the shifting horizon in terms of primacy and recency effects. The initial impression on the audience made by certain aspects of the narrative, such as the characters, the situations, etc., are largely modified by the author in descriptions. This is the primacy effect that is strengthened, modified or reversed by subsequent proceeding of the narration, which presents new situations and reveals more expositional detail. This is referred to as the recency effect. See Sklar 2008, 79.}
other action units that had a perceived connection as well as knowledge about the chronology or causal order linking these units. According to Clover, this knowledge was inherently preserved in a narrative form: it possessed the narrative structure in which it was represented (and the reverse is also true: structural models do not exist in an oral tradition without contents). According to Clover’s hypothesis, the saga writers compiled saga entities through adapting methods that were typically medieval: they added to the core material that was both literary and oral; they incorporated digressions; they interwove plot lines; and they forced the text to be at least relatively coherent by using predictions and parallelism (Clover 1986, 34–36). Gísli Sigurðsson revealed evidence of immanent biographical sagas in medieval Icelandic oral traditions. Sigurðsson demonstrated that the congruity of the constituent elements of certain saga characters’ biographies in different saga texts is often only explicable in terms of an underlying oral tradition. (Sigurðsson G. 2004, 184.)

The idea of an immanent saga approximates what Lauri Honko calls a mental text – a pre-existent module, a “prenarrative” that governed the actualized story-lines, the textual elements in them, the generic rules of reproduction as well as their contextual frames. Honko states, “It is only through its fixed manifestations that we can try to construct components of a particular mental text” (Honko 1998, 94). Honko’s mental text differs from the concept of immanent saga in that mental text was used to describe a subjective understanding of a single individual without attempting to generalize this to a social phenomenon (Honko 1998: 99). The immanent saga, on an individual level of the saga writer and as discussed by Clover and Sigurðsson, is thus one such mental text. However, immanent sagas are hypothetical collective mental texts. They are approximate models or expectations, of how things have gone. As Honko notes, “The listeners, too, commanded some kind of mental text, such as an outline of plot and the episodes that concerned them most” (Honko 1998, 95). In other words, the immanent sagas were not necessarily fully collective: there was variation for different reasons such as those that followed the various interest groups producing the saga.

As we do not have sufficient knowledge of the oral narrative structures that preserved the memory of historical incidents and individuals, immanent saga remains a notion of the potential of a saga that was not necessarily realized by others, but by the saga writer who implemented the narrative. This potential seems to have followed certain structural conventions concerning how to represent a feud or a biography, and there were probably certain key narratives that characterized a narration that dealt with the Saga Age. However, the
narrative structure seems to have been less obvious in the sagas that extend in complexity. In the chronicle sagas such as *Eyrbyggja saga* or *Vatnsdæla saga*, immanent matter occurred in smaller structural constituent units of the saga, such as in individual passages, sequences and sections, rather than in the overall entity. The connection between these constituent units was not necessarily realized in the oral tradition except as a network of immanently identified connections between the traditional narratives that depicted the different incidents, places and characters among other possible subjects. For example, a narrative about an incident brought together different characters, a place could be the setting for several incidents, and a biography consisted of a series of incidents that had settings in numerous places. These constituent elements of the Family Sagas had the potential for many different connections, which further possessed the potential to be constituents of many alternative sagas. They formed an immanent network of historical tradition, knots of which were interconnected by different types of links. The knots in this network were key elements of the historical tradition and what bound them together were the thematic, narrative and associative connections.

The potential that was realized in an actual written saga depended on the modal choice of the writer (feud, biography or chronicle), which was undoubtedly largely enhanced by the available oral narratives and the interest groups behind the writing process. On the other hand, the manuscript Möðruvallabók is a compilation of Family Sagas, organized in a geographical order in the same style as *Landnámabók*. Möðruvallabók is the culmination of an idea of the Family Sagas as interwoven narratives that tie places and people together, as narratives that belong on the same plane (see Carol Clover 1982a, 58–59).

### 4.3 Traditional Referentiality

The accounts of outlawry in the Family Sagas reflect the collective conceptions of outlawry within the repeating narrative features of the sagas and the range of variation in them. These conceptions are also reflected and altered by the appearances of these same features in the texts of other genres. This is because the Family Sagas comprise only a part of the expressions that manifest the cultural system of signifiers. This same system also provides the basis for other cultural expressions.

The meaning of a sign extends beyond its immediate referent, which can be described hierarchically by the concepts of denotation and connotation. According to the literary theory of Wolfgang Iser, the
denotative function of an expression makes the represented world, “concrete enough to be perceived as a world and, simultaneously, figures as an analogue exemplifying, through a concrete specimen, what is to be conceived” (Iser 1993, 15). Technically, outlawry then refers to the consequences of a legal sentence on an individual’s juridical and social status. This sentence and status, however, has many meanings.

Oral-derived texts (Foley 1991, 247) such as the Family Sagas (Sigurðsson G. 2004, 48) refer to a wider tradition beyond the actual realization of the text, and these references affect the meanings of that text. John Miles Foley discusses the entire tradition that a traditional text appears in as the basis for a possible interpretation of the text, and asserts that performance is the event within which this interpretation can be made (Foley 1995, 27–28). Richard Bauman (1982, 16) notes that the texts that belong to a field of traditional expression constitute a network. The traditional dimension of a text is evoked when the text is interpreted as an element of this network.

The multiple appearances of outlawry in the saga texts obtain some of their meanings in relation to the expressions of the same or similar phenomena in other texts that occur in the contemporary culture. In her study that focuses on the intertextuality in Karelian epic poetry, Lotte Tarkka examined kalevalaic poems as works of a tradition system. According to Tarkka, these poems have meaning as texts in relation to other texts within this system, through intertextual references (Tarkka 2005, 63). Tarkka demonstrates that in intertextual reading, the generic differences between the texts that are referentially related are not barriers, but rather guide the interpretation of the significations of the texts (ibid., 64–65). Recently, Slavica Ranković has discussed the relevance of traditional referentiality to the signification in saga literature, concluding: “Each of these separate works we encounter is in a lively dialogue with the rest of the works in the corpus, continuing to create an abundance of textual possibilities” (Ranković 2007, 111).

The accounts that carry associative connections with the outlawry in the Family Sagas, even if these appear in texts that represent other genres, then can be seen to reflect the same conceptions that were the basis for the accounts in the Family Sagas. As Tarkka (2005, 64) has observed, the referential relations between texts are not completely free and open-ended. Instead, they are motivated and subordinated to the social and historical conditions of the tradition community and they are also limited by the conventions of the tradition. Thus, the relation between the outlawry of the Family Sagas and of other text genres can be seen as interacting. In other words, the same conceptions were expressed in different genres but the difference in the textual contexts that they
appeared in affected both how the outlaws were presented in each genre and the audience’s horizons of expectations in their reception of the particular narrative in which an outlaw appeared. According to John Miles Foley, these types of traditional connotations occupy a central role in traditional expression (Foley 1991, 46–48).

The Family Sagas affected people’s perception of reality and the Saga World contributed to their general perceptions of the world and society. The connections between these sagas and the social reality that surrounded saga audiences changed the social contexts of these audiences. The sagas did this by altering audiences’ knowledge about history and social relationships through the historical analogies to present circumstances, events and actors that the narrative provided. Realizing the similarities and differences between the past and the present invited an evaluation of the extent to which the realized differences and similarities were preferable. Another point is that the interests for those in a favorable position within the society were conservative. Apparently, it was they who predominantly were also responsible for having the sagas recorded in writing. It was also in their interests to represent the past in a way that confirmed or justified current (political / societal) circumstances, to represent it as a natural state of things (on which, see Bourdieu 1977, 167–171), or as a teleologically approvable consequence of historical events. It is evident that this does apply to all saga literature, as there are many examples that seem to represent rather harsh criticism towards the prevailing conditions.48

Torfi Tulinius (2000, 533) contends that the Family Sagas are an intermediary genre between the eloquent, stylized ancient past and the opaque and diffuse present of the period of saga writing. The identities of the families who were capable of having sagas written were established largely in the narratives of these sagas, their own “myths.” These myths could be called paradigmatic narratives as accounts of events that reveal something essential about the world and the society that their tellers live in. Even when located in the past, paradigmatic narratives reflect the present, teleologically explaining the present circumstances through the mythical past. The power of the past upon the present as myth (in the Malinowskian sense) is vividly described by the sociologist of religion, Thomas O’Dea:

Mythic time is always present, and myth re-creates and represents what it portrays; it actualises what it tells. Standing outside of time, making present what it presents, myth tells the

---

48 Especially Bandamanna saga; also Hrafnkels saga (see Heinemann 1974), and perhaps Njáls saga. This issue is however complicated and is not discussed in further detail here.
event itself, not a mere description of it. It makes past and future immediately present (O’Dea 1966, 44).

In other words, the flexibility of the past, which was manifested as reflexions upon the Saga World in the Family Sagas, enabled the attempts to use narration to affect the present by providing deliberate contributions to this world.

In reception, the relevant frame of reference and the corresponding horizon of expectation are selected according to the hints provided in the text. The process that is used has been discussed in cognitive sciences (and cognitive literary studies) in terms of what was introduced by Walter Kintsch (1988, 2005) as the construction-integrated model of schema theory. According to this model, the information received in reception is interpreted simultaneously in a number of differing ways in order to enable the bottom-up processing of the received information. The accumulating information then gradually limits possible interpretations, and only those remain that continue to be relevant. The propositions inferred from this information are either confirmed or rejected by the proceeding text. In addition, alternative interpretations are gradually rejected. Kintsch calls the total number of potential interpretations an associative net. This associative net is the total number of possible meanings.

Applied to the reception of narratives concerning outlawry in the Family Sagas, the actions of the outlaws were best explained in certain terms that were selected or evoked by the narrative context and by the implications it provided to formulate a coherent interpretation. However, it is impossible to determine the one “correct” reading for any instance, even if the indicators for the readings appear to be clear. Different interpretations remained potential as long as the outlaw was discussed, and new interpretations were made if the text propositions gave reason to resort to them. In any case, it can be presumed that the interpretations were primarily traditionally based. The saga writers, in spite of their evident and inevitable authorial impact through the processes of selecting and organizing the narrative material, normally dispelled any individual from the narrative voice, and instead preferred expressions that reinforced a collective point of view. Whereas the thematic content of an entire saga could be (though not always would have been) conferred, the individual constituent units needed to bear inherent meaning in order to be understood.
4.4 Frames of Reference

The medieval Icelandic interpretations concerning outlawry as it appears in the Family Sagas are pursued in this study by analyzing the appearances of outlawry in the Family Sagas in relation to different frames of reference. Gregory Bateson introduced the “notion of frame as a defined interpretive context providing guidelines for discriminating between orders of message” (Bauman 1975, 292). The term frame has been preferred in an anthropological or sociological use as a term for interactive frames of interpretation, whereas the term schema is usually reserved for cognitive sciences (Tannen & Wallat 1987, 206–207; see also van Dijk 1980, 233–234; Siikala 1984, 21–22). The frames of reference are understood here to be in constant interaction with each other and therefore to affect each other. Therefore, the meaning-making within the frames of reference has to be understood as a process, not a mechanism (see Frake 1977). Applied to saga writing, the frames of reference can be understood in terms of different categories of a saga writer’s “presumptions about prior knowledge shared by his readers” (Tulinius 2002, 220).

On the basis of what has been previously discussed, it is possible to state that the Saga World was conceived of in relation to three primary, general frames of reference. These frames of reference are as follows:

- The literary frame of reference was primary for a saga narrative (see Bruner 1990, 43). The Family Sagas are complex narratives and as such constitute a secondary genre, as discussed above. Their frames of reference may therefore have differed in terms of the overall design and minor narrative structures of the saga texts. Besides oral traditions, with which a text sequence may have recognizable connections, the text was also evaluated by comparison with other representatives of the same medium, with other written texts. Franz Bäuml (1987, 33–34) has noted that, “in oral derived texts tradition determining reception is not the oral tradition,” but instead, the oral-derived texts constitute, or contribute to, a specific frame of reference of their own. Therefore, the corpus of saga literature can be considered as a valid frame of reference.

---

49Teun van Dijk uses the concept frame for an individual aspect of “our conventional knowledge of the world” (1977, 106) which is consistent with the usage of the concept in this study.

50Torfi Tulinius (2002, 220) stated that the individual saga author’s frame of reference was a “field of significations within which the author’s own construction of meaning throughout his text will be displayed through all sorts of reference and allusions, or simply through presumptions about prior knowledge shared by his readers.”
• The extratextual cultural system, through the notions of difference from and similarity to the Saga World, was a secondary frame of reference. However, precisely this frame of reference provided the categories that the cultural values and their reflections in the Saga World were based on.

• The personal experiences and interests of each distributed author of a saga text left traces in the texts. Personal experiences and interests also affected the reception of the texts, as the audience consisted of individuals who interpreted the texts on the basis of their personal backgrounds. These individuals, on their behalf, provided feedback to the auditors and without a doubt occasionally had an impact on the production of future redactions of the text as representatives of their implied audience.

The intertextual context of the contemporary narratives about the Saga World, which defined its economic, ecological and social structures, formed and affected the totality of those matters that were conceived as being factual, possible, plausible, implausible, impossible and fictitious as constituents of the Saga World. Another domain of meaning-making we can have knowledge of was the religious domain. Vésteinn Ólason (2005) introduces three interpretative approaches to the Family Sagas: 1) the epic or heroic mode of interpretation, which would have the narrative tradition as the frame of reference; 2) the Christian mode of interpretation, which would have the “master narrative of the Fall and Redemption of Man” as the frame of reference; and 3) the political mode of interpretation, which would discuss the texts’ status as history. Torfi Tulinius (2002, 220–225) lists the major frames of reference for the sagas as being law, scientific knowledge, history, mythology, heroic literature, religion and “real life.”

The centrality of breaking the social order in saga discourse may explain the central position of outlawry and the numerous outlaw characters in the saga literature. Outlawry was a unilateral legal outcome of a social conflict, and as the Family Sagas were predominantly occupied with the discrepancies between formal and informal social values, outlawry provided a genre-specific way to express the rejection,

---

51 Hans Robert Jauss (1982, 24) states that it is possible to objectify the horizon of expectations in less sharply delineated texts (such as sagas in their rather flexible prose form) through the narrative conventions of the genre, intertextual relations to familiar works of the literary-historical surroundings, and plausibility. Satu Apo, in her study of discourses of sexuality in Finnish folk culture (1995), contextualized her research material on three levels: 1) economic, ecological and social structures; 2) the context of mythology and ritual practices; 3) the intertextual context of folklore. In her study Viinan voima (2001), Apo categorizes “relational understanding” into a reflection of the studied narrative unit in relation to its 1) intertextual context, 2) immediate context of performance, and 3) reflective context that describes who it is exactly that is interpreting the text under analysis.
marginalization and banishment of an individual within this genre. The concept of rejection was not only dealt with from a juridical point of view, but instead, jurisdiction was the point of departure that provided the rejection of an individual with a genre-specific label. Therefore, outlawry in the Family Sagas expresses a multitude of conceptions connected to rejection. This rejection is expressed in saga texts through narration that reflects different discourses and narrative genres. These discourses and genres provided the frames of reference within which to interpret the narratives about outlawry in the Family Sagas.

The basis for outlawry, as presented in the Family Sagas, is as a juridical sentence and its consequent status. Therefore, the primary substance of outlawry springs from law texts. The level of conformity between the accounts in the saga texts and the law texts reveals the degree to which the law texts are a relevant frame of reference for understanding outlawry in the Family Sagas. The sections concerning outlawry in the law texts and the heteroglossia of outlawry in the Family Sagas, together with outlaws’ roles in the narrative structures of the Family Sagas (discussed in further detail in chapter 8), all constitute the denotative dimension of outlawry in the Saga World. In order to understand this more thoroughly, in Part III of this study, the signifying elements of outlawry will be observed in other literary genres that prevailed in Iceland contemporaneous to the Family Sagas. These cover the major approaches that were suggested by Ólason and Tulinius above: Christian texts, mythology, heroic literature and historical sagas. The methodology that has been applied in their reading will be described in the respective chapters.
Part II

Outlawry in the Law and Saga
5 Outlawry as a Legal Sanction

Outlawry was a legal sanction for distinct offences, and the law defined how to deal with an outlaw. The conceptions about outlawry as a part of the societal mechanism of the Saga World as defined in the law are revealed in the law texts (Grágás) and in the Family Sagas, because both groups of texts reflect conceptions about the circumstances in Saga Age Iceland. In this chapter, I will discuss the legal system of the Saga Age of Iceland, the juridical definition of outlawry, and the legal process that led to outlawry.

When a person offended another, he simultaneously also offended the law. The law in medieval Iceland was not merely a collection of norms and sanctions, but a manifestation or articulation of the society. The law can be considered to have actualized a general agreement of living together according to certain common principles. In the early phases of the Icelandic settlement, people gathered at assemblies to assess their political weight and to settle their conflicts with the help of friends and relatives, and the law was involved only later in the process (Sigurðsson J. V. et al. 2008, 50–51). The law supported social order by both defining social positions and the forms of correct interaction between them. The law was also one dimension of social interaction, not separate from it, but it was enacted only under particular circumstances. The legal sociologist Roger Cotterrell has argued the following:

Law, like other social phenomena, exists 1) only as shared ideas or understandings in the subjective experience of individuals; 2) in the sense that it is embodied as a set of expectations or understandings about behaviour. Legal systems are, therefore, not only structures recognizable objectively in positivistic terms as autonomous social phenomena – ‘social facts’ in Durkheim’s sense. They exist in the subjective experience of individual actors (Cotterrell 1984, 155).

Accordingly, law texts can be considered to be a type of standard concerning how outlawry was perceived. As narratives, the Family Sagas relied upon these standard assumptions but did not necessarily repeat them directly. In other words, as a factor in a narrative, outlawry also received supplementary meanings in connection with its social significance.

The laws defined the rights of every Icelander, but these rights had to be claimed by the injured party. The legal procedure ensured that the eventual outcome of a legal process, including its consequences, was a
matter of negotiation between the parties. Judged by the sagas and preserved law codices, the law played a major role in the lives of medieval Icelanders. The descriptions of legal practices in the remaining collections of law demonstrate complexity and formality that resemble ritual more than public affairs. The relationship of law and ritual as platforms for social gatherings was personified in the roles of a chieftain (godi), who was in charge of arranging annual district assemblies, a representative of his followers at the Alþing, the General Assembly, and who was also a religious leader responsible for the communal religious practices in the district he represented.\(^5\)

Due to the social normativity of the Saga World, an outlaw’s detachment from social bonds made him an unpredictable, potentially dangerous agent. The regulation in the social system of a decentralized government, such as that in the Saga Age of Iceland, was necessarily based on an internal control that was pursued through social relations. Family members shared the consequences of their members’ actions in relation to their society. For instance, when a killing occurred, virtually anyone in the killer’s family could expect revenge. This is why the family exerted a strong social pressure on the acts of any of its members (Miller 1991, 2083–2087). An outlaw was detached from this social regulation and hence, he was far freer to act in his own personal interest. In other words, an outlaw was more an individual than any full member in the society, such as a “free” farmer. This social detachment and the consequent freedom from social pressure are evident in the narratives about outlawry.

5.1 Legal Institutions

The Family Sagas and the law texts describe the functions of juridical institutions mostly in accordance with one another. In 960 AD, when the Icelandic Commonwealth was established, the administration of Iceland was distributed among chieftains to decide the interpretation of the law (Islendingabók, Ch. 5). The free men of Iceland gathered annually at thirteen district assemblies, each consisting of three godarðs (farm factions attributed to one chieftain) each. These assemblies were organized each spring, and for this reason, they were called “Spring Assemblies” (vorþing). The communal significance of the district assemblies was evident in the legal obligation that each farmer and

\(^5\)In the twelfth century, along with literacy, legal texts came into the possession of the Christian religious leaders: Skálholt’s bishop’s see possessed the official edition of the law.
landowner was either to attend himself or to appoint a representative (Jóhannesson 1974, 61). The country was further divided into four administrative quarters (South, West, North and East) in which Quarter assemblies could be held. However, the law did not regulate how frequently these assemblies were to be organized (Jóhannesson 1974, 52). The highest level of legal procedures took place at the General Assembly (Alþing), which consisted of four quarter courts to which matters from each quarter were presented. The quarter courts had 36 judges who were nominated by the chieftains of the 36 godorðs that had existed before the administrative division of the land into quarters (hence referred to as the “original” godorðs). Furthermore, any assembly member could serve as a judge (Grágás, 371–373). The chieftains of the original godorðs nominated judges, but all 39 shared the other duties of the chieftains (Dennis, Foote & Perkins 2006, 242).

The Law Court (lögþet) was the foundation of legislation and the ultimate organ to interpret the law. The Law Court congregated at the General Assembly. The members of the Law Court consisted of the 39 chieftains and nine additional attendants from each of the three quarters that only had three districts, together with two assistants for each member. The total number of members was therefore 144 (Jóhannesson 1974, 63). The Law Court nominated a person with extensive knowledge of the law to the respected office of law-speaker (lögsmagur). This office existed beginning from the establishment of the General Assembly up to year 1271. The law-speaker was consulted in the interpretation of the law as the president of the General Assembly (Jóhannesson 1974, 47–48). The law-speaker was also the primary source for legal letter and his duty was to dictate all of the law at the general assembly over the period of his term, three years, with the aid of the Law Court if necessary. The office of the law-speaker retained the law by predisposing it to criticism while concurrently providing knowledge about legal procedures to the general public. The recital of the law can also be seen as a ritual that manifested and re-established communal peace and social order.

The decentralized juridical power at the assemblies valued the importance of having knowledge of the law. This meant that in the highly formalized court sessions, it was essential for a party to be familiar with the correct procedures and with the law itself. The emphasis that the Family Sagas place on legal experts may accurately reflect the actual historical situation (Miller 1990, 226–227).
5.2 Compensating a Damage

The central principles in the law were the inviolability of one’s person and property. When these were violated, Icelanders had a number of options when seeking compensation. The legal scholar R.S. Radford (1989, 633–640) divided these options into *active ways*, which aimed at revenge (blood vengeance and duel), *passive ways* that aimed at compensation (arbitration and self-judgment), and *lawsuits*. Accordingly, William Ian Miller (1984, 96 n.4; 99–100) listed *arbitrated settlement*, *vengeance*, and *legal action* as ways to seek compensation for a violation. In the indigenous terms used in the Family Sagas, settlement was sought either through *agreement* (*að sátt, sætt*) or through *legal summons* (*saka*). If one was incapable of seeking compensation himself, for instance, due to a loss of life, this was undertaken by his relatives and their representatives.

Miller (1984) argues that settlement was sought primarily because the repertoire of punishment was limited at the court of law. The saga evidence suggests that a judgment that was made at the General Assembly of an assault was virtually synonymous with full outlawry (Heusler 1911, 158–163). Therefore, the stakes at a law court were higher for both the defendant and the plaintiff: the end result could only be either the outlawry of the defendant (the only available punishment), or the plaintiff’s shame that follows losing the case (Miller 1984, 111). This encouraged the parties to settle outside court (Radford 1988, 631 n. 75). Additionally, it was recognized that arbitration could follow the social morality better than the clumsy paragraphs of Icelandic law (Miller 1984, 111).

The risks of precipitate summoning become evident in a passage in *Bolla þáttr Bollasonar* (Ch. 84–87). According to this narrative, a petty farmer named Helgi summoned the respected chieftain, Bolli, for theft when Bolli allowed his men’s horses to graze on Helgi’s meadow without permission. Bolli immediately made a countercharge, which would have been considered to be stronger if the cases had been brought to the assembly. Helgi realized with terror the seriousness of his error, but Bolli rejected all attempts to persuade him to withdraw his charges. The charges were not handled in court because Bolli threw a spear through Helgi in the encounter that followed. The message could hardly be clearer.

---

53 Miller follows Heusler (1911, 40–41).
Interruption was possible at numerous stages in the court proceeding, including during the summoning, the trial, and at the confiscation court. Each stage offered an opportunity to settle the case in a public arena. The parties could even agree upon outlawry without involving the court, which could be a relevant solution when the defendant was a less dignified, dependent person, whose master could even make decisions and negotiate on his behalf. *Grágás* states that this type of settlement required the defendant’s acceptance of it. This settlement also required twelve witnesses and it was to be published at the General Assembly, apparently to inform the other members of the society of the new legal status of the outlaw. (*Grágás*, 422–424.)

Fines were neither pecuniary penalties, nor even penalties, but fines were to be considered rather as compensations (see Faulkes 2009, 124). Compensation was usually monetary. *Wergild* (Icel. *lögbaugur*) was the monetary value of a person’s life. This was paid as compensation to the closest relatives of the deceased by the party responsible for the death, that is, if a responsible party could be determined. Wergild was paid for killings and major wounds, but the compensation was sufficient only with the prior leave of the General Assembly (*Grágás*, 161). However, this restriction does not seem to be the rule in saga narratives, where settlement always appears as an option only if the parties are willing to agree to it. The standard consequence of minor offenses was a fine of three marks.

The wergild, a person’s value, depended on how close the closest of his surviving relatives were to him. Compensation was paid to his closest male relative, and his relationship to the deceased determined the amount of that compensation. The laws section *Baugatal* (“list of wergilds”) stipulates these amounts in detail for each class of relatedness. For instance, the compensation of a man to his father, son or brother (“first wergild”) was three marks of silver, whereas if the closest male relative was an uncle or a nephew (“third wergild”), the compensation was determined as being two marks of silver (*Grágás*, 447, 514). Therefore, the life of a person who had no male relatives or had only distant relatives was cheap. For acts that were not considered to be killing and therefore did not grant the right to prosecution, such as leaving someone helplessly on a skerry, mountain, cave, or hung (*Grágás*, 265), was likewise to be paid compensation (wergild), and the one at fault was responsible for that compensation. By comparison, when killing was involved and when the one responsible was known, payments were made to the victim’s family irrespective of the outcome of the lawsuit – as long as the victim had not forfeited his own immunity before the killing (as would easily happen, for instance, in battles).
In the Family Sagas, compensation (bót) seems to have been an alternative to the verdict of outlawry. For instance, in *Harðar saga* (Ch. 21), Torfí, who summoned Hörðr for a killing, stated that he would accept compensation – but as this was not offered, he had Hörðr outlawed instead. In the narrative, this was the way to point out the incidental, fate-involved manner Hörðr was sentenced, which made him half-innocent. For another example, *Grettis saga* (Ch. 27) describes a compensation that was accepted on Þormóðr’s behalf for the killings in a battle that both he and Þorgeirr Hávarsson participated in. However, whereas Þorgeirr had killed the foster son of Ásmundr *haerulangr* during the battle, Ásmundr refused compensation due to his emotional tie to the deceased. Ásmundr then used his legal right to have Þorgeirr outlawed (see also *Fóstbræðra saga*, Ch. 7). The offended party could also be compensated separately in exchange for avoiding outlawry. Indeed, the generous offer of *self-judgment* (sjálfdæmi), in which the offended was given free hands to determine the sufficient monetary amount for compensation, is regularly used in this connection in saga literature. Nevertheless, no standard fine was established for different wounds or insults; the amount depended on the prestige at stake. According to Andreas Heusler (1911, 170), the amount “was linked to the social standings of the victim, and his popularity [...] as well as to the wealth and power of his kin and affines.”

Sometimes a wronged person was entitled to personal compensation that was separate from the penalty. For example, in *Bjarnar saga Hítdælakappa* (Ch. 34), Þórór, who led the successful campaign to kill Björn and was to accept the consequences, paid a compensation three times to Björn’s mother – one for Björn’s life, one to avoid outlawry, and one on behalf of Kálfr. The total compensation was three hundred in silver\(^{54}\) for each man. All other men who participated in the attack on Björn were outlawed: “they would be made violable as outlaws, all of them who had participated in the ambush of Björn.”\(^{55}\) Furthermore, all twelve were allowed to purchase the permission to leave the country at one mark each. “Then Þorsteinn made them outlaws (sekja) and they were to travel abroad the same summer and pay for this right, one mark each. But if they did not travel as ordered, then full outlawry would fall

---

\(^{54}\) “*big hundred,*” 120 = the worth of 360 ells vaðmál (woven cloth) in silver, that is, approximately 200 grams of silver.

\(^{55}\) “[...] aðrir menn, er at víginu váru, skyldi undir ganga bæði sekðir ok fébætr [...]”
upon them (*skyldu þeir alsekir*) and they could be killed wherever they were met.”

An alternative way to solve personal disputes between the men in some Family Sagas is dueling (*hólmang*). It is important to note that dueling was not random fighting, but was instead highly regulated, as is indicated by the examples in *Kormáks saga* (Ch. 10). Dueling was also formal in the same institutional sense as a law court. R.S. Radford (1988, 633) notes the following:

Rather than attempting to direct individual choices by legislation, the Icelandic system let the parties choose their remedies but provided incentives to encourage a shift away from vengeance. Holmgang was, in Posner’s terms, an ‘intermediate state between [vengeance] and compensation’ that played a vital role in this system.

The main goal of dueling was to solve disputes, not to kill anyone. The regulations were in fact designed to limit the damage from inflicting wounds. The winner of the dispute was to be rewarded no more than a ransom of three marks of silver, and when a death occurred, the survivor was to pay compensation for the deceased. It is important to note that in the violent duels in the Family Sagas, those less regulated and usually leading to death (called *einvígi*), usually the stake being a farmer’s property, land, or woman, all take place exclusively in Norway. Radford (1988) observes that no such cases are reported in Iceland after 930 and that the Icelandic law differed from that of Norway in this respect. Indeed, dueling was abolished in Iceland in 1006, and it was solely a historical element in the thirteenth century Icelanders’ conceptions of the dispute processing in the Saga World.

5.3 Forms of Outlawry

At the moment a person committed a violation of the law that was sufficiently serious, his inviolability (immunity, sanctity: *helgi*), which was guaranteed by the law to every Icelander, was broken, and he became *óhelgi*, which was essentially a fugitive (*Grágás*, 210; see also Miller 1990, 252–253). As a result, if the violation were serious enough, he could be killed prior to a juridical confirmation. A serious violation

---

56 “Þá gerði Þorsteinn alla sekja, ok skyldi útan fara it sama sumar, ok gefa fē til færingar þeim, mork fyrir hvern þeira; en ef þeir kemisk eigi útan, sem mælt var, þá skyldi þeir alsekir ok dræpir, hvar sem þeir fyndisk.”

57 This was the standard and a larger amount could be agreed upon.
would be an assault, injury, insult or a sexual offense.\textsuperscript{58} If the responsible party could not be reached immediately, court handling was required. This violable state became full outlawry (skóggangr) after it was formally stated and announced in public at an assembly. Thus, in a sense, outlawry was a retrospective, legal recognition of violability. The preserved written laws stipulated that a person sentenced to full outlawry forfeited his property and all rights. These included his civil, family, and ecclesiastical rights. This meant that he was banished from the society, from his family, and from the church. In addition, he could be killed by anyone without them being subject to (at least legal) retribution. Full outlawry is defined in the law in a formal declaration as follows:

\begin{quote}
I declare that he is to be […] sentenced as an outlaw, not to be supported, or transported, or helped in any way. I declare all his property confiscated, half of it to me and half to all those in the Quarter who are entitled to it. I declare immediately forty-eight ounces to the chief party in this case. I publish this matter for judgement […] (\textit{Grágás}, 139.)\textsuperscript{59}
\end{quote}

A demand to condemn anyone to outlawry therefore had to be initiated and conducted by a person. Summoning someone also involved a risk, but it was less risky than blood revenge. The consequence of this judgement of outlawry was that it isolated the condemned from support (Miller 1990, 238).

The most common term used to designate a person’s outlawry in the Family Sagas is sekr, which is a derivative of sök, a charge. This term is used in the expressions sekr gerr (“made an outlaw”: for example, see \textit{Grettis saga}, Ch. 28) or in verða sekr (“to become an outlaw”: for example, in \textit{Gísla saga}, Ch. 21). For clarification, the referent may have been given additional specifications, such as by designating full outlawry by using expressions such as Sekr um allt landit (“outlawed throughout the entire land”: \textit{Grettis saga}, Ch. 46), alsekr (“fully outlawed”: \textit{Hrafnkels saga Freyssgoða}, Ch. 4), or fullri sekþ (“fuller outlawry”: \textit{Hænsna-Póris saga}, Ch. 15). The term sekr may also stand for a liability to a fine, or even for a sin (Maurer 1910, 155–157).\textsuperscript{60} In the

\textsuperscript{58}In the case of injury and killing, the one responsible became violable until the next General Assembly; a blow that left no visible mark could be avenged on the spot (\textit{Grágás}, 214–5). A wrongful sexual intercourse or an attempt at it was also possible to avenge on the spot (\textit{Grágás}, 233–234); the killing of a slave could likewise be avenged on the spot (\textit{Grágás}, 275–276).

\textsuperscript{59}“Eg tel hann eiga að verða fyrir sök þessa sekkjan skógarmann, óælan, óferjanda, óráðandi öll bjargráð. Tel eg sekt fê hans allt, hálfh mér en hálfh öllum fjórðungsmönnum þeim er sek.tarfé eigu að taka. Tel eg rétt úr fê hans, átta aura hins fimmta tigar til handa sakaraðilja…”

\textsuperscript{60}“Líkan segir þú hann þormóði, sakadólegi várum” (\textit{Fóstbræðra saga}, Ch. 24).
dictionary of Richard Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon, sekr is attributed the meanings “sentenced, convicted, outlawed, condemned” (Cleasby & Vigfússon 1957, 520–521). Andreas Heusler (1911, 125–126) listed the meanings of the word sekr in the Family Sagas as: 1) position of being chased; 2) peacelessness; 3) banishment; 4) conviction, crime; and 5) a sum of fine.

Konrad Maurer has noted that, “whereas the term sekt or lögsekt enclosures all kinds of outlawry, skóggangr stands for the harsh form of excommunication” (Maurer 1910, 154–155). Indeed, the primary Icelandic expression for full outlawry in the law texts is skóggangr (“forest-going”), for an outlaw skógarmaðr (“a man of the forest”). The “forest” of the expression hardly refers to the Icelandic forests, which never occupied a large proportion of land for as long as the island has been populated. Konrad Maurer suggested that instead, the term derived from the Scandinavian laws in which skog is mentioned in connection with outlawry. As further evidence, he noted that in Iceland, the forests scarcely ever provided sufficient shelter or space for someone to disappear from society. (Maurer 1910, 157–158.) Kirsten Hastrup agreed that the expression reached Iceland through Norway, but in contrast to Maurer, she pointed out that even though the Icelandic forests were rather limited in range and growth, one could probably hide in them because they were not in immediate proximity to habitation. Instead, Hastrup suggested that the skógar in the expression refer to uninhabited areas in general, “whether actually blessed with trees or not.” (Hastrup 1985, 139.) The term urðarmaðr (“man of the boulder field”) appears on one occasion in the sense of an outlaw in Egils saga (Ch. 84), but Andreas Heusler argues that this was a thirteenth-century attempt to make the forest-man terminology better fit the Icelandic surroundings (Heusler 1911, 127).

According to Andreas Heusler (1912, 76), the word útlegð had two alternative meanings: it either referred to a banishment that led the subject to the wilderness, or to a judgement of the subject to be fined a particular monetary fee. The term útlagi (“a person lying out”) in the Family Sagas stands for men who are outlaws of the king of Norway (e.g. Egils saga Ch. 34, 57, 58, 60; Eyrbyggja saga, Ch. 2, 3). In the law text Grágás, the term útlagi is likewise used only in those sections in which the Norwegian law is discussed. The word stands for outlawry in

---

61"Während der Ausdruck sekt oder lögsekt alle Arten der Friedlosigkeit zugleich umfasst, wird die streng ausgebildete Acht als skóggangr bezeichnet."

the Norwegian law texts, whereas in Icelandic laws, its derivatives, útlagr and útlegð came to stand for the “liable to fine” and “liability” respectively (Claesby & Vigfússon 1957, 666) as in Heiðarfíga saga (Ch. 24): “he shall be liable to the fine of three marks”63 (see Hastrup 1985, 140). The difference in terminology already suggests that there were also differences between the outlawry in Iceland and the outlawry in Norway for the Icelanders, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6.4. Another derivative of the expression is útilegumaðr (“out-lying man”), which designates a highwayman or a robber (Vatnsdæla saga, Ch. 41: útilegumenn og ránsmenn, “highwaymen and robbers”); see also Flóamanna saga (Ch. 25). In Króka-Refs saga (Ch. 3), the expression útilegumaðr is used to accuse another man of behavior that could expose him to outlawry, and in Laxdæla saga (Ch. 38), it is used in connection with Stigandi, who was outlawed: “He was made an outlaw, and a difficult one to deal with.”64 The word probably also referred to lying in ambush. In eighteenth and nineteenth century folklore, the word referred to any humans or other beings that were forced to stay in the wilderness (Faulkes 2009, 142).65

The term vargr (“wolf”), which is used in the Family Sagas to designate an outlaw in a derogatory sense, suggests a parallelism between the hated, pursued beast and an outlaw (Turville-Petre 1977, 769, 777–778; Nordal 1998, 168). It juxtaposes an outlaw and a decent man as respectively corresponding to a wolf and its domesticated and useful cousin, the dog. Therefore, the term implicitly provides justification for the merciless pursuit of the outlaw who thus is placed on a level with the dangerous and hated beast. The term vargr is used, for example, in Egils saga (Ch. 49) as a synonym for outlawry. As a poetic idiom in the skaldic poems, vargr or úlf, besides the detonation “wolf,” usually refers to a “corpse-eater” (a warrior is called a wolves’ feeder in kennings in numerous variations), or alternatively, it refers to an outlaw.66 (Egilsson & Jónsson F. 1931, 594.) Wolves appear in the Family Sagas most often in people’s dreams as symbols of an approaching enemy: they symbolize danger. Additionally, vargr and úlf are idioms for outlaws that are strongly attached to mythic images, and

63“skal sá út lagðr […] þrem mørkum.”
64“Hann gerðisk útilegumaðr ok illr viðreignar”
65In this meaning it has been applied for instance in the title of Bergbúa þáttur in Lbs 2328 4to: “Bergbúa þáttur með út laðói kviðunní” where it refers to the poet of Hallmundarkviða, a trollish figure of the wilderness.
66Outlawry appears as a metaphor for a solitary defensive situation in general for instance in a poem in Reykøla saga (Ch. 26), in which Glúmr recites (from a safe position) to Skútta who has unsuccessfully attacked him: “Halfs eyris met ek hverjan / hrísrunn fyr á sunnan. Vel hafa viðir skógar / vargr opt of borgit.” (I evaluate each bush on the south-side of the river worth half an aura. Wide forests often have paid out well a wolf.)
especially those in *Heimskringla* and *Völsunga saga* (which are set in continental Scandinavia) evoke an association between the hunted wolf and the hunted outlaw. The significance of these mythic images for outlawry in the Family Sagas will be discussed in chapter 13. The wolf, the symbol of an outlaw, was indeed a significant symbol in medieval Iceland, especially for an animal that was not in fact met in Iceland’s natural ecology.

When a violation occurred that could not be passed over by a mere compensation but was not considered sufficiently serious to entitle one to take another’s life in revenge, the suffered party was entitled to claim that the violator had to leave the country for a stipulated period of time. The standard time for this exile was three years. This exile was called *lesser outlawry* (*fjörbaugsgårðr*). Konrad Maurer notes that the distinction between full outlawry and lesser outlawry is not exhaustive in the law texts or in the sagas: “There is the milder banishment that is called *fjörbaugsgårðr*, and there is a set of intermediate stages between [it and full outlawry], for which special designations are lacking” (Maurer 1910, 154–155). In the Family Sagas, lesser outlawry appears as an agreement between the parties, and occurs especially when the defendant is willing to reduce his awaiting sentence to outlawry before the judgment and the plaintiff is ready to withdraw his claims (Heusler 1911, 167). Both full and lesser outlawry involve the condemned losing all his property. However, in the saga accounts, the loss of property is connected only to full outlawry.

As the outcome of a court session was always negotiable, there were also many different types of intermediate forms of outlawry between the full and lesser outlawry. In some parts of *Grágás*, the prohibitions to support an outlaw in different ways appear as different levels of outlawry, but this does not seem to have been a consistent practice. Clearly, *Grágás* states that there were three types of legal outlawry in Iceland. The first was full outlawry that included the prohibition to be transported out of the country, *óferjandi*. The second was lesser outlawry, and the third lesser outlawry with the condition that the condemned may not return to Iceland, which turned the sentence into a life-long exile. The Family Sagas also describe banishment from a certain district either permanently, or for a specified time, which is referred to as *district outlawry* (*héraðssekt*). District outlawry appears to have been intended to help maintain local peace by keeping rivals away from each other. However, the sentence was asymmetrical, which meant that the party that was successfully summoned and found guilty was sent

---

67 “… eine mildere Landesverweisung, als fjörbaugsgårðr bezeichnet, und eine Reihe von Zwischenstufen stehen zwischen beiden, für welche besondere Bezeichnungen fehlen.”
away instead of the other party. This form of outlawry was not stipulated in the law, perhaps because it was not agreed upon in court (Heusler 1911, 165). Andreas Heusler listed nineteen cases of district outlawry in Landnámaðbók and four or five in the Family Sagas (Heusler 1911, 163).\footnote{Laxdæla saga, Hallfredar saga, Vápnfirdinga saga (Ch. 12–14), Fóstbæðra saga, and Vatnsdæla saga.}

However, Heusler only listed cases that have an explicit sentence, and also the frequent cases in the saga narratives in which an outlaw appears in a district without an apparent immediate threat may often imply cases of district outlawry.

5.4 Offences that Exposed One to Outlawry

Being condemned to lesser outlawry was a potential consequence that was established fairly easily. For example, any damage that exceeded the value of five ounces\footnote{“Ef fimm aura skaði verður að eða meiri, þá varðar fjörbaugsgard.”} was liable to lesser outlawry (Grágás, 320; Miller 1990, 224). However, it was possible to settle offences leading to lesser outlawry without seeking a court decision, and parties were encouraged to reach settlement solutions. Hence, lesser outlawry seems to have functioned in the law predominantly as a preventive measure, as a threat against refusing settlement. Two judgements of lesser outlawry at the same court automatically led to full outlawry. This was relevant because, for instance, one could be summoned separately for each single blow (Miller 1990, 215).

Full outlawry most often ensued when a person’s physical immunity was violated. The detailed and partly trivial cases (such as knocking a person’s hat over his eyes) that are listed as violations in the law give the impression that violence was a constant threat and that it potentially led to serious consequences. The legal system attempted to prevent violence through exhaustive legislation and punishments that appear somewhat overbearing. However, the sections of the law are not consistent and items may have been added when actual cases revealed a need for it.

Violations of physical immunity, which were classified into nine groups (Grágás, 209–210) and carefully listed, included articles such as wrestling something out of another’s grasp. The offences that were classified separately were the different types of blows (Grágás, 213). More obvious grounds for a sentence included wounding, assault, and killing, as well as helping an assailant. An attempt and a plan to injure another person exposed one to lesser outlawry, whereas any definite
actions led to full outlawry (Grágás, 169). Persuading or forcing someone to commit a killing exposed that person to full outlawry even if his attempt never succeeded (Grágás, 265). Moreover, an attempt to injure someone exposed one to lesser outlawry, and planning any assault was to be punished by lesser outlawry. In short, any definite actions exposed one to full outlawry. (Grágás, 169)

Not announcing publicly a killing was deemed a murder (mórð) – the verdict could not be worse than for a killing, but a murderer was not allowed a defence at court (Grágás, 146–147). The gravity of the crime meant that someone was to be sentenced, and this was ensured by denying the defendant means to defend himself. The central killings in Gísla saga are committed in secrecy. It is still disputed who was guilty of the first killing, but Gísli Súrsson himself definitely committed the second. However, his deed was never articulated in the saga to be a murder, perhaps because he announced the killing in an ambiguous poem to his sister (Gísla saga, Ch. 17). Murder was among the particularly grave crimes, crimes that put a bounty worth three marks of legal tender. Other such grave offenses included a killing at the General Assembly, a killing by fire, or the killing of a master or members of a master’s family by a servant. For these crimes, the convicted murderer received the especially contemptuous designation of morðvargur. (Grágás, 245.) All other outlaws were worth eight ounces in silver.⁷⁰

A child under twelve years old was not punished for injuries he caused (Grágás, 235)⁷¹ and, actually, the age of twelve was the age of liability in other matters as well. Víga-Glúms saga (Ch. 22–23) tells how Víga-Glúmr took advantage of this when he managed to convince a boy of twelve to believe that he himself was the killer of Þórvaldr krókr during the chaos in a battle. Because the boy was minor, the prosecution that Þórvaldr’s brother planned came to nothing. In the Family Sagas, this same age of liability also concerns consequences of a deed that are outside the law. For example, killings that are committed at the age of twelve are, as a rule, not avenged (for some reason, killings committed at an earlier age are virtually non-existent in the Family Sagas). In fact, it

---

⁷⁰Legal tender: lögeyrir: vaðmólsseyrir, sex álnir vaðmóla (six ells of vaðmál); tviýlfarbaugur: tveggja tylfta baugur, 24 aurar, um 645 grómm af silfri (Grágás, 246). 1 mórk = 8 aurar. 1 eyrir silfurs = 27g = 8 aurar vaðmóla; 1 mórk silfurs = 214g = 8 aurar silfurs (Grágás 510–512.)

⁷¹This is the age in Konungsþók redaction; it is sixteen years in Staðarhólsbók. The accounts in the saga literature indicate that the age of liability as it is conceived to have prevailed in the Saga World was consistent with Konungsþók.
appears that the law and the norms concerning feuding were unanimous on this matter.  

Whereas a killing could be accepted as a means of dispute, no excuse was made for a sexual violation. An (indirect) expression of attitude in the saga narration towards sexual violation can be seen in, for instance, the case of a man named Þorleifr in Eyrbyggja saga (Ch. 36), who is sentenced to outlawry for violating a woman (um konumál). Þorleifr functions in the saga as a dispensable assassin who is killed in the process and who does not acquire further sympathies. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen has suggested that Gísli Súrsson (Gísla saga, Ch. 16) secretly stole to the bedside of his sister, Þórdís, and her husband, Þorgrimr, and touched the breast of his sister in secrecy in order to tempt them to engage in love play. According to Sørensen’s interpretation, this would justify Gísli’s killing of Þorgrimr – as he then did – because Gísli did not consider their marriage to be valid any longer: Þorgrimr had previously killed Gísli’s brother-in-law. This justification would not be sufficient before the law, but it seems to have been fully valid in Gísli’s eyes (Meulengracht Sørensen 1986). The attitude towards sexual violence is not always as strict in the saga literature and at least on one occasion, even a playful approach is accepted in a sexual scene whose protagonists do not seem equally enthusiastic (Grettis saga, Ch. 72). This erotic scene is exceptionally explicit in the saga literature (excluding the instances in the Legendary Sagas such as the numerous sexual scenes in Bósa saga) but Grettir is also an exceptional hero, and this scene contributes to establishing his character.

Theft appears in the Family Sagas as being morally condemnable. As William Ian Miller (1990, 250) notes, “No one was lower than the thief, the secret appropriator of another’s property.” Seizing another man’s property without permission led to outlawry but when this deed was concealed, the responsible person was additionally deemed a thief. Otherwise it was a “mere” robbery (rán), which was less condemnable (Grágás, 467). The theft of valuables also exposed one to outlawry (Grágás, 174), and the thief could be killed on the spot (Grágás, 268). In the law, theft is treated most thoroughly in a section that is devoted to house searches involving suspected theft (Grágás, 467–471). Theft was a sensible crime. Being summoned for theft was so humiliating that the summoning formula included a passage that reassures the plaintiff’s

---

72Egil Skalla-Grimsson in Egils saga; Þorgeirr Hávarsson in Fóstbræðra saga (Ch. 2); Brodd-Helgi in Vápnfirðinga saga (Ch. 2); according to Vatnsdeila saga, Þorkell krafla kills Þorkell silfri at the age of twelve, seemingly in compensation for despicable words but in reality he does this on the suggestion of Þorgrimr (Ch. 42).
good will (Andersson 1984, 497–498). The humiliating nature of the accusation is evident for instance in Bandamanna saga (Ch. 4):

“[…] some are willing not to call it unlikely that it has been your accomplishment. People connect the facts that you parted in anger and that the sheep disappeared not long after that.”

Óspakr says: “I could not have prepared for you speaking in such a way, and if we were not such friends, I would avenge it sorely.”

Vali says: “You do not need to hide this or become so furious. You will not get rid of it, and I have been looking over your matters, and I can see that you have much more in store than would be likely to have gotten decently.”

Óspakr says: “It cannot be proven, and I do not know what our enemies talk if friends talk in such way.”

The law stipulates that if a man steals something worth half an ounce or more, he may be condemned to outlawry (he had made himself guilty of skóggangsþyﬁ) (Grágás, 174, 328). The notorious thieves in Vatnsdæla saga, Þórólfr sleggja (Ch. 28) and Þórólfr heljarskinn (Ch. 30), are portrayed as a social menace and therefore as mere prey for the ambitious young chieftains who attempt to establish themselves in the district and to win the confidence of their followers. The character Hánefr in Reykdæla saga (Ch. 4–6) is no less unfavorably depicted, nor is his end less tragic. Furthermore, some occasions in the Family Sagas suggest that hanging was an appropriate punishment for theft (Grettis saga, Ch. 52; Fóstbræðra saga, Ch. 13; see also Andersson 1984, 501).

On some occasions, theft seems to have been an accepted means for an outlaw to survive. For instance, in Grettis saga (Ch. 77), Grettir Ásmundarson’s thefts of sheep are ignored while discussing his

73Andersson’s main finding is that in the sagas, “the thief is typically pictured as an outsider, a sorcerer, and a sexual deviant,” these characteristics belonging to the same “semantic range” (502).
74“[…] þat vilja sumir menn ekki kalla övæn, at nökkut muni af þinum völdum; minnask men á þat allt saman, er þit Oddr skilðuð stutt, ok þat, er hvartlit litlu síðar.” Óspakr segir: “Eigi varði mik, at þu myndir þetta mæla, ok ef eigi væri vit svá miklir vinir, þá mynda ek þessa máls sárliða hefna.” Váli segir: “Eigi þarfut þessa at dylja, Óspakr, því at meiri ván er, at eigi beri að þær, fyrir því at ek hefi sét yfir ráð þitt, ok kann ek þat at sjá, at miklu hefir þu meiri tilbrigði um atföng en líklit er.” “Eigi mun at því gefask,” segir Óspakr, “ok eigi veit ek, hvat fjáðskarparmenn várir munu tala, er slíkt tala vinir várir.” See also Eyrbyggja saga, p. 36; Laxdaela saga, p. 106–107; Bolla þattr Bollasonar, Laxdaela saga p. 256; Fóstbræðra saga, Ch. 13; see Andersson 1984, 497–501. For further references, ibid., p. 503 note 24.
75“Þrigga álna skaði”: Grágás, 350; “hálfs eyris”: Grágás, 467.
pardon. However, stealing was dubious even in such a state. For instance, the outlawed Hörðr Grimkelsson protests, albeit weakly, when his outlaw comrades decide to steal a bull for survival. It seems that this protest is based on moral grounds. (Harðar saga, Ch. 22.) As another example of the questionability of theft as a means of survival, the law-speaker Skapti Þóroddsson scolds Grettir (Grettis saga, Ch. 54) by saying, “I am told that you have been acting arrogantly and been seizing other men’s property. That does not suit such a hightborn man.”

Offensive speech acts also were grounds for outlawry. The offences that were judged as constituting minor outlawry were minor insults. These included brigsl (blame), added names, or the erecting of a níðstöng or trénið (insulting wood-carvings or statues). There were three words separately mentioned in the law that exposed the utterer to full outlawry if they were mentioned in connection with a person. These words are rægr (“homosexual, coward”), stroðinn (“being raped”, with the notion of Sodomitic practices, Cleasby and Vigfusson 1957, 523) and sordinn (same as the previous). Any person using these words could be killed by anyone on the spot. In a similar vein, if a poem that was composed about a man contained the words “löst” or “háðung” (shame), the composer was exposed to outlawry. Even reciting this type of poem in public had the same consequences. (Grágás, 273–274.) Another case of an offensive speech act was lying in court. False testimony was principally identical to the definition of insult and therefore, it is considered similar in gravity. The penalty for false testimony at a court session was to be condemned to outlawry (Grágás, 378). Furthermore, composing and reciting a romantic poem, referred to as a mannsöng, and directing it to a woman, also exposed one to outlawry (Grágás, 274). Such a poem could be considered to be offensive apparently for its suggestiveness of her eagerness to romance, that her value as a match had been lowered, and that her romantic life was no longer under the control of the head of the household, thus questioning his authority in general.

An account in Njáls saga (Ch. 103, 104) suggests that, potentially, a sufficiently grave insult could be considered to be worthy of outlawry on behalf of an absent offended party. According to this saga, Hjalti Skeggjason recited a mocking verse about the heathen god Freyja at the General Assembly as the discussion about a common conversion to Christianity reached its height, and the saga recounts that he was sentenced to outlawry (varð sekr) for blasphemy (goðgá) (see also

---

76“Pat er mér sagt, at þú farir heldr óspakliga ok gripir fyrir mǫnnun góz sitt, ok samir þér þat illa, svá stórættuðum manni.”
77For discussion about this passage and the notion of blasphemy in it, see North 2000.
Laxdæla saga, Ch. 41). This example leaves it ambiguous how general this may have been because the offended party was the goddess Freyja, thus a mythical figure, and also a woman; gender roles implied that a male representative should take up her case.

The seriousness of an offense was evaluated by distinguishing between honest and dishonest offenses of the law, and the extent of the damage done. Honesty entailed acting openly, whereas dishonesty meant acting in secrecy or without giving the victim a chance to defend himself (Stein-Wilkeshuis 1991, 100). A nominally harmless act could lead to serious consequences, such as full outlawry, if the seriousness of the act was found to be condemnatory enough. Moreover, the dishonesty of a crime led to a similar consequence as that of an honest act except that the condemned additionally received a shameful designation. The fact that this was considered necessary to be formulated in the laws, stresses the importance of one’s personal reputation for medieval Icelanders.

5.5 Legal Process

The legal process was a public, bilateral issue from its outset. After a violation, the injury was to be published by a formal announcement: the inflictor was to publish his act. Likewise, the victim was to publish the summons at the defendant’s home or, in some cases, elsewhere (Miller 1990, 259). Each legal case thus had a defendant and a prosecutor. Witnesses were also required in the stages of preparing and pleading cases: a panel of neighbors (búakviðr) was supposed to have the best knowledge of the happenings in their vicinity.

The assembly in which a case was handled was determined only partly by the law. The cases between members of the same assembly, when the prescribed penalties were fines, always had to go to court at the Spring Assembly and be judged there. Other cases could go to a Spring Assembly or to the General Assembly as was preferred. (Grágás, 413.) Bolla þáttir Bollasonar (Laxdæla saga, Ch. 82) states that it was considered to be unusual to have someone outlawed in a quarter in which he did not live. This indicates the importance of public support in a bilateral case. An action for manslaughter had to be raised at the spring assembly that was nearest to the scene of the killing. If the parties were from the same quarter but from different districts, they could take their cases to the Quarter Assembly or the General Assembly. In major cases, it was up to the one who did the summoning to determine which
assembly he preferred to take the case to, but minor cases were always to be brought to the district assemblies (Jóhannesson 1974, 50).  

In most cases of physical injury, the offender was forbidden to attend the assembly himself. The offender’s presence was apparently thought of as being provocative to the other party. (Miller 1990, 230; Heusler 1911, 109–11; 215–21.) This law has a narrative function in two of the Outlaw Sagas: according to Gísla saga and Harðar saga, precisely the absence of the accused from the assembly was what led to the outlawry of Gísli Súrsson and Hörðr Grímkelsson. Both bitterly complained that they were poorly represented in court. Their complaints are represented in the sagas in a fixed poetic form, which emphasizes the significance of this poor representation for their biographies. However, this particular rule is not often followed in the saga narrative, be it due to a difference between the law and the actual legal practice or due to narrative effect: the presence of the offender in court made the bilateral conflict more concrete.

The court began with a formal summons of the man who had been charged to answer to the prosecution before a court. A panel of neighbors was required to decide whether the case was worth prosecuting. The panel of neighbors was nominated by the plaintiff out of the five to nine farmers who lived closest to the place of the proposed offence. The defendant then nominated five of them to a jury. It was this jury’s interpretation and judgement about the succession of events that the judges took into account in court. In some cases, the plaintiff could request that there be a jury of twelve (göðakviðr) from the defendant’s district chieftain to state in their opinion whether the defendant was guilty (Jóhannesson 1974, 69). Juries were the usual way of presenting evidence until the introduction of the new law code, Járnsíða.

The prosecutor presented the case before the judges, as did the defendant. The judges could only give verdicts according to the evidence brought before them by formally correct means. Hence, it was extremely important to know the correct formalities in order to perform successfully at court. The role of the correct form is also underscored in the sagas. When the judges could not reach unanimity, the case was brought to the Fifth Court of the General Assembly.

In principle, the judges exerted no discretion in imposing the penalty; the judgment followed automatically as a consequence of a successful

---

78Cases involving consequences of a fine of only three ounces of silver always went to a district court (Jóhannesson 1974, 68).
79Harðar saga (Ch. 21): “Minn varð mágur hranna / mér, og svo er hann fleirum, / eini illr að reyna / elds, í málaferlum.” Hörðr was offered the possibility to compensation but because he was not represented in court, he was outlawed. Gísla saga (Ch. 21): “Myndit þa á þórsnesi / meðalok á minni sôk, / ef Vésteins væri hjarta / Bjartmars sonum í brjóst lagt.”
prosecution of the claim (Miller 1984, 109). Evidence that was condemnatory, formally accurate and correctly presented, led to a judgment. In cases of an offence that was serious enough to expose one to outlawry, the defendant would have been in a violable (óhelgi) state, practically an outlaw, already before the court judgment. However, the court sentence additionally forbade any support and help from him. Therefore, the judgment of outlawry can be considered a collective or public acknowledgment and announcement of the person’s outlawry. The sentence took effect after the assembly had closed: the assembly established under the Assembly Peace (pingheligi) and thus violence was prohibited while it was held. The outlaw thus also had some time to make an escape “to the woods” (Hastrup 1985, 139).

In some cases, the effect of outlawry extended even abroad. If the condemned outlaw managed to leave the country, he was not allowed to return; he could be killed abroad wherever he was met – but of course, only in terms of the Icelandic law. In addition, if an Icelander was killed abroad, the responsible person could be prosecuted in Iceland at the General Assembly and he could be declared an outlaw if he came to Iceland (Grágás, 250). Furthermore, a person who was sentenced to outlawry in Greenland was likewise an outlaw in Iceland (Grágás, 271). This indicates the proximity between the Icelandic and Greenlandic communities. The conception that outlawry was valid even abroad is manifested, for instance, in Grettis saga (Ch. 86), in which Þórsteinn drómundr’s right to slay his brother’s, Grettir’s, killer in Miklagarðr was acknowledged even though Þórsteinn was sentenced to death because there was no-one present who could testify that he actually was Grettir’s brother.

5.6 Putting Outlawry into Effect

During the Commonwealth Period, Iceland had no official institution that was authorized to execute the judgments of the court. As a result, it was the responsibility of the plaintiff to implement the court decisions. However, the chieftains were supposed to support their followers in their legal cases. If the condemned was able to procure a sufficiently powerful protector, the plaintiff could not necessarily execute the verdict. The law strictly forbade protecting an outlaw, but this prohibition did not have a direct impact if no one came forth to summon the protector. A person who was sufficiently powerful and influential could trust that he would

80“óæll er hann kemur út hingað”
not be summoned because the execution of a verdict would become
difficult or impossible, that is, as long as his opponents were relatively
weak. Nevertheless, endlessly harboring outlaws would become
impracticable for a chieftain, whose power ultimately depended on his
popularity among his followers. That popularity can be assumed to have
depended to some degree on following the collectively approved laws
and norms because every chieftain was also connected to social networks
that extended beyond his own district.

After a man was sentenced to either full or lesser outlawry, a
\textit{confiscation court (færánsdómr)} was held at his house. The confiscation
court confiscated the property of the condemned two weeks after the
assembly that had sentenced him was closed. It was required that the
confiscation court be kept beyond an arrow-shot’s distance of the
condemned’s home yard (\textit{garðr}). The wife of the condemned could keep
her personal property, but compensation to the suffered party was
deducted when necessary. If something was left after this, the chieftain
in charge of the court was given a cow or an ox. If there still was
something left, half of it was delivered to the plaintiff and half of it to the
people either of the quarter or of the district depending on which court
the condemned was sentenced at. (\textit{Grágás}, 406.) Andreas Heusler has
noted that in the Family Sagas, a confiscation court is only associated
with full outlawry, whereas in \textit{Grágás}, it is also required in cases of
lesser outlawry (Heusler 1911, 147). According to \textit{Hrafnkels saga},
outlawry was valid only after the confiscation court was completed. “A
man is not in full outlawry before confiscation court is held, and that is
to be conducted at his homestead. That is to be done fourteen days after
the end of the assembly” (\textit{Hrafnkels saga}, Ch. 5). 81

An outlaw also lost his ecclesiastical rights because he was
automatically banned by the Church. This naturally only concerned the
era after the Christian laws section was added to the law, but it
nevertheless affected the conceptions that Icelanders held about outlaws
at the time that the narratives about them were written in the sagas.
According to the Christian laws section, four types of people were not to
be buried in consecrated land: the unbaptised, those who died of self-
inflicted wounds (i.e. those who committed suicide), those banned by the
bishop, and outlaws (\textit{óæll og óferjandi: full outlaws}). Exceptions could,
however, be made if permission from the bishop of the quarter were
secured (\textit{Grágás}, 9–10). Medieval Icelanders did not see this penalty as
being trivial. Burial in consecrated land was considered to be extremely
important in the framework of Christian resurrection, which is also

81"Eigi er maðrinn asekr, meðan eigi er háðr færánsdómr, ok hlýtr þat at hans heimili at gera.
Þat skal vera fjórtán nóttum eptir vápnatak.”
evinced in the great amount of attention allotted to proper burial in the Christian laws section of Grágás (4–10). Indeed, people made great efforts to transport bodies and their remains to churchyards from distant places as well as to collect the bodily remains when a churchyard was moved to a new location. It is obvious that loosing ecclesiastical rights was not fully trivial even though earthly suffering was the most concrete negative result of outlawry.82 This will be discussed in further detail in chapter 12.3.

The responsibility to avenge a violation or injury, and hence to put a sentence of outlawry into effect, fell to a relative of the victim: 1) a son older than sixteen; 2) the father; 3) a brother through the father; 4) a brother through the mother; 5) an illegitimate son (Grágás, 236–237). As discussed earlier, men sentenced to outlawry as well as men charged publicly with an offence leading to outlawry were not allowed any assistance. However, the only people who were required to actually kill an outlaw were those who were directly responsible for condemning the outlaw. For example, if an outlaw had been delivered to the one who had summoned him and the outlaw was released instead of killed, the summoner was to be sentenced to outlawry himself (Grágás, 277). This means that there was a strong social pressure for the summoner to kill his outlaw. This pressure is manifested in the Family Sagas in the public scorn directed to the summoners’ unsuccessful attempts in Grettis saga, Harðar saga and Gísla saga to catch the outlaws. Nevertheless, there are also many exceptions to this rule in the Family Sagas (see Miller 1990, 234). For example, the sagas recount ceremonies of release, describing the persons who release outlaws as being praised for their deed and as even adding to their honor. Indeed, even though the summoners were pressured socially to catch their outlaws, the sagas contain countless examples of powerful chieftains protecting outlaws (Amory 1992, 200). These examples may reflect the actual practice. (For further discussion about the outlaws’ impact on a chieftain’s reputation, see chapter 9.3.1.)

As for lesser outlawry, the chieftain attending the confiscation court was to be given one mark, or a cow or an ox. This token for one’s life was called fjörbaugr or “life ring” (Maurer 1910, 158–159), and its implementation is described in Grágás as follows:

82 Attitudes towards outlaws as expelled from the Church are subtly highlighted in a narrative in Grettis saga (Ch. 67). This narrative describes the outlawed Grettir Ásmundarson carrying a sack containing bones to be buried in consecrated ground. Although it would seem most natural for Grettir to carry these remains into the church, the narrative includes the detail that he did not enter the building and instead contented himself with leaving the sack of bones by the church’s door. (For further discussion on the scene, see chapter 12.4.)

83 Silver ring – later, one mór (Hastrup 1985, 137).
A mark in legal tender is to be paid at the confiscation court to the chieftain who nominated the confiscation court. That is called a “life ring” and one ounce-unit of that money is called a “sustenance pledge” (Grágás, 408).

The rest of the outlaw’s property was also confiscated and the outlaw had three summers to be transported out of the country. Three attempts were required each summer. The captain or owner of a ship was also obliged to provide a condemned outlaw with transport unless he had already provided transported to three outlaws. In the last summer of a legal stay, a ship owner could not refuse because transporting an outlaw was a legal obligation. (Grágás, 409–411.) A man sentenced to lesser outlawry was to stay out of the country for three years. After these three years, the condemned regained all his rights as though he had never been sentenced. (Grágás, 53, 91.) If any of these terms were broken, the plaintiff could claim full outlawry.

Another rule was that while preparing to leave the country, the condemned man was to stay within the confines of three homesteads (heimili) not more than a day’s journey from each other (Hastrup 1985, 138). These homes were announced at the confiscation court, and in the confines of those homes, he had immunity within the range of a bowshot from the fence and within a bowshot from the roads between them. He was also not to travel on the roads more than once per month, and he was required to give way to others on the road. (Grágás, 408–410.) During that time, his movement in the country was extremely limited. The condemned also had immunity outside a bowshot from public places. A bowshot in general is the measure used in Grágás to be the distance between people who had the potential to engage in hostilities with one another and applied to other possible hostile encounters as well (for example, Grágás, 241).

5.7 Mitigation

Full outlawry could be reduced to life-long exile, but the judges could not decide this. Mitigation depended on the permission granted by the Law Council. The Family Sagas display certain types of sentences that could later be reversed by arbitration. William Ian Miller observes:

84 “Það skal gjaldast mörk lögaura að féraðsdómi goða þeim er féraðsdóminn nefndi. Það fé heitir fjörbaugur, en einn eyrir þess fjár heitir alaðsfestur.”
Even the outlawry of a chieftain himself need not disrupt his mode of operation for too long. Outlawry judgments like the initial lawsuit itself were negotiable; they could be released, the law notwithstanding, as part of a post-judgment arbitrated settlement of the dispute. (Miller 1990, 245.)

_Vallaljóts saga_ (Ch. 9) tells of how Björn, threatened with outlawry, paid a hundred in silver and walked free. Moreover, Flósi in _Njáls saga_ is only sentenced to three years in exile for burning a whole family in their house ( _Njáls saga_ , ch. 147; see also Heusler 1911, 142). There is also an example in the Family Sagas of outlawry being mitigated even after the sentence. In _Flóamanna saga_ (Ch. 19), it is said that a man named Kolr, in order to defend his sister’s honor, killed a man who had wooed her. Kolr was then sentenced to outlawry at the Spring Assembly. However, together with Þorgils, Kolr rode around the district and garnered the sympathy of people. Þorgils and Kolr then gathered the needed sum for compensation and, during the following summer, they compensated for the killing and Kolr was pardoned ( _sýkna Kols var fjærð_ ). It is worth noting that all this took place without the local chieftains and even against their will.

Those outlaws who had sentences imposed by private settlement could have the sentence mitigated. The sentence could be turned into departure from the country, or into local or temporary banishment. Additionally, in the winter of famine (ca. 975 AD), Eyjólfr Valgerðarson initiated the idea that an outlaw who killed other outlaws could redeem himself (Benediktsson 1958, xxxix–xl). Indeed, this initiative was included in the law. An outlaw could be reprieved if he killed other outlaws, but only if he had been sentenced for an offence that was sufficiently minor that it would have been possible to settle, and on the condition that his offence was not a theft. If he killed one outlaw, he was allowed to take passage abroad; if he killed two, his sentence was mitigated to lesser outlawry; and if he killed three outlaws, he achieved a complete acquittal. ( _Grágás_ , 278–279.) In other words, it was possible to earn a pardon from outlawry, but this was not available to those who had been outlawed for serious offences, such as theft or murder (Stein-Wilkeshuis 1984, 9).

---

85 Heusler 1912, 76. For instance, Hrafnkell got such mercy from Sámr in _Hrafnkels saga Freysgodá_.

100
Representatives of all the court districts of the country confirmed the law annually at the General Assembly and judgement was passed – in principle – solely on the basis of the law and according to evidence that was formally acceptable by the law. Sentences therefore had an appearance of upholding collective approval in a water-tight manner. However, as the Family Sagas testify, the actual outcome did not always attain full approval. William Pencak, a legal scholar, has drawn attention to the distinction between *natural law* and *positive law* in the moral evaluation of outlaws in the Family Sagas. Natural law stands for the universal principles of morality and justice, which are instinctively recognized by anyone, whereas when the law fails to correspond to conceptions of justice, it can be understood in terms of positive law, or the command of a sovereign. Pencak notes, “The natural and positive aspects of law necessarily have to overlap – natural law requires positive law for enforcement, positive law needs elements of natural law to have popular legitimacy.” (Pencak 1995, 5–7.) The division of the concept “law” into two quite contradictory senses, into natural and positive law, or into “justice and law,” was an essential condition for discussing, in a praising tone, those persons who were associated with actions that violated the letter of law, such as the outlaws.

The saga writers imagined that the law and legal practices in the Saga World largely corresponded to those of their own time whereas the actual outcomes of legal processes were becoming more biased during the thirteenth century. As certain powerful families gained wealth and power, their influence on the legal process correspondingly grew in the legal system which lacked an executive institution. This meant that it was not worthwhile for minor plaintiffs to summon anyone who had powerful backing, and feuds between great chieftains could spread uncontrollably (see e.g. Vésteinsson 2000). As a consequence, the old law became obsolete as Iceland came under the rule of the Norwegian crown in 1264.

The technicalities of the legal process and the loop-holes of the laws regularly serve as turns of plot in the Family Sagas. For instance, *Bandamanna saga* (Ch. 5) recounts that Óspakr nearly escaped condemnation in a straightforward case of killing without mitigating circumstances due to a minimal technical flaw in the prosecution. William Pencak notes, “This miscarriage of justice may point out the inadequacy of the whole Althing [General Assembly], or it may only signify that the system was liable to abuse” (Pencak 1995, 101).
Nevertheless, *Hænsa-bóris saga* is a story of how a mere farmer needs to gather necessary allies (even by questionable means) to be able to initiate a case against a powerful chieftain. Then again, William Pencak characterizes the conflict in *Grettis saga* as follows: “The distinction between true justice, which an outlaw’s heroism shames the Althing into finally accomplishing, and legal rules is driven home in the saga’s epilogue” (Pencak 1995, 50). This epilogue establishes the essence of Grettir Ásmundarson as an exemplary character. It is apparent in the Family Sagas, as William Ian Miller noted, that “Law mattered, even if certain laws did not” (Miller 1990, 231). The attitude towards the law was rather pragmatic as it was an agreement, and as such, it was also violable. “Violent disruption of a case […] was not unknown” (Miller 1990, 234). In the Family Sagas, even court cases are constantly being manipulated to the highest degree. The fact that the law failed in perfectly reflecting the current moral code made it possible for an individual who broke the law to be considered decent in a moral sense.

5.9 Conclusion: Outlawry as Lawful Revenge

Outlawry was an exceedingly harsh penalty. The effect of its severity, if not its purpose, was to promote arbitration as a preferable means of resolving conflict situations. Societal peace was a primary interest behind the law: only cases of importance were to be brought to court. The outcome of a case of offence that was brought to the court was outlawry (in practical terms, death). The condemning judgment was therefore a concrete end to a dispute. However, in court, the outcome was a decision beyond the control of the parties involved. Andreas Heusler characterized the collectivity of an outlaw sentence as follows: “There is a deeper ravine between forestgoing and banishment [lesser outlawry] than is visible in the law texts. To make an offender an outlaw, the prosecutor needs the support of the public. Banishment is as a rule an agreement between the parties” (Heusler 1911, 167). Outlawry was a public condemnation, a public enterprise that authorized one of the society’s members to get rid of a violator of its rules that were collectively agreed upon. Hence, Taylor Culbert notes:

[... Gísli Súrsson’s] persecution, which was carried on by several agents, represents not merely personal vengeance but also the official pursuit of its enemy by society. The verdict of the Thing [Assembly], in other words, sanctioned Börk’s private actions and, in effect, publicly commissioned him to
hunt down Gísli on behalf of the entire community (Culbert 1959, 157).

The collectivity of the outlaw sentence was also manifested in the rules of paying the entitled fee to his killer. The law stated that if a man killed an outlaw, the chieftains and the following assemblymen of the assembly unit to which the killer belonged were to pay him a mark. But if the sum set on the head of the outlaw was three marks, the sum was to be paid by all the chieftains at the General Assembly. Furthermore, this fee was to be paid at the booth doorway (Grágás, 280). This extraordinarily and explicitly defined procedure of payment most likely reflects the problems that had occurred in extracting payment. The law was therefore formulated to make it as fluent and as easy as possible for the outlaw’s killer to receive his payment. The law seems to presume that the outlaw’s killer could expect hostility from the chieftains or from the men of the killed outlaw’s district, and directs the monetary loss to those who presumably were most favorable towards him: men of his own district. In short, the law sets to look at the issue from a wider angle, and treats the killing of outlaws as a collective interest.

A person’s outlawry needed to be recognized by and announced to whoever this concerned in the public. Lesser outlawry and district outlawry were announced in the district courts because these types of outlawry concerned only those people who lived in the district. However, full outlaws were outlawed throughout the land, hence, their sentences needed to be announced at the General Assembly.

In the decentralized medieval Icelandic society, revenge seems to have been considered as an inevitable and justifiable consequence of one’s wrong-doings. Outlawry was essentially a juridical approval of blood revenge. With outlawry, the law attempted to ensure the plaintiff’s security in this justified revenge. From the point of view of maintaining peace in that society, which was the primary motive behind the common agreement known as the law, it was essential to prevent skirmishes from spiraling into an ongoing cycle of blood revenge. Towards this end, the law individualized the acceptable target of revenge and defined the circumstances under which revenge could take place.86 Medieval Icelandic law was therefore consistent with instinctive reactions,

---

86 William Ian Miller recognizes this in his discussion about revenge in the saga literature (1999, esp. 75–76), but does not see a unity between social order and the law: according to his discussion, feuding is something that is tolerated by the law, not an integral element in commonly accepted social practices that the laws were expressions of. Miller’s discussion is, however, limited to approved (justified) revenge and does not proceed to discuss the discrepancies between the law and justice that are indeed the main theme in many sagas, especially in the Outlaw Sagas.
predicted them, and attempted to control them in a way that they would not spiral out of control.

Despite the strong implications of social integration ascribed to the law, the legal process was a bilateral issue, only a slightly formalized version of unadorned revenge (Heusler 1911, 103). William Ian Miller acknowledges the analogy between blood revenge and outlawry:

> The law [...] did not disown revenge and although pure blood revenge was always the most satisfying for the aggrieved avenger, no one felt themselves totally dissatisfied if they succeeded in outlawing and then killing key people in their adversary’s group (Miller 1990, 232).

This means that the legal procedure itself, with the plaintiff as the party who declared the judgment, stressed the bilateral nature of all legal cases as well as the nature of outlawry as regulated revenge.

In essence, outlawry was a legal and collectively approved means of detaching a person both from his reference group and from the whole of society. As a legal sentence declared at the General Assembly, outlawry was a collective rejection, but because the court functioned basically as a platform or stage for bilateral confrontation and the court procedure predominately accompanied this function, outlawry was also conceivable as a private act of violence on behalf of the summoner, comparable to blood revenge, although with a juridical approval. Both of these aspects, the alternative collective and bilateral interpretations of outlawry, are visible in the outlawry as described in the Family Sagas and in the appearances of the outlawed characters in them. These two aspects also play a significant role in the interpretations of other medieval Icelandic texts that represent and express valuations of phenomena that are related to outlawry.

It is possible to draw conclusions concerning how outlawry affected the individuals in the Saga World on the basis of the law texts as well as in the corresponding accounts in the Family Sagas. To understand the outlawry in the Family Sagas, it is useful to examine these effects in two dimensions, the spatial and the social dimensions of the Saga World. Nonetheless, it is essential to discuss the different types of appearances that the outlaws make in the Family Sagas before proceeding to them.
6 The Outlaw as a Narrative Character

Outlawry was a conviction and an individual’s legal status. The Family Sagas are narratives about events that are based on the relations between individuals, and outlawry manifests itself in them in personages characterized by outlawry and in their actions. In this chapter, I will introduce the outlaw and the accounts connected to them in the Family Sagas that are the basis of my interpretations. This material includes both works that are counted among the Family Sagas for their brevity, and works that are designated as þættir for their shortness. The term main character refers to a narrative character that functions as the focal character of an entire saga whereas the term focal character refers to a narrative character that is the focal character of a narrative sequence (for further discussion, see chapter 8.2).

The most thorough and exhaustive survey of outlawry in the Family Sagas was conducted by Andreas Heusler (1911). Heusler searched for all instances in which a character was outlawed in the Family Sagas. Heusler identified 14 certain cases of condemnation to full outlawry, 22 uncertain cases, and 31 certain cases of men being condemned to lesser outlawry. Heusler was interested in the formal legal practices in the Saga Age as reflected in the saga literature and he therefore focused on the cases and descriptions of a judgement referred to as dómr (Heusler 1911, 143–144). Heusler counted full outlaws as those who were either designated as being skógarman or whose fate after being condemned was termed sekr, which indicated that they were fully rejected from society. However, the list produced by Heusler is by no means exhaustive. For example, there are numerous cases of outlawry judgments in the central Family Sagas that are included in the present study but that are not mentioned in Heusler’s account. Furthermore, it is evident that, in saga narration, there was only a minor difference whether or not a person’s sentence to outlawry was explicitly designated; a person who was either outlawed or had lost his inviolability as being óhelgi was at any rate in a state of desperate flight. In other words, outlawry can be either explicit, when the technical sentence of outlawry is articulated in the text (this corresponds to the criteria of Andreas Heusler’s analysis) or implicit, when the outlawry of the character is recognizable by narrative features that associate him with outlaws. Men in full outlawry and in district outlawry both appear in the Family Sagas in certain minor roles together with other desperate characters, such as

87 Heusler included in his material all narrative texts situated in the Saga Age Iceland, also short narratives, þættir, such as Gunnars þátr Þiðrandabana, Hrafns þátr and Bolla þátr Bollasonar.
beggars and slaves, who had basically nothing to lose (Cochrane 2002; 2012). Vésteinn Ólason (1993, 335) notes that in the Family Sagas, people who placed themselves outside their society were treated collectively as outcasts. Outlawry in Greenland was also acknowledged in the Icelandic law, and indeed, the Family Sagas depict outlawry in Greenland as being similar to the outlawry in Iceland. Furthermore, the men who were condemned in Norway were outlaws of the king, which differed significantly from the Icelandic type of outlawry.

In the present study, the outlawry in the Family Sagas is divided into three categories according to the outcome of the outlawry as accounted in the narrative. These categories are tragic, fortunate, and pioneering outcomes of outlawry. The subject of the first category, a tragic outlaw character, is hunted down and killed as a consequence of his outlawry and outlawry is therefore his personal tragedy. For the subject of the second category, a fortunate outlaw character, outlawry is likewise a personal tragedy, but he is also able to negotiate and escape the consequences, either abroad or by a legal or social mitigation. Indeed, his fortunateness is the very survival of outlawry. The final type, a pioneering outlaw, escapes the consequences of his sentence to a new, previously unknown place, where he successfully settles and becomes a retrospectively respected figure in that context. The settling of Iceland is described largely in these terms in both Íslendingabók and Landnámabók, and a significant number of the settlers, as depicted both by Landnámabók and by many of the Family Sagas, emigrated from Norway as outlaws (see chapter 10.2).

The division into the tragic and fortunate outcomes of outlawry is supported by the saga texts through the concept pair of gæfi / ógæfi ("fortunateness / unfortunateness"). Gæfi (alternatively also e.g. auðn or hamingja) stands for fortune and success as an innate quality of a person, as a characterization of his prescribed fate or of his tendency to react to matters in ways that have certain types of consequences. While the presence of this in a person is seldom mentioned in connection with outlawry, the lack of this trait is most often noted, especially in the cases of admired figures to whom outlawry results in personal tragedy. 88 Lack of fortune (ógæfi or hamingjuleysi) functions in the Family Sagas as a

88Grettir Ámundarson: Grettis saga, Ch. 28, 31, 34, esp. 35, 39, 52. Gisli Súrsson: Gisla saga, Ch. 28 “and still he was not a lucky man (gæfumaður)”; also Ch. 36. In Harðar saga, Hörð Grímkelsson’s lack of fortune (articulated in his necrology, Ch. 36 as the description “ekki auðnumaður”) is predominantly personified in Helgi Sigmundarson, who accompanies him (Harðar saga, Ch. 9, 12, 21). Jorgeir Hávarsson: Fóstbræðra saga, Ch. 8: “Konungr segir: ‘Heyrt hefi ek þin getit. þú ert mikill maðr vexti ok drengiligr í ðsýnu ok munt eigi vera í öllu gæfumaðr.’ ” Hrappr Örgumleiðason: Njáls saga, Ch. 87. Þórólfr: Bolla þátr Bollasonar (Laxdæla saga), Ch. 80, 82.
prefigurative implication of the tragic outcome of a person’s outlawry. Lack of fortune can also be understood as a tendency of a person to react to stimuli in a harmful and an even self-destructive way, without the ability or will to ponder upon the consequences of one’s deeds. This is a rather despised quality in a person, which becomes evident in the material, because the ill fortune this person brings upon himself also easily affects those around him. Becoming a pioneer, instead of dying, already inherently presupposes being gefuleg ("fortunate"). The strong metaphorical value of pioneering in the history of Iceland served as a reason to include it here as a separate category, as will be discussed in the concluding section 6.3.3.

6.1 Tragic Biographies of Outlaws

The tragic biographies of outlaws provide the most detailed accounts of outlaw careers that have tragic endings and of the scenes that constitute them. Biography in this case refers to presenting outlawry as a fatal phase in the main character’s biography. The primary tragic biographies of outlaws are referred to as the three Outlaw Sagas: Gísla saga Súrssonar, Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar and Harðar saga. These sagas include most of the motifs and ideas that are repeated or implied in relation to the outlaws who appear in less central positions in the sagas. These biographies may have contributed to the establishment of certain traditional ideas, but these biographies have also attracted these ideas. This is especially true of Grettis saga, which is one of the last Family Sagas to have been written. The Outlaw Sagas depict their peculiar main characters as being praiseworthy by emphasizing their capability to maintain honor in the difficult circumstances of outlawry and, as Vésteinn Ólason has emphasized, by praising their ability to escape revenge (Ólason 1993, 335). The outlaws are described sympathetically in these biographies, as are the main characters of any biographical saga. The Outlaw Sagas focus on the period of the main character’s life as an outlaw, they excessively narrate both the adventures and the close escapes during his career as well as the tragic but heroic violent deaths of the outlaws.

6.1.1 Gísla saga

Gísla saga Súrssonar (here referred to as Gísla saga) is a biographical saga that focuses on a man named Gísli Súrsson and his
outlawry. This saga is structured like a classical tragedy whose coherent structure has been widely praised (e.g. Ker 1957, 214–224; Turville-Petre 1975, 244). The introductory part of the saga describes the events in Norway of the generation that preceded Gísli Súrsson. The uncle of Gísli, also named Gísli, offers to fight a berserk\(^{89}\) who demands his brother’s wife. By aid of a magical sword, Uncle Gísli wins, but because he refuses to return the sword to its owner, a slave named Kolr,\(^{90}\) a fight ensues between them and both are killed. Next, it is said that the main character of the saga, Gísli Súrsson, kills a man courting of his sister, Þórdís, who happens to be a friend of Gísli’s brother, Þorkell. The resulting blood feud forces Gísli to leave for Iceland with his family.

In Iceland, Gísli’s brother, Þorkell, joins forces with Þórdís, while her husband, Þorgrímr, Gísli joins forces with his wife’s brother, Vésteinn. They live on two farms as neighbors in the valley of Haukadalr. Þorkell and Þorgrímr come to be on bad terms with Vésteinn, and this eventually leads to the killing of Vésteinn. The killer is not disclosed in the narrative,\(^{91}\) not even to the saga audience, but Gísli seeks revenge by killing his brother-in-law, Þorgrímr, in a manner similar to how Vésteinn was killed. Gísli reveals his deed in a poem to his sister, Þórdís, who – understandably – becomes furious and betrays Gísli to Þorgrímr’s brother, Börkr.

Þórdís then marries Börkr, who also accepts the task of summoning Gísli. Gísli is subsequently sentenced to outlawry and the rest of the saga focuses on his adventures while hiding and his close escapes over the following years. Börkr has a spell put on Þorgrímr’s killer, and owing to this spell, Gísli has only very limited access to help. As a consequence, he is forced to stay mainly at the farm of his wife, Auðr, which was built by Gísli in the remote fjord Geirsþósfjörður, and this endangers her position. Gísli finds refuge on the island of Hergilsøy for only a brief period. Vésteinn’s two sons then kill Þorkell in revenge for the death of their father. The saga describes Gísli’s nightmares that predict his death, and finally his pursuers catch him. Gísli dies after a heroic final battle. In fact, all the men in the original family unit are eventually killed by one another or by their relatives. This series of events closes as Gísli’s sister, Þórdís, avenges the death of her brother by stabbing the killer with a

---

\(^{89}\)Berserk\(^s\) were men and warriors who were capable of bringing themselves into a state of battle-rage that increased their strength so that they did not sense pain. See further in chapter 14.6.2.  
\(^{90}\)A slave in the M-version; in the S-version, Kolr is described as a foster father of the lady who is being fought over. On the redactions, see further below.  
\(^{91}\)According to the S-version, the killer is definitely Þorgrímr (Lethbridge 2010, 135).
sword. On the top of this, she divorces Börkr who was responsible of having Gísli slain.

The first version of Gísla saga was written prior to Eyrbyggja saga. Eyrbyggja saga is known to have been used by Sturla Þórdarson before 1282, which provides its terminus ante quem. Thus Gísla saga is estimated to have been written sometime between 1220 and 1270, which makes it one among the earliest of the Family Sagas. Judging by the accuracy of the topography, the writer of Gísla saga was from the Westfjords (Andersson 1968, 11). The organization of this saga is based on various events that occur in Gísli’s life. Taylor Culbert (1959, 152–153) interprets these events as being integral parts of three main conflicts. The first conflict is between Gísli and Börkr, the second is between Gísli and society, and the third is between Gísli and his fate. Anne Holtsmark (1951, 33–34) and Peter Foote (1963, 107) noted that the setting of a family conflict is initiated in the Norwegian prelude during which Gísli kills three suitors of Þórdís, and two of the three were Þorkell’s friends.

The saga is named and predominantly structured as a biography of Gísli Súrsson. But the focus of the saga is on the tragedy in which all the participants of an attempted sworn-brotherhood become victims of a mutual blood feud. In other words, the focus is structurally less on one, single death than on the series of deaths within the social network. However, the obvious intention of this saga was to present the main character as a hero. Here, outlawry serves to demonstrate how capable Gísli Súrsson is in a difficult situation. Gísli’s outlawry divides the saga naturally into the part before his outlawry and the part that describes that outlawry. Theodore Andersson portrays the period of outlawry in Gísla saga in relation to the overall plan of the saga as follows:

The passage does not attempt to describe the events of a thirteen-year period but only to reproduce the feelings that assail Gísli, his loneliness, his fear, and his solidarity with his wife. It is a sentimental history of Gísli’s outlawry, selective and slanted, designed solely to promote the reader’s admiration and pity (Andersson 1968, 40).

Outlawry thus effectively emphasizes the main character being detached from his family, thus focusing the attention to his tragic fate and his spiritual struggle.
6.1.2 Grettis saga

_Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar_ (here referred to as _Grettis saga_) concentrates on Grettir Ásmundarson’s biography and focuses on his long period in outlawry. This is a late saga. It is expansive in vocabulary (Thorsson Ö. 1994a) and it contains many digressions. The sequence that describes Grettir’s years in outlawry appears as a set of episodes that have a rather loose common denominator in their connection to Grettir’s biography. There are many supernatural events included in this narrative, which led the saga collector Árni Magnússon to describe it in the early eighteenth century as being “rather fable than history; full of fables and parachronisms […]” (Jónsson G. 1936, viii–ix). Halldór Laxness likewise emphasized the diversity of the materials that constitute the saga (1950, 85).

_Grettis saga_ opens with an introductory part that depicts the events that took place in Iceland before Grettir was born. It recounts, adhering rather obediently to _Landnámabók_, how Grettir’s great-grandfather Önundr Ófeigsson settled in Iceland. Then the narrative proceeds to the events that concern Önundr’s offspring. Not before Ch. 14 is Grettir introduced as a difficult, stubborn child who refuses to do ordinary farm work decently and who eventually, at the age of sixteen, kills a man and is sentenced to lesser outlawry. Grettir is expelled to Norway where he performs magnificent deeds. He defeats a ghost and acquires a treasure, he slays twelve berserks single-handedly and kills a bear with his bare hands. Nonetheless, the friction between Grettir and a king’s man leads to killings, and Grettir is banished from Norway. He returns to Iceland. He is bored by a lack of opponents who would be his equals and hears about a haunting in a valley. He volunteers to fight the ghost, Glámr, and is successful. But the ghost Glámr predicts a miserable future for him.

Grettir returns to Norway once again after hearing that there is a new king and that the new king, Óláfr Haraldsson, recruits capable men. Unfortunately, the ship Grettir sails on is shipwrecked on the coast of Norway. For the survivors of that shipwreck, Grettir volunteers to fetch fire from a near-by house. He causes panic in that house by appearing suddenly in the middle of the night, looking hideous, and a fire breaks out in the house with fatal consequences. Grettir is accused of being responsible for that unfortunate outcome and he is banished from Norway. He returns to Iceland only to hear that he has been sentenced to outlawry there as well, and that his father and brother have died in his absence.

---

92 “naer fabulae en historiae; er full með fabulas, parachronismos….”
Grettir avenges his brother’s death and begins a long, adventurous journey in outlawry. During that time, he moves around the island and lives in the wilderness as well as being hosted by random people and even by half-trolls. First, Grettir seeks refuge at Reykjahólar, where he is forced to test his strength against Þorgeirr Hávarsson and Þormóðr Bersason, the two outlaws familiar from Fóstbræðra saga. Grettir victoriously demonstrates his strength by carrying an ox from the shore to the house. In Ísafjörður, the local farmers capture him and threaten to hang him, but he survives with the help of a lady, Þorbjörg digra. Grettir is forced to move to the interior, where he supports himself by robbing passengers. There he meets a half-troll named Hallmundr who helps him to defend himself in a battle against an overwhelming force of pursuers. Whereas Grettir stays on Björn Hítðækappi’s lands for a while, he is eventually forced to withdraw again into the wilderness. He then finds a fertile valley where he stays as a guest of a half-troll named Þórir. Next, Grettir moves to the east of Iceland where his arch-enemy, Þórir Skeggjason, attempts to catch him, but Grettir manages to deceive him. While he is in Bárdardalr, Grettir kills two trolls who have harassed the farm. Eventually, he moves with his brother, Illugi, to the remote and inaccessible island of Drangey. They are safe for a few years until their presence angers the local farmers and they are overcome by means of witchcraft. They are killed on that island.

Grettir’s and Illugi’s killer, Þorbjörn Óngull, is subsequently banished for resorting to witchcraft and he travels all the way to Constantinople to enter the service of the Emperor. The rest of the saga is a semi-independent section (“Spesar þátrr”), which recounts the life of Grettir’s half-brother, Þorsteinn drómundr. Þorsteinn follows Þorbjörn to Constantinople and kills him in revenge for Grettir’s death. Þorsteinn is also involved in a complicated romantic affair with a noble lady named Spes. Þorsteinn eventually marries her, and he returns to Norway to serve the king. As Haraldr Harðráði takes the throne, Þorsteinn and Spes make a pilgrimage to Rome together, do penance, and die well-reputed. Here the saga ends.

The episodic structure and the stylistic diversity of Grettis saga has led several scholars to conclude that this saga acquired its final form by undergoing many phases involving many writers. Guðbrandur Vigfússon asserts that Grettis saga was first written in the twelfth century but material was added later and that the final version took form around the year 1300 (ks. Thorsson Ö. 1994a, 10–13; Thorsson Ö. 1994b). Moreover, R. C. Boer argues that the saga was first written in the middle of the thirteenth century and that Sturla Þórðarson and other writers contributed additional material to this “frum-Grettla” around 1300.
However, the general consensus suggests that the saga was completed around the year 1320. This view is based solely on evidence from the saga narrative itself, that is, from the four references to Sturla Þórðarson (d.1284) (*Grettis saga*, Ch. 49, 69, 84, 93; see Thorsson Ö. 1994, 910–911, 912; Óskar Halldórsson 1977, 636; Sigurður Nordal 1938, 39). Guðni Jónsson (1936, xvi) states that the saga has to be considered a work of a single writer. Jónsson bases his position on the observation that despite its apparent episodic form, *Grettis saga* is highly coherent in all its parts.

The saga contains several indications that it was written at a late time. *Grettisfærsla* (*Grettis saga*, Ch. 52) is a poem that is mentioned in all manuscripts, and this poem has been interpreted as a tradition that was adopted in the fourteenth century at the earliest (Ólafur Halldórsson 1990). Örnólfur Thorsson states that the relatively young age of this saga is indicated by the numerous rather recently borrowed words and the general language, style and narrative devices. This saga became popular around the year 1500 (Hastrup 1990, 179) and Örnólfur Thorsson suggests that the first manuscripts of *Grettis saga* had appeared only slightly earlier. The only evidence of *Grettis saga* having been written before the fifteenth century is the mentioning of Sturla Þórðarson in the text itself. But these references cannot be considered to be evidence of Sturla Þórðarson’s contribution to the writing of the saga. Therefore, Örnólfur Thorsson (1990; 1994, 919) suggests that the dating of *Grettis saga* be re-evaluated as potentially later than the fourteenth century.

6.1.3 Harðar saga

*Harðar saga Grímkelssonar* or *Hólmverja saga* (here referred to as *Harðar saga*) tells about the son of a chieftain, Hörðr Grímkelsson, who became a leader of a mob of outlaws. In the introductory sequence, *Harðar saga* describes a man named Björn who escapes the tyranny of Harldr hárfagri in Norway to Iceland. Björn’s son Grímkel, who becomes a chieftain after him, has a son named Hörðr. Grímkel gives Hörðr to his former servant, Grímr inn litli, to fosterage. Hörðr becomes a friend with Grímr’s son, Geirr. They are exceptionally promising as young men.

Hörðr and Geirr make a journey to Norway. In Norway, Geirr cuts the hand of a king’s man who attempts to steal his fur coat. After soothing the king, they continue on to Gautland. Hörðr hears about a haunting there and he breaks into the mound of a viking named Sóti, winning a sword and a ring after a fight with the haunting viking. Geirr
departs for Iceland and on his way, still in Norway, Geirr overcomes nine of the king’s men who attack him.

After Hörðr returns to Iceland, his servant and companion Helgi commits a rash killing, and Hörðr becomes embroiled in a quarrel with the victim’s father, Auðr. As a result, Hörðr kills Auðr. Hörðr and Helgi are then sentenced to outlawry. Hörðr moves to stay with Geirr, where he remains until they start to feel unsafe and move to an island called Geirshólmr. Hörðr moves there with as many as two hundred outlaws who have gathered around Hörðr. Hörðr and his men make several plundering expeditions to the nearby farms in the following two years. They decide to move to another area but Geirr insists on killing their main enemies first. Hörðr’s brother-in-law Indriði is among those. However, their attack on Indriði fails, and they retreat back to the island.

The farmers decide to get rid of the outlaws and gather forces nearby. One of the outlaws, Þorgeirr gyröilskeggi, notices the approaching forces while fetching water from the mainland, and he flees to Arnarvatnsheiði with six others. Þorgeirr subsequently gathers a troop there, which would be dispersed later, and he is killed in Strandir. Back in Geirshólmr, one of the attacking farmers, a man named Kjartan, pretends to be friends with the outlaws. He lures the outlaws to the mainland in small groups. The farmers, who have gathered their forces, kill all the men of the first three groups that come ashore. Hörðr is reluctant to leave but eventually, Kjartan manages to persuade him. When Hörðr’s boat comes ashore, he is attacked. He defends himself and his comrade-in-fate Helgi bravely, but eventually he is overcome and slain. Hörðr’s sister, Þorbjörg, organizes the revenge for Hörðr’s death, even though Hörðr had earlier attacked her farm and her husband, Indriði. A total of twenty-four men are killed in compensation for Hörðr’s death, and according to the saga, most of these killings are organized by Þorbjörg.

The saga writer represents Hörðr as the hero of the saga (see Schottmann 2000), but it is important to remember that Hörðr was constantly accompanied by comrades. Hörðr grew up with Geirr and he died together with Helgi, and both are designated in the saga as Hörðr’s sworn-brothers. Hörðr also attracted a large band of outlaws and he was an authority among them. However, he was unable to take charge at crucial moments, which also released him from responsibility for many of the band’s deeds. Even though Harðar saga deserves its position among the Outlaw Sagas, Hörðr Grímkelsson cannot be considered to have been a solitary tragic figure in the same sense as Gísli Súrsson and Grettir Ásmundarson.
The mentions of the “saga hardar Grimkelssonar ok GeirS” in the Landnámabók manuscripts of both Hauksbók and Sturlubók suggests that Harðar saga belonged to the established saga literature by the middle of the thirteenth century (Sveinsson 1958, 90) when Landnámabók took form. Janus Jónsson (1892) dated the poems in the saga (of which none are included in the Vatnshyrna version) on linguistic evidence to be from the latter part of the fourteenth century. Sture Hast (1960, 81) also agrees with this assessment. Hast considered these poems to be the creation of one person. The evaluation of Hóðrir’s career at the end of the saga is attributed to priest Styrmir (d. 1245) and this has been an incentive to suggest Styrmir as being the author of the saga. However, no conclusive evidence has been found for this claim (Hast 1960, 96). In general terms, Harðar saga has been considered quite an early saga, dating back to late in Styrmir’s life and to the time of the compiling of Landnámabók.

6.1.4 The “Outlaw Manuscript”

The manuscript AM 556a 4to (Eggertsbók) has dominated the editions and translations of the Outlaw Sagas. This manuscript was written in northern Iceland around the year 1475, or in the last quarter of that century (Hast 1960, 27, 86). Eggertsbók contains the earliest expanded versions of Grettis saga and Harðar saga, and Eggertsbók is the most commonly used source of the short version of Gísla saga (and the short version has commonly been preferred in translations and editions). Eggertsbók has had a profound influence on the modern perceptions of the Outlaw Sagas and therefore, also on the traditional expressions of outlawry in the saga literature in general.

The manuscript is divided to two parts: AM 556 a 4to and AM 556 b 4to. Both parts have been written by the same hand. AM 556 a 4to opens with Sigrgardar saga frækna. This is an adventurous Saga of Chivalry (riddarasaga). The title character is the Prince of Garðaríki. The Prince wins over a princess with the aid of his two outlawed childhood friends. This saga is followed by Grettis saga, after which Grettisfærsla was also included, but there have been attempts to erase this Grettisfærsla at a later stage (Heslop 2006). Grettis saga is followed by the shorter version of Gísla saga, and Harðar saga closes the manuscript. AM 556 b 4to contains the Legendary Sagas Mágu saga jarls, Jarlmanns saga ok Hermans and Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar.

93 For a detailed description of Eggertsbók, see Lethbridge 2012, 352–356.
There are different versions of all the Outlaw Sagas, but the significance of these differences between the versions vary. In the following, I will discuss AM 556 a 4to as an independent manuscript. I will provide a brief account of the different versions and their relationship to Eggertsbók.

**Gísla saga**
There are two main versions of *Gísla saga*: the long version (here referred to as S) and the short version (M). These versions generally narrate the story of Gísli in similar terms, but S contains certain narrative passages that are more detailed than in M. The two versions differ most in their introductory sequences of the saga, which is set in Norway. (For further discussion about the differences between the versions, see Lethbridge 2007, 2010.) There is also a fragmented version of the saga that is referred to as version B, and it resembles version M.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Short (M)</th>
<th>Long (S)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eggertsbók</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 445c 4to</td>
<td>NKS 1181 fol (1780)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AM 149 fol (1700)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The long version is preserved in paper manuscripts that are both based on a lost vellum manuscript (Jónsson G. 1943, xliv). These paper manuscripts of the short version are based on a vellum manuscript that Brynjólfur bishop sent to the king with Þormóðr Torfason in 1662. Generally, the beginning of M was first considered to be closer to the original, but Guðni Kolbeinsson and Jónas Kristjánsson (1972, 159) argued the opposite viewpoint. They considered both S and M to have a common original but that the S-version is actually closer to it than M that is an abbreviated version.

**Grettis saga**
The two versions of *Grettis saga* differ only in detail. In comparison to the version represented in Group B, the version of Group A is expanded. These expansions emphasize the local aspects of Grettir: Ch. 82 provides a short commentary on Grettir’s career, and Ch. 84 offers an
account on the fetching the bones of Grettir and Illugi from Drangey. These extensions are commentaries that remain outside the saga plot.

Group A           Group B

Eggertsbók (1475-
AM 551a 4to

DG 10 fol
AM 152 fol (1500-1525)

\textit{Harðar saga}

Two versions of \textit{Harðar saga} are preserved in manuscripts, one longer and one shorter. The long version has been preserved in numerous copies, with the earliest being Eggertsbók. However, only a fragment of the short version has been preserved in manuscript AM 564a 4to (“Pseudo-Vatnshyrna”) from around 1400, corresponding to Chapters 1–8 in the long version. The shorter version is also considerably more laconic, with for example notably less sophisticated sentence structures. Chapter 2 in the version of \textit{Harðar saga} in Eggertsbók is similar to the opening chapter of this saga in Pseudo-Vatnshyrna. The wordiness of the version of \textit{Harðar saga} in Pseudo-Vatnshyrna in many instances seems to be a result of expansions to the version in Eggertsbók: they have numerous identical key expressions in phrases but Pseudo-Vatnshyrna has more circumstantial details, dialogue, and an additional three poems, whereas the version in Eggertsbók has no poems included. Two of the poems in the version in Pseudo-Vatnshyrna are added in order to point to the portent of Hörðr breaking his mother’s precious necklace while taking his very first steps. Furthermore, it is Eggertsbók that provides the interpretation of Signý’s dream about Hörðr’s birth. The later paper manuscripts are based on Eggertsbók either directly or indirectly, forming groups A, B and C according to the following organization (Hast 1960, 92, 102):
According to Vera Lachmann (1932, 1–16), the two versions of *Harðar saga* preserved in Eggertsbók and Vatnshyrna, respectively, are based on differing oral traditions. In contrast, Finnur Jónsson had earlier suggested that the version in Eggertsbók was an expanded copy of the version in Vatnshyrna (Jónsson F. 1920, 421–423). Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1958, 107) likewise suggested that the versions in the two manuscripts are revisions of the same original. Sture Hast (1960, 96–102) conducted a survey on the relationships between the two main versions of *Harðar saga*. Hast considered it to be most plausible that these versions both derive from a written source that was expanded in Eggertsbók and perhaps shortened in Vatnshyrna.

**Conclusion**

Eggertsbók contains the oldest preserved texts of the extended versions of *Grettis saga* and *Harðar saga*, and the earliest preserved text of the shorter version of *Gísla saga*. This manuscript strongly suggests that the three Outlaw Sagas were considered to be important constituents of a group of Family Sagas in the Icelandic fifteenth-century literary conceptions and most likely earlier. These were sagas depicting the adventures in which outlaws had sympathetic roles. The texts in Eggertsbók were copied from written source(s), which is indicated by the
repeated scribal errors (Hast 1960, 86–88). However, it is not known whether the Outlaw Sagas had been presented together in earlier manuscripts.

*Sigrgarðs saga frækna* sets the tone of the manuscript as a rather imaginative or fantastic opening narrative. As a result, the fantastic adventures in *Grettis saga* seem rather modest or realistic, whereas the more human, morally and psychically tormented figure of Gísli Súrsson in the following *Gísla saga* is easier to interpret as a tragic hero within the horizon provided by the two earlier sagas. From the perspective of the three first sagas, *Harðar saga* appears to resemble more a saga of an individual hero rather than a saga about the pair Hörðr and Geirr, or it appears to be a saga about the formation and destruction of a mob of bandits, the “holm-dwellers.” However, it is also important to note that the order of the sagas in the manuscript did not necessarily affect their reception, nor was the order necessarily purposeful in the compilation, as the sagas were not necessarily read in the order they appeared in the manuscript.

### 6.1.5 Minor Tragic Biographies of Outlaws

The defining element of the Outlaw Sagas is the heroically born, tragic consequence of outlawry, but it is defining only when outlawry is in the overall focus of the saga. As an illustration, the “heroic death of an outlaw in a final battle” does not quite suffice to categorize the biography of Gunnarr af Hlíðarendi in *Njáls saga* an Outlaw Saga. On the other hand, in *Bandamanna saga* (Ch. 4, 6, 12), Óspakr Glúmsson, who had notorious outlaws in his family, is outlawed for accidentally killing his friend who attempts to arbitrate in a quarrel that involves Óspakr. Óspakr’s sentencing takes place under questionable circumstances, which include the bribery and scheming of the summoning party, on which the saga predominantly focuses, and Óspakr disappears into the mountains. He returns later in the narrative to take revenge upon his summoner, ravaging his farm and killing nine cows during the night in a manner that resembles saga narratives about hauntings. Óspakr also stabs his wife’s new husband to death, as she had divorced Óspakr for his outlawry. Óspakr is wounded during that incident and he is later found dead in a nearby cave. Would Óspakr have been the focal character of the saga, his biography would almost qualify as an Outlaw Saga.

---

94 Grettir Ásmundarson was his uncle and Óspakr Kjallaksson was his grandfather.
Like the deaths of the heroes of the Outlaw Sagas, the tragic deaths of Klængr Narfason in *Víga-Glúms saga* (Ch. 27) and Gunnarr Þíðrandabani’s companion, Þormóðr, in *Gunnars þáttir Þíðrandabana* (Ch. 2–4) bear the mark of a similarly undeserved tragic death in outlawry. However, most of the outlaws who occupy minor positions in the Family Sagas seem to lose their lives as if they deserved it. These outlaws are represented in the narratives as law-breakers who also disobey the moral code, like assassins (9 examples), bandits (6 examples), thieves (3 examples) or witches (2 examples). 95 Another example of a minor character’s tragic death in outlawry is Helgi Sigmundarson, who is represented in *Harðar saga* (Ch. 9, 12–14, 21–36) as the cause or embodiment of Hörðr Grímröklsson’s ill fate. Helgi shared this fate but in a minor position in the saga.

The other tragic outlaws occupying minor positions in the Family Sagas were represented in a manner that did not give reason to question the justification of the sentence. In *Bolla þáttir Bollasonar* (*Laxdæla saga*, Ch. 79–82), the outlawed Þórólfr had killed a child, Eysteinn Mánason in *Reykdæla saga* (Ch. 3) had framed another person as a thief, and *Haensna-Þórir* (*Haensna-Þóris saga*) had had Blund-Ketill burned to death in his house. Moreover, Svartr was outlawed for a killing that was motivated by his general unpleasantness and greediness (*Vápnfirðinga saga*, Ch. 2), which then justified his death. Þórir Ketilsson was also outlawed for the killing of Áskell godi (*Reykdæla saga*, Ch. 16, 20). He was later granted the protection of the chieftains of another district, but he was subsequently killed by Áskell’s son, Skúti. Skúti is the focal character of the saga and he displayed exemplary bravery in connection with that killing. There are incomplete biographies of outlaws as well, but these do not reveal the eventual outcome of the outlawry and hence are not possible to place in this category. However, the positive representation of the outlaw characters indicates that their biographies are to be counted among the fortunate biographies of outlaws. 96

### 6.2 Fortunate Biographies of Outlaws

The fortunate biographies of outlaws consist of the saga narratives that have an outlawed focal character who receives most of the narrative’s attention. The focus is particularly on his adventures and close escapes. However, these biographies lack the final tragic element in the

---

95 See Appendix 3 for complete lists.

96 These biographies include those of Auðunn in *Bjarnar saga Hítdeðakappa* (Ch. 5), Eilífr in *Ljósvetninga saga* (Ch. 20) and Gestr alias Helgu-Steinn in *Fóstbraeda saga* (Ch. 20, 24).
The narratives of fortunate outlawry represent an outlaw who manages to leave the country (or district) that he is pursued in, and often he gains recognition abroad and manages to rebuild his life there. This group also includes the narratives on outlaws who have mitigated sentences.

### 6.2.1 Fóstbræðra saga

The title characters of *Fóstbræðra saga*, the sworn-brothers Þorgeirr Hávarsson and Þormóðr Bersason, were both outlawed but managed to escape abroad. According to this saga, during their youth, the two sworn-brothers, together with a bunch of similar rascals, sailed along the coast of north-west Iceland brawling whenever the ship landed. Þorgeirr Hávarsson is the active trouble-maker in their group, a peculiar type who admires warrior values. He is summoned by Ásmundr, the father of Grettir Ásmundarson, for killing his foster son, Þorgils. Þorgeirr is sentenced to outlawry, but he manages to receive help from his relatives to leave the country when the assembly convened. Þorgeirr eventually enters into the service of the king of Norway. Yet while he is on an errand for the king in Iceland, he is attacked and killed after a heroic defense.

Þormóðr, who stays in the shadow of his energetic sworn-brother for the first part of the saga, stays behind in Iceland when Þorgeirr leaves for Norway. But Þormóðr travels to Norway after Þorgeirr’s death. He willingly accepts the task to avenge his sworn-brother, whose killer, Þorgrimr *trolli*, lives in Greenland. Þormóðr journeys to Greenland, where he avenges Þorgeirr and where he is outlawed. As a consequence, he has to live the life of an outlaw hiding in caves. Nevertheless, he makes expeditions to attack the nephews of Þorgrimr, and he kills four of them. After this extended revenge, Þormóðr manages to return to Norway. Þormóðr joins King Óláfr Haraldsson in the battle of Stíklastaðir, where he dies.

*Fóstbræðra saga* consists of four basic parts: 1) Chapters 1–8 relate the adventures of the sworn-brothers, and their separation; 2) Chapters 9–11 recount Þormóðr’s romantic adventures in Iceland; 3) Chapters 12–19 focus on Þorgeirr’s adventures and his death; and 4) Chapters 20–24 tell of Þormóðr’s voyage to Greenland and the revenge for Þorgeirr’s death, as well as of Þormóðr’s death (Þórólfsson 1943, liii–lv). Only the
second part is somewhat independent of the overall narrative plot, whereas the fourth part functions well as an independent narrative. Evidence for this subject matter is found in a separate narrative, Þormóðar þátttr, which appears in Flateyjarbók. This þátttr tells how Þormóðr joined King Óláfr’s retinue while in the service of Danish King Knut and also recounts Þormóðr’s journey to Greenland. The first and third parts of the saga are predominately, albeit not fully congruously, structured upon a cycle of praise poems that are dedicated to Þorgeirr and attributed to Þormóðr in the saga text. Þormóðr Bersason is generally accepted as being the original composer of most of these praise poems. However, were this not the case, the poems were at any rate composed long before the writing of the saga.

This saga has been preserved in numerous manuscripts, the oldest of which is Hauksbók. This manuscript was written before 1334 (1300–1330). The first third of Fóstbræðra saga is missing in Hauksbók. Möðruvallabók (before 1350) and copies of it contain the opening two thirds of the saga. In Flateyjarbók (1390), the saga is divided into smaller segments that are scattered among The Saga of St Óláfr in four sections (See Rowe 2005, esp. 426–427; Bragason 2000, 268). The last section, which is partly set at the Battle of Stíklastaðir, is fully integrated into The Saga of St Óláfr. The different versions of The Saga of St Óláfr include the account of Þormóðr’s death. Judging from their contents, the versions in Möðruvallabók and Hauksbók are quite similar, whereas the version in Flateyjarbók is more extensive. Hauksbók is excluded from the others owing to a lack of “clerical brevity” (Þórólfsson 1943, lxx–lxxi). Nevertheless, it is rather difficult to determine the philological relations between the texts in the manuscripts.

Whereas the saga’s editor for the Íslensk fornrit series, Guðni Jónsson (1943, lxxv), suggests that the Flateyjarbók version is closest to the original, Jónas Kristjánsson states in his exhaustive study Um Fóstbræðrasögu (1972) that the sections of the saga in Möðruvallabók are closest to the original. He also argues that the version in Hauksbók is both abbreviated and stylistically altered, and that the extracts in Flateyjarbók differ from the original text both in terms of additions and omissions. On the other hand, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (1994, 590) considers Flateyjarbók to be closer to the original saga.

97It explains how Þormóðr Bersason acquired his added name, Kolbrúnarskáld; this added name was well known (referred to, for instance, in Skáldatal, the list of court poets) as well as the story behind it, which is indicated by its presence in Landnámabók even though the author of Fóstbræðra saga seems not to have used it as a reference work (Þórólfsson 1943, lxv–lxvi).

98See Þórólfsson 1943, lix–lxii for discussion on the origins of the poems.
Meulengracht Sørensen states that the written version of the original saga had utilized oral narratives without paying too much attention to the narrative coherence of the saga, whereas these narratives were omitted from the version in Hauksbók. Úlfar Bragason (2000) noted that the contents of the different versions agree with each other to a considerable degree, but the variation in the impression made by the different versions differs significantly. Bragason suggests that the writer of Flateyjarbók consciously omitted and added material in order to characterize the sworn-brothers as the king’s men (Bragason 2000, 271). This meant adding scenes in which Þorgeirr is depicted as quarrelsome, shortening the description of Þorsteirr’s last stand, and adding Þormóðar þáttir, thereby emphasising the sequence of the saga which recounts Þormóðr’s journey to Greenland.

The saga was earlier considered to be one of the earliest, and it was determined to be from the beginning of the thirteenth century, due to its raw and robust style and structure. In contrast, Jónas Kristjánsson (1972, 302–307) argued that, actually, the saga displays a style that is a mixture of traditional and learned style and indicates a later date, and that numerous aspects of this “archaic” style were actually adapted from chivalric models. Since Kristjánsson’s suggestion, the late thirteenth century has been generally agreed on as the date for the saga, although the dating still has been subject to questioning (e.g. Andersson 2006, 69). In Fóstbraédra saga, Þorgeirr Hávarsson is the active protagonist, a bully and a warrior, and the initial outlaw. The first and third parts of the saga consist of his coherent biography that is essentially divided by his sentencing to outlawry in Iceland. In the overall design of this saga, however, these parts function as an introduction to Þormóður’s heroic journey to Greenland. Judging by his appearance in numerous sources, Þormóðr was the more famous of the two sworn-brothers during the period of saga writing. In Fóstbraédra saga was used as a point of reference in other saga texts (for instance, in Grettis saga) and even as an incentive to further narrative developments (Þórarins þáttir ofsa).

6.2.2 Gunnars þáttir Þiðrandabana

Gunnars þáttir Þiðrandabana is a short saga about the Norwegian named Gunnarr, who avenges his host in Iceland on the spot of his

---

99 He appeared, however, as a poet, and it is possible that he was a popular figure among the share of the population who had interest in poetry and its history. As those involved in saga writing probably were more interested in poetry than an average Icelander, it is possible that Þormóðr’s relative position in this saga was not in congruence with a general conception.
killing. He flees and hides at several farms until Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir’s spouse spots him at her farm. Guðrún prevents her husband from killing Gunnarr, and helps Gunnarr to go back to Norway.

The scholarly consensus is that Gunnars þátr Þiðrandabana was a source for a passage in Laxdæla saga (Ch. 69), referred to in this text as Njarðvikinga saga. In Laxdæla saga, certain details that are at variance between the texts would have been changed in order to maintain Guðrún as the central character (Jóhannesson 1950, lxxxvii). This would date Gunnars þátr Þiðrandabana to before 1250. Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1934, xci) suggested, on the basis of stylistic evidence, an early date, the beginning of thirteenth century, but this is based on rather weak evidence. Gísli Sigurðsson showed that the case is not closed and that actually, the Njarðvikinga saga that is referred to in Laxdæla saga as another source for the events could in fact be Fljótsdæla saga. The plot of Gunnars þátr Þiðrandabana is to a great extent similarly accounted for in Fljótsdæla saga (see Sigurðsson G. 2004, 217–245 for a discussion on the comparison), which has long been considered to be written in the sixteenth century (Stefán Karlsson 1994, 757) but this argument, put forward by Kålund in the nineteenth century, is not watertight. Sigurðsson suggests that Laxdæla saga actually refers to an oral tradition of Njarðvikinga saga, which was also the source for Gunnars þátr Þiðrandabana and Fljótsdæla saga; these, nonetheless, represent the tradition that is referred to in Laxdæla saga as Njarðvikinga saga (Sigurðsson G. 2004, 242–245). The differences in the representation of the narrative in these three sagas exemplify how the central core of a narrative was adapted in different narrative contexts.

Gunnarr Þiðrandabani is also mentioned in another Family Saga that is set in eastern Iceland. A man named Gunnarr austriaðr is mentioned in Droplaugarsona saga (M-version) when Grímr Droplaugarson is warned in Norway that Gunnarr is one of the men who want him killed (Ch. 14). Gunnars þátr Þiðrandabana has been preserved in a number of seventeenth-century paper manuscripts.\(^{100}\)

6.2.3 Króka-Refs saga

Króka-Refs saga is a peculiar saga about a resourceful man, Refr, who is forced to move from Iceland to Greenland after killing a man in order to protect his widowed mother. In Greenland, he has to withdraw

---

\(^{100}\) The similarity of Gunnars þátr Þiðrandabana with elements in Gísla saga and Grettis saga has been noted recently by Chris Callow, who however stressed Gunnarr being Norwegian (Callow 2004, 330, note 22).
from the settlement to the wilderness, óbygðir, because he avenges a serious insult with proper lethality. His pursuers receive help from a messenger of the king of Norway. With his help, they find Refr’s fortress in the wilderness but are unable to catch him because of his technologically superior defense strategies. However, Refr is forced to travel to Norway. In Norway, he kills a man who attempts to rape his wife. The man turns out to belong to the king’s retinue, and thus Refr is outlawed. He manages to escape, though, and travels to Denmark, where he ambushes the troops sent by the king of Norway to catch him. He thereby gains the respect of the Danish king.

Króka-Refr is depicted in this saga as a special type of cunning hero who calculates his every move but who, in spite of this, cannot escape his ill fate before finding an environment that suits him: in the Danish kingdom. Furthermore, he always manages to foresee the trouble awaiting him and prepares for it beforehand. He states in Chapter 8 of Króka-Refr’s saga, “Rather should one have thought of resources than fall into killings or egg others to them,” and the statement appears to be the veritable moral of the saga. Furthermore, Kendra Willson observes, “Króka-Refr’s saga represents a lighter, more hilarious satire which sidesteps many of the moral issues” that are a concern of Bandamanna saga (Willson 2006, 1069). Historical accuracy has not been an aim of this saga, which is evident from the serious chronological discrepancies that occur.

Króka-Refr’s saga has been wholly preserved in one vellum, AM 471 4to (1450–1500) and in several paper copies. The differences between the copies are minor. The saga is rather difficult to date but on the basis of its stylistic features that are more chivalric than “classic,” it is generally supposed to be written in the early fourteenth century. As such, it would be among the last Family Sagas that have been written. (Halldórsson 1959, xxxvii.)

6.2.4 Víglundar saga

Víglundar saga is a romantic saga of two brothers, Víglundr and Trausti. This saga depicts Víglundr as being in love with a girl named Ketilriðr but he is despised by her family. Víglundr and Trausti are subsequently outlawed for defending themselves against an attack by Ketilriðr’s brother and his band. Víglundr and Trausti travel to Norway

\[101\] “Fyrr skyldi maðr hafa hugat ráð nøkkut fyrir sjálfum sér en rata i stóræði eða eggja aðra til.”
with two Norwegian brothers who originally came to Iceland to kill their father in revenge for earlier incidents in Norway. In Iceland, however, they reach a settlement. Víglundr and Trausti gain fame abroad, and Trausti marries the sister of the two Norwegians. Meanwhile, Ketillrór is given to an old man in marriage. When the brothers return, it transpires that the old man has actually been Víglundr’s uncle who merely kept Ketillrór away from suitors, saving her for Víglundr. All previous skirmishes are then settled and Víglundr marries Ketillrór.

Víglundr is the sole hero of this saga as its main character even though he is constantly accompanied by his his brother and sometimes also others. The saga is late and influenced by the Sagas of Chivalry, such as Tristrams saga. The theme of Víglundar saga is a happy reunion of former enemies, which is evident in the final scene. This scene involves two families that were in conflict with Víglundr’s family but who are literally united with Víglundr’s family by intermarriages. In fact, the theme of Víglundar saga is the opposite of that found in Gísla saga. In Gísla saga, the unsuccessful bond of sworn-brotherhood led the members to kill each other. By comparison, in Víglundar saga, the sworn-brothers marry each others’ relatives.

6.2.5 Kjalnesinga saga

The main character of Kjalnesinga saga is Búi, a big, strong and handsome man whose biography is largely characterized by his outlawry. The saga reveals that Búi is Irish by his origins. His religious practices differ from those of Icelanders, and a young man named Þorsteinn has him outlawed for harboring a false belief (rang átrúnað) when Búi is twelve years old. After Þorsteinn attacks Búi, Búi follows him to a temple where he kills Þorsteinn and burns down the temple. The following revenge affects Búi’s father, and Búi escapes abroad, leaving behind a maiden, Ólöf, who promises to wait for him. In Norway, King Haraldr requests Búi to fetch a tafl, which is not described in more detail, from the Giant King Dofri. Next, Búi meets Dofri’s daughter, Friðr, whose favor he wins and he spends the winter with her at Dofri’s court. Búi returns to King Haraldr the following spring with the tafl, and after another trial (he fights a troll-sized man and is victorious), Búi is finally allowed to return to Iceland. He discovers there that in the meantime, a rival has kidnapped his fiancée, Ólöf. Búi kills the rival, but refuses to take the “spoiled” Ólöf. After this, Búi and his first victim’s father, Þorgrimr, are reconciled and Búi marries his daughter, Helga. Búi and Helga subsequently settle down in Iceland. Later, a twelve-year old boy
named Jökull comes to Iceland from Norway, claiming to be Búi’s son by Fríðr. Búi doubts that and challenges him to wrestle, but gets killed in the match, which proves him wrong.

6.2.6 Þórðar saga hreðu

Þórðar saga hreðu is a saga about the eponymous character’s adventures as a fugitive, in the state of violablility (óhelgi). The saga describes how Þórðr and his brothers are outlawed in Norway for killing the king and they emigrate to Iceland. In Iceland, Þórðr angers the respected saga character Miðfjarðar-Skeggi, but wins his favor by saving the life of Skeggi’s son. Skeggi asks Þórðr to arrange a marriage between Þórðr’s sister, Sigríðr, and Skeggi’s nephew, Ásbjörn, who is abroad. Þórðr promises to have Sigríðr waiting for him three summers. In fact, he kills Ásbjörn’s brother, Ormr, who attempts to woo Sigríðr. After this, Þórðr abandons his farm and leaves for a ship to the north. By chance, he encounters Ormr’s relatives and defends himself successfully in numerous ensuing battles. Skeggi’s son prevents his father from attacking Þórðr on three occasions. They settle the case of Ormr’s killing, and Ásbjörn marries Þórðr’s sister, Sigríðr. Ormr’s uncle, Sörli, appears in Iceland and fights Þórðr, but Þórðr overcomes him in a duel. Þórðr dies peacefully in his bed at an old age.

Þórðar saga hreðu is an example of a biographical saga that emphasizes the heroic, admirable qualities of the title character. Þórðr was outlawed in Norway for the killing of King Sigurðr slefða, the son of King Eiríkr blóðóx, and in Iceland Þórðr was forced to remain hiding after killing the nephew of Miðfjarðar-Skeggi, Ormr. Since then, Þórðr behaved as if he were an outlaw and essentially, that was what he was. By committing a slaying that was not compensated for (compensation was not accepted), the case remained open – he was violable even though the sentence of outlawry was never officially declared and his property was not confiscated. As a declared outlaw, Þórðr could not have settled and then have lived a long life as a respected member of the community. It is also worth noting that none of the numerous violent confrontations that are depicted in the saga were settled in court: the saga simply focuses on the bilateral conflict, ignoring the societal reality, and hence approaches the Taleworld of the Legendary Sagas even though the chronotope attaches the narrative firmly to the Saga World (see chapter 14.5).
6.2.7 Hrafn's þattr Guðrúnarsonar

_Hrafn's þattr Guðrúnarsonar_ is a short saga (or Íslendingaþattr) about Hrafn Guðrúnarson who was outlawed both in Iceland and in Norway. This saga tells that Hrafn is outlawed in Iceland for avenging his father. His mother has Hrafn transported to Norway. In Norway, Hrafn has a romantic affair with the daughter of one of the men of King Magnús. The girl’s father dislikes the affair and Hrafn is forced to kill him in self-defense. Hrafn escapes to the woods and King Magnús attempts to catch him, but in vain. King Magnús has Hrafn outlawed. Later, King Magnús sets off for a campaign in Denmark and Hrafn accompanies his troops in disguise. He fights bravely and King Magnús pardons him, largely because his late father, St Óláfr, has appeared to him in a dream and spoken on Hrafn’s behalf. Hrafn visits Iceland where his sentence is likewise annulled.

6.2.8 Minor Fortunate Biographies of Outlaws

The period of outlawry portrayed in the fortunate biographies of outlawry most often ends with the person escaping from the society that outlawed him. For example, Grímr, the son of the widow Helga, appears in two sagas (Grettis saga, Ch. 62; Laxdæla saga, Ch. 57–58). _Laxdæla saga_ (Ch. 57–58) recounts that Grímr was outlawed and he escaped to the heaths. He was subsequently spotted and attacked by a man named Þorkell, who however did not prevail in the ensuing fight. Grímr spared his life and out of gratitude, Þorkell helped him out of Iceland. _Grettis saga_ (Ch. 62) adds a heroic adventure in the heath to this frame story (see Ahola 2011).

There are actually quite a number of outlaws in the Family Sagas who manage to leave Iceland. Grímr Droplaugarson (Droplaugarsona saga, Ch. 14–15) escaped from Iceland to Norway in outlawry. The twelve-year-old Guðbrandr Þorvarðarson, whom the harsh chieftain Víga-Glúmr made believe he had committed a killing for which Víga-Glúmr was actually responsible himself, was helped move abroad by Víga-Glúmr after he was sentenced (Víga-Glúms saga, Ch. 22–23). Then again, Þórarinn svarth (Eyrbyggja saga, Ch. 15–22) managed to leave right before he was sentenced. The introductory section of _Grettis saga_ includes a story about Flosi Eiríksson, who was involved in a feud that was connected to quarrels over a stranded whale, and for this, he was sentenced but left Iceland (_Grettis saga_, Ch. 11–12). Sigr Sigríðarson is said to have left Greenland after being sentenced for avenging the wrongdoings from which he and his mother had suffered. Meanwhile,
Sigr assists the more famous outlaw Þormóðr Bersason in his efforts. (*Fóstbræðra saga*, Ch. 24.)

There are also less respectfully depicted outlaws who are told to have managed to leave Iceland in outlawry, and to have a more or less successful future abroad. These outlaws include for instance Kolbækur (a slave who attempted an assassination in *Fóstbræðra saga*, Ch. 9–10), Veglágr (a notorious thief in *Fóstbræðra saga*, Ch. 13) and Þórir Akraskeggr (*Ljósvetninga saga*, Ch. 13–14). In short, even those outlaws, who were not considered to deserve it on moral grounds, are told to have escaped the sentence.

In many cases, especially in the Family Sagas that represent chivalric tendencies, the outlaw returns to Iceland from abroad to be pardoned and to regain his reputation.\(^\text{102}\) For example, according to *Þósteins saga hvíta* (Ch. 4–7), a man named Einarr woos Helga, who has been promised as a bride to Þorsteinn *fagri*, while Þorsteinn is lying ill in Norway. Helga’s father, Kraki, gives her to Einarr under pressure from a chieftain named Þorgils, the son of Þorsteinn *hvíti*. After returning to Iceland, Þorsteinn *fagri* makes an excuse to kill Einar. After the deed, he attempts to flee abroad. Þorsteinn’s pursuer, Þorgils, and his men, kills Þorsteinn’s brothers who are to help him, but Þorgils gets killed himself in the battle, too. Þorsteinn travels to Norway, and the next summer he is outlawed in Iceland. Þorsteinn returns to Iceland after five years and he is pardoned by Þorsteinn *hvíti*, who even helps him to obtain Helga as a wife. Þorsteinn *fagri* moves later to Hálögaland in Norway where he becomes a prosperous man.

This passage constitutes a major share of *Þórsteins saga hvíta* and recounts the story of the killer of the saga’s title character’s son and of the father of a famous saga character, *Brodd*-Helgi (familiar for instance from *Vápnfirðinga saga*), who was only a child at the time. In the saga, Þorsteinn *fagri* becomes a hero who elevates both Þorsteinn *hvíti* and *Brodd*-Helgi by surrendering himself to them. *Þorsteins saga hvíta* is short and seems to be interrupted, and was possibly written with an alternative version of *Vápnfirðinga saga* in mind (Ólason 2005, 115).

There are also other minor cases of pardoning the outlaw. *Vatnsdæla saga* closes with a sequence (Ch. 47) that tells about two brothers, Þróttólfur and Fóstólfur, who are outlawed by a man named Úlfjótr because they have killed his brother to take revenge for a man who had been under their protection. Þróttólfur and Fóstólfur travel to Norway,

\(^{102}\) Viglundr and Trausti in *Viglundar saga*; Búi in *Kjalnesinga saga*; Hrafn in *Hrafnshátt*; Fóstólfur in *Vatnsdæla saga*; Þorsteinn fagri in *Þórsteins saga hvíta*; Háls Fjörleifarson in *Reykdæla saga*. 128
where they manage to obtain the property that has previously been stolen by Úlfíjót́r’s slave, and they send this property to Úlfíjót́r back in Iceland. Þróttólfr returns to Iceland where he settles with Úlfíjót́r and his outlawry sentence is consequently annulled. Vatnsdæla saga (Ch. 44) also tells about Þorkell krafla who kills a man at the age of twelve, after which he leaves the country. He returns later, after having attained fame abroad, and he kills a man in Iceland in revenge for some insults. The case of Þorkell krafla is arbitrated by his influential relatives in both cases – he only loses his inviolability, becoming òhelgi, but he does this twice. In fact, the second time he would have been outlawed were it not for the help of witchcraft, which made his summoner change his mind concerning the acceptance of compensation. Another example is Háls Fjörleifarson (Reykdæla saga, Ch. 2–3) who was outlawed after he was successfully framed for theft and he escaped to Norway. He managed to find a person who could tell him about what had really occurred and he returned to Iceland with this man to have his case corrected and to have the foul summoner sentenced.

The quarrel that led to outlawry was settled and the sentence also annulled in the cases of Kolr Jósteinsson (Flóamanna saga, Ch. 19), Þorkell krafla Þorgrimsson (Vatnsdæla saga, Ch. 44), Vermundr (Finnboga saga ramma, Ch. 41–42), Vígfüss Glúmsson (Víga-Glúms saga, Ch. 17–18, 23), Þorsteinn stangarhögg (Þorsteins ðátr stangarhöggs) and Hrafnkell Freysgoði (Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða, Ch. 5). The case of Hrafnkell Freysgoði will be further discussed in the following category. Some outlaws are saved from the consequences of their sentence by more powerful characters as a gesture of gratitude. According to Reykdæla saga (Ch. 26), the helpful outlaw Ásbjörn found refuge with a powerful chieftain, like Þórólfr did in Laxdæla saga (Ch. 14–15). However, the eventual fate of these outlaws is not revealed in the saga texts and therefore, it is not certain that outlawry in their cases had fortunate outcomes.

6.3 Biographies of Pioneering Outlawry

The biographies of pioneering outlawry represent outlawry that does not occupy a dominating position in the narrative but outlawry instead has a central role as an incentive for pioneering emigration.
Eiríks saga rauða and Grænlendinga saga narrate the settlement of Greenland as an enterprise of Eiríkr rauði (Eric the Red), a chieftain who could not get along with his neighbors in Iceland. After bloody skirmishes, he was eventually forced to leave Iceland as an outlaw.

According to Eiríks saga rauða, Eiríkr rauði and his father Þorvaldr leave Norway after being accused of killings. They settle in Iceland. Before long, Eiríkr is exiled from his homestead in Haukadalr for killing a man, and he moves to Eiríksey. Soon he is again in serious quarrels that lead to his being sentenced to outlawry (see also Eyrbyggja saga, Ch. 24). Eiríkr leaves for Greenland. He explores the then-uninhabited land and settles there, becoming a “significant chieftain.” His son Leifr and son-in-law Þorfinnr karlsefni explore the lands further in the west and find odd, fertile places.

Eiríks saga rauða does not report that Eriríkr and his son, Leifr, would have had connections to Iceland after the sentence of outlawry. However, Leifr was on particularly good terms with the king of Norway. Eiríkr was obviously an awkward character, but as the first settler in Greenland, and as the father of Leifr heppinn (“Lucky”), who was a man acknowledged for his Christian virtues and for being in the king’s favor, he was a respected pioneer in the spirit of the first settlers of Iceland.

This theme of pioneering is also very strongly present in Króka-Refr’s visit to Greenland (Króka-Refs saga, Ch. 6–15). Króka-Refr moved to Greenland from Iceland to escape the consequences of outlawry. In Greenland, he found a favorable place to live that was unknown to others. Refr, however, was forced to flee from that place as well and pioneering did not develop as one of his dominant characteristics in the same sense as in the case of Eiríkr rauði.

Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða

According to Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða, Hrafnkell Hallfreðsson settles in Jökulsdalr in eastern Iceland and became a chieftain. He hires a man named Einarr as a shepherd. Breaking a specific prohibition, Einarr uses the horse that possesses religious significance to Hrafnkell, and Hrafnkell determines that he is consequently forced to kill Einarr. Einarr’s father Þorbjörn does not accept the compensation that Hrafnkell offers him and instead, he summons Hrafnkell. Þorbjörn receives help from a man named Sámr, who in turn is supported by a man named Þorkell, who is from the Westfjords. Þorkell has two brothers named
Þorgeirr and Þormóðr. They have Hrafnkell outlawed and immediately take him by surprise. Even though Sámr has Hrafnkell’s life in his hands, Sámr decides to spare his life, contenting himself with expelling him from the district and taking over his farm and former position, despite Þorkell’s warnings against letting Hrafnkell live. Hrafnkell settles in a nearby district, abandons his pagan customs, and he prospers. After six years have passed, Eyvindr, Sámr’s brother, returns from Norway. Hrafnkell attacks and kills him. Hrafnkell gathers a troop and attacks Sámr as well. He then subjects Sámr to his sway, and Sámr remains in the area, living in poverty.

As this saga account reveals, Hrafnkell Freysgoði merely moved to another district after his sentence to outlawry was mitigated to one of district outlawry. Nonetheless, he built a prosperous life out of nothing on this alien ground, and later even re-attached his previous godóðr to his domain.

6.3.3 Conclusion

The pioneering impetus of outlawry prevails in some of the narratives about the settlement of Iceland as told in the introductory parts of numerous Family Sagas. In Norway, the king was responsible for the capture and conviction of outlaws, which conversely meant that those who became enemies of the king for any reason (who were judged by him and therefore hunted down) were considered to be outlaws. Many Family Sagas repeat that Iceland was settled by Norwegian chieftains who refused to recognize the power of King Haraldr hárfagrí (see Sigurðsson G. 2013, 236–244). Some sagas, such as Vatnsdæla saga, contradict this position of the hostility between the king and the chieftains as the incentive to emigration, but the repeated image of these hostilities that occurs in several sagas indicates, even underlying the multivoiced nature of the evidence, that this idea of hostility was a part of the Icelanders’ historical ethos (Byock 1988, 54–55; see also Ranković 2006, 180–181). According to this tradition, many high-born and powerful Norwegians decided to leave Norway because they could not tolerate the new form of kingship that King Haraldr hárfagrí imposed (Boulhosa 2005, 154). Resisting the king, who was the embodiment of the law in those historical circumstances, was associated with outlawry.

A conflict with the king entailed two alternatives for an individual: either he was to obey the judgment that the king made (death or subordinance), or the individual had to escape somewhere beyond the
reach of that judgment, beyond the king’s expanding realm. The biographies of the Icelandic settlers, who emigrated to Iceland in order to evade subjugation to the Norwegian king, structurally correspond to the biographies of the pioneering outlaws. Furthermore, the destination of these exiles, which was Iceland, úti (“outside”) from the Norwegian perspective, lexically strengthened this correspondence. This “outside” was the spatial category that was reserved for outlaws in Iceland (Meulengracht Sørensen 1989; see chapter 11.2).

It is told in the Family Sagas that many of the major outlaw characters, or their families, originally fled from Norway. This situation resembled the pioneering settlement of Iceland. The necessity to point this out in the saga texts may have reflected the attitudes towards the Norwegian crown during the time that the Family Sagas were written. During this time, the influence of the Norwegian crown was growing in Iceland and the indigenous historical traditions received increasing attention in the literary production. Against this background, the conception of Iceland’s settlement as an element that resisted the demands of the king of Norway’s expanding power, or the conception of Iceland as the destination in an escape from a conflict on Norwegian soil, is understandable as a politically motivated reaction to the current situation. This means that the emigration story was a functional and effective characterizing narrative element for the outlaws who were depicted in a positive light, particularly for the pioneering outlaws. Then again, these narratives have many features that are similar to those found in some of the biographies of the Norwegian kings, as will be discussed in chapter 15.1.

6.4 Outlaws of the Norwegian King

Outlawry could be imposed on Norwegians in Iceland and, as will be discussed in this chapter, on Icelanders in Norway. The Norwegians who were outlawed in Iceland thus became attached to the land. In other words, in the discourse of the Family Sagas, they became Icelanders in

103 The following are examples from the material discussed in this study: Kveld-Úlfr Bjalfason and Skalla-Grímr Kveld-Úlfrsson in Eglis saga, Ch. 25–26; Björn Ketilsson and Þóroldr Mostrarskeggur in Eybyggja saga, Ch. 2–3; Björn gullberi in Harðar saga, Ch. 1; Sæmundr in Vatnsdæla saga, Ch. 9–10 (note that Hrolleifr who was the outlaw responsible for the death of the central character of the saga, Ingjáldr gamli, was attributed to be his nephew in the saga); Þorgrím prúði in Víglundar saga, Ch. 5–6 (the conflict initiated by love).

104 Examples from the material discussed in this study are Þorvaldr Ásvaldsson and Eiríkr rauði in Eiríks saga rauða, Ch. 2; Þorbjörn Sírfr and Gísli Súrsson in Gísla saga.
outlawry. Another case comprises those Norwegians or Icelanders who were outlawed in Norway by the prevailing ruler, here referred to as the king.

The outlawry sentence passed by the Norwegian king was considerably different in nature from that found in the Icelandic commonwealth due to the centralized power in Norway. According to the Norwegian provincial law, *Gulaþingslög*, in order to be outlawed, a man had to be summoned by someone — he was someone’s outlaw, just like in Iceland. However, the Crown’s representatives were to see that the sentence was implemented. This meant that when an outlaw was caught, he was to remain in custody until the next assembly, where his sentencing and putting that sentence into effect were performed. Moreover, it was the king who benefited from the confiscation of the outlaw’s property. It was also forbidden to help a person who had forfeited his personal rights through a deed that made him liable to outlawry. However, the outlaw could redeem himself by paying the injured party a single atonement. (Larson 1935, 129, 141.) It was only after King Hákon reformed the law, as manifested in *Frostapingslög* in 1260, that the king only took a certain sum out of the outlaw’s confiscated property and the rest remained with the outlaw’s family. They were to pay a fourth of a wergild to the injured party, and as a consequence, would regain peace and friendship with them. An outlaw who had the favor of the nobility could buy peace from the king. (Larson 1935, 214–215.)

Icelandic outlaws have basically three types of relations to the Norwegian kings in the Family Sagas. These outlaws were:

1) Able to escape the sentence passed by the king or his bailiff.
2) Sentenced, caught and executed by the king or his bailiff.
3) Outlawed in Iceland, but the outlaw’s true potential was recognized by the king.

The king played a notably significant role in any case of outlawry in Norway, and he was always at least partially a plaintiff, from the Icelandic point of view, as he was the one responsible for carrying out the sentence. This responsibility is visible in the Family Sagas: those outlaws who managed to escape their sentence were the recipients of the furious royal wrath. The outlaws in the Family Sagas had a significantly

---

105 E.g. Gunnarr Þiðrandabani and his companion Þormóðr (Gunnars þátr Þiðrandahana).
106 *Gulaþingslög* (Larson 1935) and *Frostapingslög* were the two earliest provincial law codes of Norway. *Gulaþingslög* has been preserved in five manuscripts, the earliest fragments from 1150–1200; the most complete manuscript is *Codex Ranzowanianus* from 1250–1300 (Larson 1935, 29). *Frostapingslög* has been preserved in one early thirteenth century manuscript.
different function when they were outlaws of the Icelandic collective, condemned according to the law as a collective, than when they were outlaws of the king of Norway, which basically followed from violating the king’s interests. The negative social connotations of outlawry in Iceland, such as the outlawry that was an indication of enmity towards society or of moral indifference, were lacking in the Norwegian cases. In other words, the outlaws of the Norwegian king were subject to a different type of evaluation from those sentenced in the Icelandic courts. From the Icelandic point of view, the king was a distant plaintiff who was difficult to identify with. His reputation in no way relied upon any Icelander and the reverse was also true.

The outlaws of the king who were able to escape the sentence were mainly evaluated by their success in survival and less by whether the sentence was originally justified. There are some cases in the Family Sagas in which the sentence is depicted as being unjust in the terms of Icelandic law, and those cases emphasize the heroic stature of the Icelander who survives that wrongful sentence. For example, according to Króka-Refs saga (Ch. 16–17), Króka-Refr flees from Greenland as an outlaw and arrives in Norway. A man who belonged to the retinue of King Haraldr harðråði Sigurðsson attempts to rape Refr’s wife, and Refr therefore kills him. The killing was condemnable because the king’s men are inviolable – but according to the Icelandic law, it was approved to kill a rapist who was caught on the spot. Refr declares the killing to the king, although in encrypted wording, and flees while the king is figuring out what he has just been told. The king organizes a chase too late as Refr has already escaped to Denmark. King Haraldr Sigurðsson then gives Refr his added-name króka (“sly”) to characterize his cunning.

In many cases, this type of evaluation seems unimportant to the writer, and the justification for Icelanders to do whatever they do seems to be guaranteed merely by their being Icelandic, or by their success, as successfulness and sympathy tend to go hand-in-hand in the saga literature. These narratives can be considered to be a type of Íslendingaþættir in a revised form. The group of short prose narratives that resemble the Family Sagas is referred to as Íslendingaþættir. These stories narrate many accounts of how the Icelanders, who were willing to court the appreciation and favour of the king of Norway, were fully capable of it (see Harris 1972 & 1975 for discussion on the genre). What these Icelanders essentially achieve is an acknowledgement of their superiority from the king. In comparison, the outlaw narratives set in

107 E.g. Egill Skalla-Grimsson in Egils saga (Ch. 57–58); Grettir in Grettis saga (Ch. 42); Hraðpr in Njáls saga (Ch. 87–89); Hrafn in Hrafnþáttir; Eiríkr in Eiríks saga rauða; Auðunn in Bjarnar saga Híðkelakappa (Ch. 5).
Norway demonstrate a similar superiority in relation to the king but in a reverse manner. In Norway, the outlaws became the enemies of the king, and the verdict was often unjustified, no matter how much it was the land’s habit as, for instance, in those cases in which the Icelander killed a king’s man for a good reason and was nevertheless outlawed.\footnote{108} However, in these cases, the king was unable to catch the outlaw, and through the shame caused by not being able to catch his outlaw, the king was lowered, making him closer to the petty Icelander in their relative levels of status and honor (see further discussion on honor in chapter 9.3). In the cases of Króka-Refr and Þorleifr jarlaskáld, the outlaw of the Norwegian king finds refuge in the Danish kingdom. Króka-Refr and Þorleifr jarlaskáld prove their valiance to the King of Denmark by humiliating his Norwegian rival. Króka-Refr does this by resisting the attack of the king’s force (Króka-Refr saga, Ch. 20) and Þorleifr by penetrating the king’s court in disguise and causing havoc by his singing performance that was replete with insults and magic (Þorleifsf Matth jarlaskálds, Ch. 5).

Only one Family Saga mentions an outlaw who was sentenced in Norway on grounds that were considered to be unjust from the Icelandic point of view and who was also caught and killed. However, in this case, Þorgríms Matth Hallasonar, the Icelander was condemned not the king but by a petty lord. Even the sentenced outlaw himself, Þorgrímr Hallason, did not acknowledge his judgement. Furthermore, when the same fate awaited Þorgrímr’s faithful servant Kolgrímr, the king himself appeared on the scene and saved him at the last moment. The Christian ideal of martyrdom, as a readiness to die on behalf of righteousness, is represented strongly in the spirit of this saga.

There are also many narratives in the Family Sagas about Icelanders confronting hostile highwaymen and outlaws during their journeys in Scandinavia. The many outlawed natives (meaning Norwegians and Swedes) who raided in Scandinavia, often as berserks, mostly function in the sagas as convenient targets for demonstrations of Icelanders’ valiance in the conventional manner of the Íslendingaþettir.\footnote{109} There are also examples in the Family Sagas that involve the king sending out men to hunt down and to kill his outlaws abroad, for instance, in Iceland or in Greenland. For example, Þorgeirr Hávarsson was killed on this type of journey on behalf of the king, and Þormóör

\footnote{108} Hrafn and Hrappr both get into trouble in Norway for getting involved with the daughter of a king’s man, but their characters are very differently built as it comes to their moral evaluation.\footnote{109} E.g. Atli and Kolr in Njáls saga; bersers and bandits in Grettis saga, Droplaugarsona saga, Gísla saga, etc. (Heller 1958, 54–63). See below chapter 14.6.2.
*kolbrunaskáld’s* journey to Greenland to avenge his sworn-brother was, according to *Fóstbræðra saga* and *Þormóðar þáttr*, motivated predominantly as an errand of King Óláfr Haraldsson. Moreover, Jarl Hákon avenged his humiliation by Þorleifr jarlaskáld by magically awakening a wooden man whom he then sent to Iceland in pursuit of Þorleifr.\(^{110}\)

In short, the Norwegian king often recognized the potential of an Icelandic outlaw who managed to escape into his realm,\(^{111}\) and the Icelanders who were outlawed by the king were rather exclusively depicted in a favorable light from the Icelandic point of view in the sagas. The outlaws seem to have received more understanding on the other side of the Norwegian Sea than on the side where they were sentenced.

The complicated relationship between the Icelanders and the Norwegian kings as represented in connection with outlawry is especially visible in *Þorleifís þáttar jarlaskálds*. The name character named Þorleifr angers Jarl Hákon in Norway by refusing to give him a discount on his merchandise. The Jarl robs him of all of his merchandise, imprisons his crew and burns his ship. Consequently, Jarl Hákon bars Þorleifr from his favor, that is, he practically outlaws him even though without explicating it. The Jarl’s deeds are pictured in an unfavorable light: he is represented as overbearing and greedy and ready to resort to witchcraft. Þorleifr turns to Denmark’s King Sveinn, who is willing to help him take revenge. The enmity between the Danish King Sveinn and the Norwegian Jarl Hákon is a commonplace in the Family Sagas, and this probably derives from the historical fact that King Sveinn attempted to have Jarl Hákon converted to Christianity, an attempt that led to the breaking of their alliance. Jarl Hákon’s wickedness in *Þorleifís þáttar jarlaskálds* is attributed to his heathenism, and Þorleifr does not need his respect to gain sympathies from the audience. Instead, Þorleifr’s positive reputation was based on the respect that the Christian King Sveinn is told to have shown him.

---

\(^{110}\) According to *Þórarins þáttr*, King Óláfr sent an order to his servant in Iceland to have Þórarinn ofski killed. Þórarinn, not really violable to outlawry even though he killed the other one of the two main characters of *Fóstbræðra saga*, was judged and convicted to death by the King of Norway. This made him an outlaw of the Norwegian king even though he apparently never stepped upon Norwegian soil, and his story in *Þórarins þáttar ofski* is therefore conceivable as a narrative of outlawry.

\(^{111}\) E.g. Búi in *Kjalnesinga saga*, or Þorgeirr and Þormóðr in *Fóstbræðra saga*. 136
6.5 Conclusion

As described above, outlawry assumes diverse roles in the Family Sagas as well as in the shorter prose narratives from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The categorization of outlawry in these occurrences into either fortunate or tragic (gæfuleg / ògæfuleg) is based on the division suggested by the material itself. This division is also applied here to the narratives on outlawry in which the designation of the outlaw in question is not explicitly stated. This division provides a frame of reference that can be used in comparison of the fragmented outlaw biographies of minor saga characters with the more complete biographical sagas.

The diversity in the occurrences of outlawry in the Family Sagas reflects the diverse attitudes towards breaking the law and its most severe consequence. The particular attitude depended predominantly upon the moral justification of the sentence. Nonetheless, the expressions of this attitude also depended upon the function of outlawry in the narrative. Regardless of the degree of fortune or tragedy, or of any other variables, repeated narrative conventions were applied in the narratives of outlawry and outlaws in the Family Sagas, and these conventions will be discussed next.
There are certain narrative features that are repeatedly used in the narratives about the outlaws in the Family Sagas. The following account of these narrative features prioritizes the narratives about outlaws that appear in central roles in saga texts. The reason for this is that these texts contain more narrative elements that are related to outlawry than the shorter accounts. The saga texts are approached here as a synchronic corpus, which means that the relative (presumed) ages of the individual sagas are not taken into account.

The narrative features discussed in this chapter appear regularly in the Family Sagas in connection with the outlaw characters. It is of course possible that the correspondence of a particular narrative feature found in only two saga texts could be due to a literate borrowing from either one of them into the other. However, even in this case, it is reasonable to consider that the narrative feature in question was found useful only if it conformed to general conceptions concerning outlawry. On that foundation, any narrative feature that appears in connection with more than one outlaw character is here tentatively considered to be a convention of outlaw narratives. The following sections will present an overview of probable narrative elements that were conventionally associated with outlaws. This overview will offer perspectives on the degree to which they were specific to outlaws or the degree to which they were associated with outlaws as well as with other social categories and/or roles. These narrative conventions are used to characterize the narrative characters. Those characters in the saga narratives who are mentioned in terms of these narrative conventions are here treated as a group.

If some members of this group share other common denominators, such as outlawry, the features become associated primarily with that group, simultaneously strengthening belongingness to that group. Clifford Geertz (1973, 11) has noted that a “culture” is composed of psychological structures by means of which individuals or groups of individuals guide their behavior. Social psychology has analyzed these structures as categories (Hinton 2000, 34–35). In cognition, the information related to the categories is stored in prototypes. These prototypes consist of the abstracted features of the most typical examples of the category (Mervis & Rosch 1981). In turn, the cognitive structure that consists of prototypes contains and organizes our knowledge about categories (Fiske & Taylor 1991; Hinton 2000, 22).
The distinctive features shared by many of the representatives of a category of people, a group, may comprise a stereotype, which is a set of expectations that pertains to all members of that group. The term stock character is approached here as a narrative character that has been moulded by a stereotype of a particular role or social group. Stereotypes are “a particular kind of role schema that organises people’s expectations about other people who fall into certain social categories” (Fiske & Taylor 1991, 119), and these are expressed through language as part of discourse. This means that the schematic expectations concerning, say, the behavior of an individual member of a group are based on the abstracted features or the stereotype of that group and that this stereotype defines the group in relation to other groups. A person who is regarded as being a member of a group creates expectations about his behavior on the basis of that membership. Likewise, the categories of narrative actors are attributed similar stereotyped characteristics.

A group is recognized by a specific feature (or set of features) that distinguishes its representatives from other groups. Furthermore, an established stereotype of a group can be recognized already by few distinctive features. Because every individual also has other features in addition to those that mark him as a member of a group, individuals who are considered to be representatives of the group also alter its stereotype. Furthermore, each individual who carries any of the characteristics of a stereotype is also associated with the rest of those characteristics (Hinton 2000, 7–8). Social psychologist Perry Hinton (2000, 50) has noted that roles and role expectations “turn into prejudices as we have tendency to see behaviour as emanating from personality characteristics rather than the requirements of the role.” This also applies to the reception of a narrative: even if the role of a character in a narrative requires certain actions, the motivation of those actions is interpreted and explained as springing from the narrative character himself, not from the workings of the narrator. A narrative character that has the recognizable features of a stock character receives primary expectations as such as character and the evaluation of his actions evolves along the course of narration from that position (Sternberg 1978; Sklar 2008). Similarly, conventional narrative elements connected to outlaws appear in connection with narrative characters who occupy various roles in different narratives but who nevertheless have outlawry as their common denominator.

Stereotyping requires a conceptual division between an in-group and an out-group, from which the stereotype is constructed within the in-group about representatives of the out-group. The greater the distance from the subject (the writer and the tradition invested in him) to a representative of the out-group (an individual outlaw), the less the latter
is attributed individual characteristics and the more he is attributed stereotypical characteristics of a group representative. As the distance grows, the outlaw character’s details become blurred; his individualizing features, such as his former social status or family background, become marginalized; his name can also be confused or reflect the stereotype; and his action becomes more signifying of his character than of his person. This means that outlawry attached a person to a group that, as a stereotyped group, was an out-group in relation to the decent members of the society. The mere belonging to this group meant that the expectations of the stereotyped features attributed to the group were attributed to him, and he became an individual only when he deviated from those expectations.

7.1 Stock Characters

The designation stock character has become more or less established for the narrative characters in saga literature that can be conceived as a stereotyped group. Lars Lönnroth (1976, 61–69, 74–76) notes that the connection between a narrative role and a stock character occupying this role is close. Lönnroth identifies the stereotyped characters in Njáls saga according to their qualities that are essential to the narrative plot, but while doing this, he uses the notions of role and stock character interchangeably. For example, the stereotyped “Hero” is manifested in two kinds of stock characters: a “Prima Donna” is both a role and a stock character, and the role of “Villain” can be played by a number of stock characters, including the “Prima Donna.”

Lars Lönnroth largely draws the characteristics of his stock characters from mythological texts. This makes sense to the degree that the characters in Scandinavian mythology had rather clear predominant features and the myths definitely influenced saga narration. Lönnroth (1976, 63–64) reduces the actions of a stock character to qualities that prescribe those actions. His approach is descriptive, and applies in this study as well, although Lönnroth’s method is less depictive of more complicated saga characters because the inconsistency of these characters’ actions requires selection as to which action is considered to be characteristic. However, fictional characters in medieval literature were typically simplistic. A common strategy was to use flat figurae, or stereotyped characters that allegorically were meant to represent different mental realities (Tulinius 2002, 41). The symbolic function

---

112 Frank (1953, 240–241) calls them “symbol allegories”.

140
of outlaws in saga narration will not be discussed more deeply in this study, but the notion of *figurae* shows that the use of stereotypical stock characters was far more common in European literary history.

Slavica Ranković (2006) discusses all saga characters as originally or essentially one-dimensioned. According to Ranković, it was the narrator who ultimately gave them characteristics. Ranković claims that the fact that many antagonist characters are carefully described is a consequence of an “effort to understand” any named characters (Ranković 2006, 233). She explains the detailed description of even insignificant saga characters by the rhetorical motivation that “‘common people’ characters are often easier to the reader to identify and sympathize with than heroes” (Ranković 2006, 259). This is probably very true, but nevertheless, the preference for giving a description to saga characters is presumably derived from narrative convention and was largely conducted with references to a stock of traditional characterization.

The strong connection between traditional characterization and a group is visible, for instance, in the use of *markers* of the stock character in incongruous ways. An example of this type of use is the use of a *descriptive marker* as a *defining marker*. For instance, the stereotypical costume (a descriptive marker) of outlaws consists of a rugged cloak and a hood that covers the face, which addresses their need to conceal their identity. In *Laxdæla saga* (Ch. 61), in order to disguise himself as an outlaw, a man wears this costume. This costume, reasonable as a situation-bound solution for an outlaw, evolves into being a defining marker of an outlaw. This is possible when narrative elements have become fixed conventions and have become detached from their immediate narrative contexts and consequently have been applied in a different function in other narrative contexts.113

As was earlier pointed out, when a character is represented in a narrative as a group representative, the stereotyped properties of the representatives of this group become emphasized. When such a character is minor, few details are given in his description, the individual status, family, property and other such factors are left in the margin, the name can be stereotyped, confused, referential or not mentioned at all, and action, the character’s contribution to the narrative at hand, becomes more central. In other words, the less specific the position a character has outside the narrative, the less extra-narrative demands there are on his

113 The description of and attitude towards heathen religion in sagas is a case in point. All religiosity was evaluated against the standard of Christianity. The experience of non-Christian religiosity in the Writing Period varied conceptually between heresy and witchcraft. Therefore, it is no wonder that the descriptions of heathenism in the sagas are highly mixed with the imagery of witchcraft.
characterization, and the more economical it is to depict and treat him as a stock character.

The outlaw characters in the Family Sagas, like other saga characters, develop very little over the course of a narrative. Certain events and certain personal qualities were connected to the characters in the traditions that were the basis for saga narration. From the first moment he is introduced, a saga character is close to everything he is to be and to do. A character’s indebtedness to stock characters stabilizes that character all the more.

It is not possible to state with certainty that any single narrative feature or element was conventional in the narrative tradition beyond its literary manifestations that have been preserved in the saga literature (and even if this was the case, how widely), but this is not necessary in the scope of this study. Even though the conventionality of these narrative features and elements remains a probability, each of these features and elements resonates in both the realities of outlawry and in the correspondences recognizable in other contemporary literature. The view of outlaws as a group and as a category of narrative characters presented here is not dependent of any single narrative feature. Later chapters will return to these features and additional narrative strategies in order to consider how their meaning-potential has been informed by foreign and vernacular literary traditions as well as by other genres and aspects of traditional referentiality.

7.2 The Outlaw as a Stock Character

The distinctive descriptions and deeds connected to a stock character are closely connected to each other because certain characteristics are associated with certain deeds. As discussed above, the characteristics of a stock character correspond with the role(s) he or she is assigned in the narrative. Established saga characters seem to have established characteristics as well. Narratives told about them correspond with these characteristics, or in contradictory cases, they evoke commentary. There is an example of this in Grettis saga (Ch. 31). Grettir Ásmundarson, the invincible fighter who had successfully defended himself even against a small army, withdrew from a battle with Barði Guðmundarson and five of his men who were not even in full strength, being weary and wounded. Here the saga writer saw it necessary to explain that Grettir would never retreat before four opponents but that he preferred not to fight more than that. This is further confirmed in a poem attributed to Grettir (Grettis saga, Ch. 31). The phenomenon that saga characters
seem to vary with their circumstances\textsuperscript{114} can be read through the role: as the narrative context differs, so does the role of the character, because the expectations of a role differed according to the narrative conventions or discourse. Furthermore, the discourse was often connected to the narrative settings, as has been discussed above in chapter 4.1.

Lars Lönnroth (1976, 62–63) has divided the stock characterization of the saga heroes\textsuperscript{115} into the “Siegfried type” and the “Grettir type.” The Siegfried type is characterized by blond hair, a handsome appearance, good manners and virtuous conduct, whereas the Grettir type is “more homely in appearance or even ugly, heavy, usually dark-haired or red-haired, sarcastic, impetuous, and difficult to get along with, persecuted by bad luck, often outlawed from the community, but noble in his sufferings and frequently a good poet” (Lönnroth 1976, 62). It is noteworthy that indeed many outlaw characters correspond to Lars Lönnroth’s depiction of the Grettir type. In quantitative terms, outlaws appear most often in the role of a “villain,” which is often occupied by the stock character of the berserk who, as Lönnroth has pointed out, “invite comparison with Grettir type” (Lönnroth 1976, 63–64). It can be argued that, to some extent, the difference between the stock characters of a Grettir-type hero and of a berserk is determined by their respective roles in the scene in question (see chapter 8.2).

Most outlaws, despite their role, are described as being big and strong. An obvious example of this is Grettir Ásmundarson with his trollish appearance. Yet another good example is given in the Möðruvallabók redaction of Bandamanna saga (Ch. 6) in which Oddr provides a description of Ófeigr, whom he has summoned and who is sentenced to outlawry: “He is big in size and manly. He has brown hair and large facial bones, black brows, large hands, thick legs and in all measures, he is conspicuous; the man is most hideous.”\textsuperscript{116} This description is not objective and it is not intended to be. However, it provides an account of features of an outlaw who may be supposed to survive on his own for a while. However, a man’s stature and great strength are definitely not features that are associated exclusively with the outlaw characters in the Family Sagas. Instead, this depiction fits a

\textsuperscript{114} E.g. men who accomplished unbelievable heroic feats abroad had difficulties in encounters with ordinary farmers in Iceland: for instance Grettir Ásmundarson, Þorgeir Hávarsson, Hörðr Grimkelsson, Egill Skalla-Grimsson, and others.

\textsuperscript{115} Lars Lönnroth (1976) uses Njáls saga as a point of departure but, actually, he discusses saga literature in most general terms, as is evident from his earlier work (e.g. 1963–1964; 1965, 22).

\textsuperscript{116} “[…] hann er mikill vexti ok karlmannlig; hann hefir brúnt hár ok stór bein í andliti, svartar brynn, miklar hendr, digra leggi, ok allr hans vóxt er afburðar mikill, ok er mæör inn glæpamannligst.”
great majority of the saga protagonists. Physical strength, which was and is associated with massive size, appears to have been a prerequisite for credibility in the social encounters in which violence and the threat thereof was constantly used to consolidate one’s position. Indeed, small size often appears in saga literature as an indication of cowardice (such as in case of Álfr inn litli in *Eyrbyggja saga* (Ch. 57)). Especially a person in outlawry, who constantly faced the threat of physical violence, needed to possess the necessary qualities in order to endure outlawry honorably. This was naturally supposed to be reflected in his appearance.

Even though the roles that outlaws occupy in the Family Sagas often require that a person have a larger size, of course there are exceptions. One such exception is Vermundr in *Finnboga saga ramma* (Ch. 41). Vermundr is described as “not so large, brisk (kviklegr) and alert (skjótlegr).” It seems that as compensation for Vermundr’s small size, positive connotations were mentioned in the description of his swiftness. Vermundr’s swift-footedness, which does not have a direct function in the narrative, is a property of the stereotypical swift-footed assistant that often appears in the Family Sagas. These are often men from the British Isles.117

Outlaws often are represented in the sagas as being reserved and taciturn when they appear in new social settings. This is obviously due to their need to remain unnoticed and to remain unrecognized in their pursued state. For the same reason, outlaws often don a disguise and adopt a false name. The main function of a disguise is to cover one’s identity: to appear as someone other than one’s true self. Nonetheless, disguises were certainly not exclusive to outlaws. Disguise in general was a very popular motif in medieval literature (see Akehurst & Van D’Elden 1997). Nevertheless, a disguise is repeatedly connected to outlaws to the point that it becomes a distinctive feature. For example, Þormóðr uses a disguise after having slain Þorgrimr *trolli* in Greenland. He does this in the most simple way when he turns his black cloak inside out to make it white and consequently eludes his pursuers (*Fóstbræôra saga*, Ch. 23). A stereotypical disguise of an outlaw is a worn-out cloak with a hood or a hat that covers the outlaw’s face, as was mentioned above. For instance, Gunnarr *Þiðrandabani* is said to have worn a hat pulled down over his head when he was housed by Guðrún.

---

117 The small size of the servant, Kolgrímur, is emphasized in *Þorgríms þátr Hallasonar* in contrast to the large size of his colleague, Galti. However, Kolgrímur’s size did not hinder him from exceeding Galti in loyalty and bravery.
This humble disguise was apparently socially insignificant and hence it made a harmless impression. The supposed correspondence between the clothes and the social (or economic) potential is evident through the impression Snorri goði gave on his return from Norway, emphasized in the comparison to his comrade Þorleifr kimbi:

[...] there was a great contrast between the equipment of Snorri and that of Þorleifr kimbi. Þorleifr had bought the finest horse he could find, and he also had a magnificent stained saddle. He carried an elaborately ornamented sword and a spear inlaid with gold, a dark blue shield richly gilded, and his clothes were of the finest material [...] Snorri, on the other hand, wore a black hooded cloak and rode a decent black mare. He had an old-fashioned trough-shaped saddle, and his arms were not much ornamented [...] Bork received him coolly, and people made much fun of his outfit. Bork inferred from the looks of it that he had had bad luck with his money, seeing that all was gone. (Eyrbyggja saga, Ch. 13.)

Later in the saga, it is revealed that Snorri manages to buy Börkr’s share of Helgafell at a low price. Snorri's success in this deal is based on this concealing of his actual success. The same quotation offers a good picture of the further meaning of the outfit, which is a metaphor for one’s concealed potency. In other words, wearing a cloak, which is traditionally (or conventionally) used to suggest a concealed threat, reveals one as possessing that potential. For instance, in Bandamanna saga, the old and apparently harmless Ófeigr wears a hood that covers his face while he is secretly persuading and bribing chieftains at the General Assembly. He reveals his real potential during the court session, which is successful for him. As a rule, in the Saga World, the saga characters do not recognize the sign because this is for the audience only.

118 Gunnars þátr Þiðrandabani, Ch. 7: “hefir hatt síðan á hofði”; Laxdæla saga, Ch. 69: “Fór hann mjög huldu hofði, því at margir stórir menn veittu þar eptirþjár”; “Sá maðr hafði hatt á hofði.”
119 “[...] þá skauzk þar mjoð í tvau horn um bínað þeira Snorra ok Þorleifís kimba. Þorleifr keypti þann hest, er hann fekk beztan; hann hafði ok steindan söðul allgæslígan, hann hafði búti sverð ok gullrekit spjót, myrkblán skjold ok mjoð gylfd, vonduð öll klaði; hann hafði þar ok til var mjoð öllum sinum fararefnum; en Snorri var í svartri kápú ok reið svörtu merhrossi göðu; hann hafði fornarn trogsoðul ok vápn lít til fegrðar búin” (Translation: Paul Schach 1959).
120 Compare also Ólkofra þátr in which the name character is also wearing a similar costume while he is rounding up supporters. Halldórs þátr Snorrasonar reouts how King Óláfr Tryggvason appeared in a similar outfit as the outlaws: “mikill maðr svo búinn sem munkr í blám kufli ok hafði grímu fyrir andliti” and saved the narrative’s hero, Einar, from slavery.
The function of a disguise in the outlaw narratives is to create a situation in which the saga audience knows more than the saga characters, with the latter treating the outlaw according to mistaken presumptions. This creates tension, which is often humorous, and the tension is released by a comical outcome or by action. For example, according to *Grettis saga* (Ch. 63), Grettir Ásmundarson’s pursuers are closing ground on him while he is “together with another man” on the heath Reykjaheiði in eastern Iceland. His comrade hides with the horses while Grettir meets his pursuers with his hat over his face and a staff in his hand. He guides his pursuers to marshes where their horses sink and they are delayed for the whole day. After this, Grettir sends his comrade to the west with the horses, whereas he himself hides in the north, thus attempting to have his pursuers follow the wrong man.

In the scenes of *Fóstbæðra saga* and *Gísla saga* discussed above, one condition for being successful in eluding people is the servant’s gullibility, whereas this is not as obvious in *Grettis saga*. In *Grettis saga*, the entire scene appears to be rather superficial. According to the saga, Grettir has travelled alone and unaccompanied during his voyages throughout Iceland but suddenly, in Chapter 63, he has a comrade who is not even identified by name. In the poem that is included in the episode, Grettir is not as arrogant as the prose leads us to understand:

\[
\text{I ride not towards} \\
\text{the trees that tend shield’s threat [warriors].} \\
\text{Trouble is the lot of this man.} \\
\text{I go away alone.} \\
\text{I do not want to meet} \\
\text{the keen wielders of Vidrís wall [warriors].} \\
\text{You will not think me mad.} \\
\text{I look for a better chance.} \\
\]

I shrink back where Thorir’s very great bands go.\(^{121}\)

(Translation: Anthony Faulkes 2001)

This same poem is found in *Landnámabók* in an account of Þórir Skeggjason with the introductory remark, “About Þórir, Grettir said this.” In the Sturlubók version of *Landnámabók*, the poem is identical to the poem in *Grettis saga*. In the Hauksbók version of *Landnámabók*, the same poem is found in *Landnámabók* in an account of Þórir Skeggjason with the introductory remark, “About Þórir, Grettir said this.”

---

\(^{121}\) “Riðkat rekimeiðum / randar hóts á móti; / skópuð es þessum þegni / þraut; ferk einn á brautu; / viklak Viðris balkar / vinnendr snarn finna; / ek mun þer eigi þykka / ærr; leitak mér færís. // Hnekkik frá, þars flokkar / fara Þóris mjók stórir.”
last two lines of the poem are the initial lines of a separate poem, which continues:

[...] I feel that their troops  
it is necessary to avoid;  
I do not meet the great men,  
went into the woods.  
I have to hide my head,  
so I will save my life.  

In this Hauksbók version, the poems question Grettir’s bravery and hence elevate Þórir when represented in this way. In contrast to this in Grettis saga, the poems can be interpreted in the light of the preceding narrative about successfully eluding the outlaw’s pursuers. This evokes their interpretation in an ironic sense and the poems seem to turn against the deceived Þórir and to the favor of Grettir.

When the identity of the falsely named man is not disclosed to the audience (even though the audience may be aware of it, and as it concerns the medieval audiences, probably was), the pseudonym casts an aura of mystery over him. In Fóstbraeðra saga (Ch. 20), the man who covers his face with a hat and who introduces himself first as Gestr, later appears to be Helgu-Steinarr. He is on his way to Greenland to avenge Þorgeirr Hávarsson, and apparently in order to conceal his mission, he hides his identity until the last moment. Gestr, who has initially been introduced as a very capable man and a potential threat to the focal character, Þormóðr (or at least to his superior characterization), hence turns out to be his comrade-in-arms (see chapter 8.2.3). The revelation of Gestr’s true identity at the very moment when Þormóðr needs his help dramatically highlights the relief created by him when he rescues Þormóðr from freezing to death. In addition, the fact that there were simultaneously two champions in Greenland whose aim was to avenge Þorgeirr’s death elevated Þorgeirr’s significance as a memorable hero (see Ahola 2009b).

The costume consisting of a staff and a cloak seems to have been a stereotypical shepherd’s costume (Reykdæla saga, Ch. 26: sauðamaðr; Víga-Glúms saga, Ch. 16: sauðreki). However, this disguise was exclusive to the category of the outlaws in the Saga World to the degree that it was used even as a way for one to disguise oneself as an outlaw.

---

122 The two lines indeed extend beyond the conventional eight-line stanza in both the Grettis saga and the Landnámabók (Sturlubók) version of the poem and are therefore marked in the editions as a separate stub poem.

123 “…esa mér í þys þeira / þerfilitg at hverfa; / forðumk frægra virða / fund, ák veg til lundar; / verð Heimdalar hirða / hjör, björgum svá fjörvi” (Landnámabók, pp. 281–283).
For instance, according to Laxdæla saga, Þorgils wants to determine the location of Helgi, who is in the habit of housing outlaws (Laxdæla saga, Ch. 62): “Þorgils now changes his clothes; he takes off his dark-blue cloak and put on a grey rain-cloak.” 

In Harðar saga (Ch. 27), the farm-hand Bolli successfully disguises himself as an outlaw (“He had worn shoes and a rain-cloak”) to regain a chest the outlaws have previously stolen and which has been his responsibility. Furthermore, Þorleif jarlaskáld is disguised as a tramp (stafkarl) with a fake beard when he returns to Jarl Hágón to seek revenge (Þorleifs þátr jarlaskálds, Ch. 4–5).

Besides being misidentified as a representative of a harmless social stratum and disappearing in a “grey mass,” disguise is used elsewhere in order for a person to pretend to be someone else. For example, Gísli Súrsson exchanges clothes with his servant Þórðr huglausi (“coward”) when he leaves his farm after being outlawed, and Þórðr is killed instead of Gísli (Gísla saga, Ch. 13). Gísli also escapes from Hergilsey by pretending to be Helgi, the retarded son of Íngjaldr (Gísla saga, Ch. 26). Flóamanna saga provides an example of how a saga character takes advantage of a harmless appearance. The focal character, Þorgils, is disguised as the local vagabond Án inn heimski when he attacks a group of bandits in Greenland together with his men. (Flóamanna saga, Ch. 26.) Another example, also set in Greenland, is found in Fóstbæðra saga (Ch. 23), when Þormóðr changes his clothes for the rags of a locally famous wanderer named lúsa-Oddi in order to get close to the men he intends to attack without arousing suspicion.

Usually outlaws use disguise for defense, but Þormóðr in the example above uses it to attack someone actively. Another example of this is found in Egils saga. According to this saga, Egill Skalla-Grímsson, who has recently been outlawed by King Eiríkr of Norway, pulls a hood over his helmet when he enters the forests in Norway on his way to slay Berg-Ónundr. Egill thinks that Berg-Ónundr has wrongfully acquired the full inheritance of the father of Egill’s wife. By donning this disguise, Egill pretends to be a bear in order to lure Berg-Ónundr to approach him alone. (Egils saga, Ch. 57.) Still another example is found in Grettis saga (Ch. 72), when Grettir, as a hunted outlaw, attended the assembly at Hegranes wearing rags merely to join in the entertainments. Moreover,

124 “Gerir Þorgils nú klæðaskipti; steypir af sér kápu blári, en tók yfir sík váskufi einn grán.”
125 “Bolli býst nút; hann hafði slína skó ok vörðváðarkufi.”
126 The S-version mentions that the thrall Þórðr and Helgi both were “large men, almost as large as Gísli”, whereas the M-version does not include this mention (Kolbeinsson & Kristjánsson 1979, 152).
127 Þormóðr uses disguise predominantly in the same sense as Þorgils in Flóamanna saga or Þorgils in Laxdæla saga. However, it may be noted that these two were not outlaws.
the hood may also have a direct narrative function. The example of Grímr in *Laxdæla saga* (Ch. 57) involves wearing a hood pulled down over his face, which prevents him from seeing the approaching enemy until the last moment. With this motif, the narrative explains how the dramatic battle could take place on the open heath.

A *false name* given by an outlaw could also be used in order to conceal one’s true identity. According to *Gunnars þáttir Þiðrandabana* (Ch. 7), Gunnarr “gave the name that pleased him but not his own.”

The use of a false name has also had additional dimensions on some occasions, as false names often have supplementary meanings. For example, the pseudonym Gestr (“Guest, Stranger”), which was used by Grettir Ásmundarson on two occasions (*Grettis saga*, Ch. 64; Ch. 72), and also by Helgu-Steinarr in *Fóstbræðra saga* (Ch. 20), is somewhat neutral, revealing a willingness to remain anonymous.

The false names can also be informative and evoke expectations concerning the following events. The false names that Þormóðr uses in *Fóstbræðra saga* are quite informative in this respect. For instance, he uses the name Ótryggr Tortryggsson (“Untrustful, son of Suspicious”) or, according to the Flateyjarbók redaction, Vigfúss Ótryggsson (“Kill-Eager, son of Untrustful”) when he approaches Þorgímir trolli with the intention to kill him (Ch. 23). In both of these forms, the name expresses hostility, and it is no wonder that Þorgímir trolli becomes suspicious, although too late. After killing Þorgímir, Þormóðr runs to the shore with his cloak turned inside out. Here, he introduces himself to his pursuers as Vigfúss (“Kill-Eager”) or, according to Flateyjarbók, as Tortryggr (“Suspicious”) (Ch. 23). These pursuers are not clever enough to recognize him as the killer. Later in the saga, Þormóðr introduces himself as Torrðar (“Emarrassing”) (Ch. 23) when he sets off for another killing (Ch. 23), and when Þormóðr is on his way to slay another man, he introduces himself quite depictingly as Ósvífr (“Enemy”) to a man named Sigrídr (Ch. 24). Sigrídr comprehends the message hidden in the name and replies: “One is what one’s name is.” In fact, the only person whom Þormóðr kills with his own name during his violent journey in Greenland is a petty servant. There is another example of using a name that similarly foreshadows actions in *Þorleifs þáttar jarlaskálds* (Ch. 4). When Þorleifr enters Jarl Hákon’s hall, determined to take revenge, he introduces himself as Níðungr Gjallandason (“Traitor, son of Screamer”). After introducing himself in such a way,

---

128 “Hann nefndisk því nafni, sem honum likaði, en eigi því, er hann hét.”
129 Cleasby & Vigfusson 1957, 637.
130 “Úsvífr” / “úsvífrungr”: an enemy (Cleasby & Vigfusson 1957, 665).
131 “Svá er hverr sem heitir.”
Þórleifr destroys the Jarl’s hall with his magical singing. As these examples show, the motif of using a false name could also be used in saga narratives to foreshadowing dramatic action.

The outlaws who survived for a long time are repeatedly depicted in the Family Sagas as being resourceful and witty. As a testament of their mental capacities, they compose poems and build ships (for example, Gísli Súrsson, Króka-Refr, Þóróðr hreða, and Áron Hjörleifsson). Expression in the skaldic meter was highly complex and, consequently, the ability to express anything meaningful in skaldic meter qualified a person as being capable of that type of mentally taxing demonstration. This appears to have been a factor in the association of poetic skill as an identity-marker for the stereotype of the outlaw. It is important to note that many outlaw heroes (especially Þormóðr Bersason, Grettir Ásmundarson, Gísli Súrsson) were famous as poets (O’Donoghue 2005, 141–143). Indeed a certain mental capacity, resourcefulness and stamina could be expected of a man who managed to survive in the extremely demanding state of being human prey. The exceptional outlaws were considered even to be one step further on that scale. For example, Grettir Ásmundarson’s long survival in outlawry is mentioned separately as being criteria for his being regarded as “the wisest” (vitrastr) of outlaws (Grettis saga, Ch. 93).

The ability to compose skaldic poetry as a demonstration of intelligence also implied potential for resourcefulness. The ability to find solutions to challenges that constantly beset outlaws undoubtedly was one relevant trait for survival. The mere exceptional state of outlawry often required and encouraged unconventional and unexpected actions. Many narrative elements including unconventional deeds in the outlaw narratives in the Family Sagas attest to this type of resourcefulness. Even stealing appears to have been accepted as a form of resourcefulness for a man in outlawry, at least from the moral standpoint of the saga writer and his audience. However, there was a limit to this. For example, Sturla lógsögumaðr disapproved of Grettir’s habit of robbing peaceful travelers (Grettis saga, Ch. 54). Furthermore, Svartr’s deeds as an outlaw are mentioned in Vápnfiröinga saga (Ch. 2) as follows: he “set himself on the sheep of the Hofsvæjar and did much more which was not necessary for him,”132 and it appears that exactly the unnecessary damage that Svartr caused made him an unbearable burden to the community, eventually leading to his destruction.133

---

132 “[...] leggsk á fē Hofsverja ok gerði miklu meira at en honum var nauðsyn til.”
133 This was also the reason that the outlaw band led by Hörðr Grimkelsson was finally led into an ambush (Harðar saga, Ch. 32).
In the group of Family Sagas that is referred to as skáldsögur (Skálds’ Sagas, “the sagas of poets”), the capability of composing poetry is firmly connected to capabilities as a warrior. The main characters in these sagas are famous poets. Margaret Clunies Ross describes the general features of these poets as the following:

[...] men of great physical strength, poor judgement, a violent temper, and an inability to get on with other people [...] The underlying hypothesis of the skald sagas seems to be that these men, being aggressive by nature, are naturally disposed to composing poetry of an agonistic character. (Clunies Ross 2001, 44.)

She also depicts these men as “bound up in complex difficulties with women” (Clunies Ross 2001, 35). These features seem to characterize the individualistic, solitary heroes in the Saga World in a position where they are opposed to the rest of the society and its norms, especially the outlaws (see O’Donoghue 2005, 136–142). For example, the depiction of Gísli Súrsson and Grettir Ásmundarson connects these two to the main characters of the Skálds’ Sagas. As these characteristics are not exclusively those of skalds but are also descriptive of other men, it is not surprising that an outlaw in a central position in a saga would be attributed with being a poet as an attribute of his identity and that this attribute could be assimilated into the outlaw stereotype. These characteristics strongly parallel the characterization of outlaws and make the social stereotype of skalds in the Saga World both suitable and complementary to the outlaw stereotype. It is therefore no surprise that respected outlaws would be depicted as poets as an identity-attribute and that this attribute could be assimilated into the outlaw stereotype.

7.3 Narrative Elements

Certain conventional narrative constituent units in the Family Sagas are strongly, though not exclusively, connected to outlaws and outlawry. The appearance of these narrative units is not dependent on outlaw characters, but rather, the outlaw characters attract them. The narrative elements connected to a stock character are narrative expressions of that character’s properties, be they denotative (directly following the actual, historical-legal properties of the state of outlawry) or connotative (associated with the state of outlawry via some denotative

134 For discussion on motif-attraction in folklore, see Honko 1981, esp. 24.
quality). Two basic types of these narrative units are the stock scene and the motif.

The **scene** is a coherent unit of significant action that depicts definite saga characters’ action at a definite setting. It has a beginning, a middle part, and an ending (Allen 1971, 65) that respectively narrate the background of the events to follow, the events themselves, and the consequences of these events (Clover 1974, 59; see also Clover 1982a, 180–182). Some scenes in the saga literature follow a stereotypical pattern, as Hermann Pálsson noted: “One of the outstanding features of the Family Sagas is the recurrence of certain **stock situations** (e.g. skirmishes, killings, voyages) and **stock characters** (berserks, vikings, brave heroes, beautiful heroines, villains)” (Pálsson 1974, 7). Lars Lönnroth has referred to these stock situations as **stock scenes**, “segments associated with a particular type of traditional content,” conventional situation and setting (Lönnroth 1976, 44–47). According to Lönnroth, in **Njáls saga**, they ”are based on a general motif pattern, or Gestalt, combined with verbal commonplaces and transition formulas but allowing the author the freedom to use his ‘own words’, especially at the dramatic high points” (Lönnroth 1976, 47). Saga apply conventional narrative units regularly but they are not the exclusive means of transmitting narrative. As Lönnroth observes, “Many scenes cannot be characterized as stock scenes since the situations they convey have no close parallels elsewhere” (ibid.). Another established term for stock scenes is **type-scene** (introduced by Heinemann 1974), defined by Mark Edwards as “a recurrent block of narrative with an identifiable structure” (Edwards 1992, 285). The patterned nature of the scenes evolved in narration; they did not exist simply within the collective unconscious or the minds of a literary coterie.

I use the term **motif** in this study in the sense of a conventional narrative unit that is smaller than a stock scene and may be deployed

---

135 See also Hymes 2004, esp. 171.
136 Pálsson analyzes these narrative units according to Nothrop Frye’s idea of a narrative archetype: “a symbol, usually an image, which recurs often enough in literature to be recognizable as an element of one’s literary experience as a whole” (Frye 1957, 365).
137 Frederic Amory (1980) argued that the structure of typical scenes conforms to a large extent with the narrative conventions of a basic oral narrative as described by William Labov. See also the discussion on “theme” as a set of ideas or an outlining model for structuring oral epic poetry described by Lord (1960, esp. 78), and Fry (1968) that concludes with the paragraph; “A type-scene in Old English formulaic poetry may be defined, therefore, as a recurring stereotyped presentation of conventional details used to describe a certain narrative event, requiring neither verbatim repetition nor a specific formula content.” Then again, Fry defines theme as, “a recurring concatenation of details and ideas, not restricted to a specific event, verbatim repetition, or certain formulas, which forms an underlying structure for an action or description.”
independently in narration or as a conventional constituent of a scene. Nonetheless, the distinction between a motif and a stock characterization is more difficult. It is not sensible to attempt to distinguish between the different orders of the content units in a saga narrative so accurately that there would be no intermediate forms. Whereas the conventional narrative units that are connected with outlawry in the Family Sagas below can be counted generally as motifs, they can also conform to the definition of a stock scene. These narrative units are content units or sets of ideas of numerous differing extents that regularly appear in relation to outlaws or to narrative characters that are closely associated with outlaws or outlawry. The Outlaw Sagas represent most of these content units, and as extensive narratives of outlawry, they are consequently emphasized in this survey. This survey is a general overview and the items it covers will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

When the youth of an outlaw hero (see chapter 14.6) is described, his youth is usually portrayed as being somehow exceptional. It is only natural to assume that an exceptional man would demonstrate his exceptional character in the formative years of his youth. In the Family Sagas, this exceptionality of an outlaw hero is usually articulated in terms of his growth, strength, and his verbal skills. Hence, a hero would either grow exceptionally rapidly or slowly (Hörð Grímkelsson, Króka-Refr), he would either demonstrate his strength willingly or rather conceal it (like Grettir Ásmundarson), and he would either compose

138 As Frog (2010, 14n) has pointed out, “The term ‘motif’ was originally intuitively defined and has suffered under diverse and inconsistent usage;” Thompson’s (1955, 7, with emphasis following Frog) vague description can be considered characteristic: “Certain items in narrative keep on being used by story-tellers; they are the stuff out of which tales are made. It makes no difference exactly what they are like; if they are actually useful in the construction of tales, they are considered to be motifs.” Topos is occasionally used as a parallel term for motif in medieval literature studies, apparently as a heritage from the work of Ernst Curtius. In *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (1991 [1953]), Curtius used the term topos to depict “clichés, which can be used in any form of literature, they spread to all spheres of life with which literature deals and to which it gives from” (Curtius 1991, 70). To illustrate the common elements in European Latin literature of the Middle Ages, Curtius uses the concept “topos” to denominate a commonplace or a motif that may have different articulations on the surface-level of texts. Curtius’s use of the term is based on the classical Latin use of *topoi*: “In the antique system of rhetoric, topics is the stockroom. There one found ideas of the most general sort – such as could be employed in every kind of oratory and writing” (Curtius 1991, 79). The term *topos* is also based on medieval commonplace books, with the idea that the *topoi* were used both consciously and unconsciously. “In modern research, topos has widened into a concept that approaches motif and theme as well as symbol by its meaning”, as Lummaa (2007, 58–59) wrote. According to Edwards (1992, 286), the tropes and *topoi* that do not fit type scenes and story patterns can be referred to as *motif*. In this study, the term motif is better applied – at least better than *topos* in the sense Curtius uses it – as the term motif refers more clearly than the term *topos* to a stock of conventional narrative actions that prevailed (also) beyond the written literary sphere – whereas *topos* is predominantly a term depicting literary conventions.
verses at an early age, or be prone to sulking. For example, Grettir Ásmundarson and Króka-Refr are described as kolbítar ("coal-biters") young men who spent a significant share of their time passively in the kitchen (eldhús), in the area of the household that was primarily associated with female tasks. The coal-biters were useless even there. Kolbítur, a male Cinderella, is the hero in folk tale type AT 301, and was an established character in Iceland already in the saga-writing period (see also chapter 14.6). This becomes evident in the separate account of Grettir Ásmundarson: “People did not know of Grettir’s strength because he did not show his strength in wrestling. He constantly composed verses and lampoons, and was considered rather libelous” (Grettis saga, Ch. 14). In spite of all Grettir’s properties that were associated with kolbitur (or because of them), the writer considered it necessary to state that Grettir, “did not lie in the kitchen.”

Finally, in their youth, outlaws often endured a problematic relationship with either one or both of their parents. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 9.4.

The wrongful sentence of outlawry as perceived by the main characters of the Outlaw Sagas appears in a strikingly similar form as the bitter but defiant poems that are recited by the sentenced heroes themselves. For example, both Gísli Súrsson and Hőrőr Grimkellsson used verses of this type to express their disappointment in their uncles, who served as poor representatives of them in court. In fact, they imply that the sentence was ultimately their uncles’ fault (Gísla saga, Ch. 21: three verses; Harðar saga, Ch. 21). Grettir Ásmundarson recited a similar verse about the news he received simultaneously of his father’s death and his brother’s death, and of his own outlawry when arriving in Iceland from Norway (Grettis saga, Ch. 47).

These verses function as demonstrations of the heroic perception of the tragic news of outlawry, as a heroic stance against the ultimate personal tragedy.

Outlawry is marked and defined by a need to flee constantly, and a number of stereotyped features are connected to these escapes. The stereotypical narrative elements of outlawry predominantly consist of accounts of close escapes and these escapes constitute the core of outlaw narratives. On the verge of being killed, outlaws must rely on their quick thinking and resourcefulness to survive, and narrow escapes are frequent elements in their narratives. The eventful action in these narratives may be an important reason for the narrative tradition about outlaws.

---

139 “[…] eigi vissu menn gorla afl hans, þvi at hann var óglíminn. Orti hann jafran visur ok kvíðlinga ok þotti heldr niðskældinn.”

140 “Eigi lagðisk hann í eldaskála.”

141 Likewise, Egill Skallagrímsson recited a verse about King Eiríkr of Norway sentencing him to outlawry (Egils saga, Ch. 57).
prevailing. Indeed, close escapes occur in almost all the outlaw narratives in which the outlaw is positively depicted, and by definition, they form the core essence of the group of the Outlaw Sagas. For example, *Gísla saga* presents Gísli’s numerous close escapes in outlawry, especially in the sequence following the Hergilsey episode, in which Gísli makes two narrow escapes (Ch. 26–27). Grimr Droplaugarson escapes twice from his pursuers (*Droplaugarsona saga*, Ch. 14) and Króka-Refr manages to flee from Greenland with the pursuers on his tail (*Króka-Refs saga*, Ch. 14, 15). In *Grettis Saga* (Ch. 53), a bridge rigged with bells warns Grettir of the approaching enemy. This scene does not have a role in the narrative except as an account that demonstrates how insecure Grettir’s position was and perhaps as a representation of local tradition in the period of saga writing that concerned Grettir.

Outlaws were solitary men who often had a great number of men pursuing them. For a man in this state, a readiness to engage in a battle was not always considered to be either a demand of honor or manliness, and his clever *deception of his pursuers* was considered to be to his credit. For instance, Gísli Súrsson and Þormóðr Bersason leave their boats adrift in order to convince people that they had drowned (*Gísla saga*, Ch. 24; *Fóstbræðra saga*, Ch. 23, 24). Another example is Eilífr, as he escapes his pursuer Guðmundr inn ríki on horseback in a basket, covered with hay (*Ljósvetninga saga*, Ch. 20). The numerous accounts of men using a disguise and an assumed name can be counted among these deceptions. The creditability of a deception not only concerned outlaws, but also other men in a similar situation – those who had been attacked by superior troops (as, for instance, in *Vápnfirðinga saga*, Ch. 16).

Outlaw narratives also contain descriptions of *hideouts*. According to Gísli Sígrunðsson (2004, 226), hiding-places are elements in a narrative tradition on the manhunts that prevailed in medieval Iceland. Outside civilization, besides forests, which are implied in the term for outlawry, outlaws also often lived in caves. Closer to civilization, outlaws and the events connected to outlawry often take place at *sel*, which are huts built along the boundaries of farms next to the summer grazing lands. These places will be discussed in more detail in chapter 11.1. If outlaws venture to farms, they often hide in clever places. In individual scenes, the outlaw hides often in three different clever places in a row, and occasionally, the cleverness of the hiding place is connected to the use of magic. Knut Liestøl (1930, 78) and Jón Jóhannesson (1950, lxxxix) have

---

142 It should be mentioned that *Sigrgarðs saga*, the single Legendary Saga in Eggertsbók, recounts that Sigrgarðr returned from underwater disguised as his opponent, and people thought that he had drowned (Ch. 9). See chapter 6.1.4.
discussed the alternating hiding places as a stock motif. As an example, Gunnarr Þjóðrandabani first hides in a pile of turf, then under a boat where he cannot be found even though his pursuer strikes blindly under the boat with a spear, and finally, he hides in the hay in a barn (Gunnars þáttar Þjóðrandabana, Ch. 5). Both Gunnarr Þjóðrandabani and Þormóðr Bersason hid on a skerry under algae, and Þormóðr survived even though his pursuers struck the algae blindly with spears (Gunnars þáttar Þjóðrandabana, Ch. 5; Fóstbræðra saga, Ch. 23). Þormóðr Bersason was concealed in a fully visible spot by using magic (Fóstbræðra saga, Ch. 23), just like the slave Kolr, who earlier in the saga attempted to kill Þormóðr (Ch. 10; cf. also Oddr in Eyrbyggja saga, Ch. 20). In Kjalnesinga saga (Ch. 5), Búi’s stepmother, Esja, lets the house get filled with smoke when Búi’s pursuers come, even though Búi is already hiding in the mountains. There is no function in the narrative for the smoke in the house, and this seems to be one of the cases in which the saga writer used a conventional motif without taking into consideration the context that it typically belongs to. Other effective hiding places are sexually charged places of privacy. This is demonstrated in the scene in which Gísli Súrsson found a hiding place in the bed of his helper’s wife (Gísla saga, Ch. 27).

One element that is repeatedly associated with outlawry is water in lakes, rivers and the ocean. Islands also have a central role as settings in many of the narratives about outlawry, as will be discussed in more detail in the chapter 11.1. Moreover, outlaws regularly perform considerable feats of swimming in the sagas, and for instance, the motif “capsizing a boat as a deception” is based on the supposition that outlaws are capable swimmers. Swimming was mainly considered to be an occupation of warriors in saga texts, and an exemplary figure in those terms is King Óláfr Tryggvason in Laxdæla saga (Ch. 40). Swimming was also represented as an activity of the aristocracy, as indicated in Rígsþula (35, 41). Furthermore, swimming across a body of water is a motif, for instance, in the accounts of Grettir Ásmundarson (Ch. 38, 75), Gísli Súrsson (Gísla saga, Ch. 27), Þormóðr Bersason (Fóstbræðra saga, Ch. 24) and Gunnarr Þjóðrandabani (Gunnars þáttar Þjóðrandabana, Ch. 5; Fljótsdæla saga, Ch. 18).143 Several of these accounts contain motifs such as hiding under algae and wounding one’s calf while escaping in

143 See also: Egill Skalla-Grimsson in Egil’s saga, Ch. 45; Þórir hreða in Þóðar saga hreðu, Ch. 2; Þórolfr in Laxdæla saga, Ch. 16; Gestr Þórhallason leaps over Hítará in Heiðarvígasaga, Ch. 9; and it is important to mention that Sigrgarðr frekni is a superior swimmer due to the magical aid he receives from his stepmother (Sigrgarðs saga frekna, Ch. 9).
the water. When combined, these motifs form a recognizable stock scene.144

Outlaws were not bound to societal restrictions, which made them challenge the authority of those whose power depended on social order. On some occasions, the saga narrative emphasizes the comic effect of the outlaw’s situational superiority over the authorities. Good examples of this are Grettir Ásmundarson’s disguise when attending the local assembly in Hegranes in order to participate in the festivities (Grettis saga, Ch. 72), or Egill Skalla-Grímsson’s statue of shame erected to disgrace King Eiríkr of Norway (Egils saga, Ch. 45). Many of the accounts of close escapes that resemble these convey the superiority of the outlaw.

By definition, outlaws were beyond help. In the cases of Gísli Súrsson and Grettir Ásmundarson, this notion assumed a common expressive form. Grettis saga recounts that Grettir sought help from the Westfjord chieftains, but something always seemed to prevent them from helping him: “every time something got in the way” (bar jafnan eithvert við) (Ch. 52). This expression is remarkably similar to the one in Gísla saga that describes what happened when Gísli sought help, again from the Westfjord chieftains, who were helpful but only in principle: “Everywhere something got in the way” (bar pó alls staðar nokkuð við) (Ch. 21). These examples represent a definite, formulaic narrative unit that conveys the idea of being marginalized.

Outlaws often receive help from women in the form of shelter and support, even to the point that the women engage in direct violence against the outlaw’s pursuers (Ahola 2009b). Furthermore, a mother or a loyal wife occupies a central position in the lives of the main characters of the Outlaw Sagas. Another form of close connection with the opposite sex manifests itself in romantic relationships, often disregarding normative restrictions, which are recounted in many outlaw narratives. The conventional narrative elements that are connected to the interaction between outlaws and women in the Family Sagas will be discussed in more detail in chapter 9.2.

Many outlaws are attributed as having prophetic sensitivity and this is expressed in the saga narration in the form of prophetic dreams or prophetic words.146 The whole theme of Króka-Refs saga centers on

144 Gunnarr Piðrandabani in Gunnars þáttir Piðrandabana, Ch. 6 and Fljótsdæla saga, Ch. 18; Þormóð Bersason in Fóstbræðra saga, Ch. 24; Gísli Súrsson in Gísla saga, Ch. 20.
145 Gísli Súrsson, Gunnarr Piðrandabani (Gunnars þáttir Piðrandabana, Ch. 4), Þóðr hreða (Þóðar saga hreðu, Ch. 10, 12). Án bógsveigir is warned of the approaching pursuer in a dream (Áns saga bógsveigis, Ch. 6). Áns saga bógsveigis is a Legendary Saga.
146 Grettir Ásmundarson; Hörðr Grímkelsson (Harðar saga, esp. Ch. 21).
preparing for impending disaster, which is visible to those who can see (esp. Ch. 8). Otherworldly skills were also associated with outlaws due to their resorting to witchcraft as a basis for outlawry, which was the case of Þorgrím Ógull (Grettis saga, Ch. 84), Stigandi Kotkelsson (Laxdæla saga, Ch. 37–38) and Hrolleifr hinn mikli (Vatnsdæla saga, Ch. 18–26).

Magic often is involved in the fates of outlaws. For example, many outlaws were defeated by witchcraft or by a curse. Grettir Ásmundarson was killed when the wound that he suffered while chopping a cursed piece of driftwood became infected (Grettis saga, Ch. 79). That curse, which was pronounced by the witch Þorgrím Ínó, followed Gísli Súrsson to his end. This curse surfaces repeatedly in Gísla saga in the accounts of the ominous dreams that Gísli had. Another possible case of witchcraft involved in the death of an outlaw hero is the “battle fear” (herfjótr) that overcame Hörðr Grímkelsson in the midst of his final battle and caused him to freeze three times out of fear. Hörðr blamed witchcraft (Harðar saga, Ch. 36).147 In addition, Droplaugarsona saga (Ch. 15) recounts that Grímr Droplaugarson was killed after managing to flee to Norway as an outlaw. The wound inflicted on him from a berserk’s sword in a duel became badly infected and, as it was later revealed, the sorcerer woman, who was brought in to help him, intentionally made the infection worse.

These recurrent narrative elements in the outlaw narratives constitute the basis for the following discussion, which attempts to trace the meanings of outlawry in the Family Sagas. First, it will be discussed how the outlaws’ position within the narrative structures of the Family Sagas had an impact on the meanings that these narrative elements generated in the reception of the sagas and how these narrative structures affected the selection and treatment of the narrative elements.

147 The contemporary sources recount that in battle, the God of War, Óðinn, could make his enemies blind, deaf, or full of fear, and that their weapons bit no more than willow twigs; “Óðinn kunni svá gera, at í orrostu urðu óvinir hans blindir eða daufir eða óttafullir, en vápn þeira bitu eigi heldr en vendir” (Finnur Jónsson 1911, 7). Be it witchcraft or the interference of a deity, Hörðr’s fear is attributed to other factors than to his personal characteristics.
8 Outlawry in Narrative Structures of the Family Sagas

The medieval Icelanders’ conceptions of outlawry in the Saga World were expressed in the narratives that were embedded in the saga texts. This means that narrative structures are a central consideration in this study, because a narrative character can be presumed to appear to assume a role in those structures. How the character is represented is affected to some degree by that role. Conventional narrative structures make the audience create expectations concerning the subsequent progression of the narrative. In traditional narration on familiar topics, these expectations tend to become actualized. Therefore, the role that a character occupies in a saga narrative basically determines how he or she is described and discussed – and this is also why certain stock characters often occupy similar roles in different sagas. This chapter will present a theoretical discussion on the various roles that outlaws had within the different narrative structures displayed by the Family Sagas. I will first discuss the impact of a character’s position within a saga narrative on his representation as an outlaw in the text, whether as a focal character or a secondary character. I will then discuss the roles that outlaws have in the conventional narrative structures of the Family Sagas.

8.1 Narrative Structure

The meanings indexed by outlawry in the Family Sagas depend on the narrative environment. This chapter will present a discussion on the functions that have been attributed to outlawry in different narrative structures, and how these functions also affected the very presentation of outlawry.

The main purpose of outlawry in a saga text lies primarily in the immediate narrative context. A saga is constituted of narrative units that succeed, displace and correct one another (Ker 1957, 237). These units are in turn connected to larger narrative structures, in the widest sense, of the overall plot of a saga and of the immanent network of historical events that are elements of the Saga World. These historical events are not presented in the Family Sagas at random. On the contrary, the general and specific elements of the Saga World were adapted to the generic conventions of saga narration in both the production and interpretation of the saga texts.

In reception, every new passage that occurs in a saga is constructed upon the preceding events that are presented in that narrative. This
accumulation of information forms the horizon (Iser 1984, 97–98) within which every passage is placed. Each passage also affects the horizon of the following passages and thereby affects their interpretation. Furthermore, each constituent of a narrative gradually contributes to the horizon. The receiver thus interprets a passage in a saga with the aid of knowledge of the Saga World and of the conventions of saga narration on the basis of the horizon that has been developed through the preceding narration. Moreover, the shifts in this horizon affect not only the meanings of the following events, but also the meanings of the preceding events. For example, different explanations or motivations that have been attributed to the acts of an outlaw affect the evaluation of his whole career. With the receiver’s latent prior knowledge of the contents of the narrative, the acknowledged input of the writer was primarily in the manner that the key elements were narrated (for example, in the intensifying narration about Gisli Súrsson sneaking in to kill Þórgrímr in Gísla saga, Ch. 16) and in the ways these elements were interconnected.

There could be actions of a saga character recounted in oral tradition that were not generally accepted but which were so tightly connected to the saga character that it was impossible to simply neglect them in the character’s biography in a saga text. However, even questionable deeds of a character could be described in a way so that the character was not debased. The saga writer could recount the deeds in a way that was favorable to the character, for instance by attributing these deeds with reasons that justified them. This becomes evident in the saga writers’ techniques of persuasion. In short, the key events in the Family Sagas (events that were commonly known and central for the Saga World) were both produced and evaluated in the interplay between traditional knowledge and authorial input.

Narratives about outlawry as well as the elements in them were used in saga literature as constituents of larger narratives. As the study at hand concentrates on the outlaw as a saga character who exists merely as an actor in a narrative, and the narrative framework is necessarily essential in understanding the outlaw. The meaning of outlawry and of the outlaws in the Family Sagas is primarily conferred. In other words, the role that an outlaw occupies in a narrative has meaning in relation to his roles the preceding narrative and to the narrative that is expected to follow. These roles of the individual outlaw characters need to be

---

148 See Theodore Andersson (1967, 40–41) on intensifying narrative closer to the event, which is referred to as retardation in Andersson’s terms. On “retarding the action” as a feature of classical epic, see also Auerbach 1974, 4–5.
considered before analyzing the general, inherent meanings of outlawry and of the outlaws of the Saga World in the chapters that will follow.

8.1.1 Structural Elements

The structural elements of a saga narrative are introduced in this chapter. The Family Sagas are typically rather complicated compilations of narratives and they may consist of interweaving narrative structures. Hence, it is necessary to bear in mind that the units forming these structures may have more than one function in the overall saga plot (Ahola 2005).

The structural element description is connected to the introduction of a new character, and it is often formulaic in content. Except for occasional digressions, descriptions rarely have a dramatic aspect to them. Examples of a “dramatic” description are the biographical narratives that evolve from the description of the genealogical background of the described person, or from the settlement history of a described place.

As addressed above, the basic narrative unit in saga literature is the scene. Carol Clover has suggested that, in the oral saga tradition, the scene functioned as a mnemonic unit, a framework in which an event was memorized (Clover 1974, 82). The scene structure in Icelandic narrative tradition was so strong that, in medieval Icelandic translations, material could be added to the translation in order to obtain that structure, as Clover (1974, 67–75) shows.

To turn from constituent units to structural units, chapters are suggestions by the saga writer as to how the saga should be divided into sections. The grounds for chapter division vary, and a chapter is more of a descriptive unit than an analytical structural unit. Conversely, sequences (Tulinius 2002, 79)\textsuperscript{149} are relatively independent constituent units of a saga. Like scenes, they have a beginning, a middle part, and an ending but they are larger structural units than scenes: whereas scenes are limited to a definite setting and personae, sequences depict a series of action and therefore consist typically of numerous scenes. A saga is compiled of succeeding sequences, and in spite of their relative independence, they cannot be completely detached from the entirety when interpreted: a sequence was selected for the entirety, and the entirety interacts with its parts.

\textsuperscript{149} Which correspond to the structural unit episode (Lönnroth 1976, 23–4; Clover 1982a, 180–182).
A narrative unit that forms a concise story that has a unifying theme, such as a central character, can be referred to as a section (Tulinius 2002, 74) or, in emic terms, a þátr (pl. þættir) (Clover 1982a, 180–182). Typically, a section is best described as a brief biography. þættir appear in manuscripts as independent narratives consisting of several scenes and even sequences, but the same designation is also applied to the more or less organic parts of larger saga entities that form distinct narrative units. Apparently, the word þátr originally referred to a piece of narrative that functioned as a part of a larger entity and only later acquired the meaning of an independent piece of narrative (Lönnroth 1965, 8). Structurally, a þátr often appears as though it were a compact saga. The line between a selfstanding þátr and a saga is not distinct. As a part of a larger saga, a section may intermingle with other sections, or it can function as a constituent of another section. Each section is constituted of sequences that are bound together by mutual characters or structural features, and on this basis, it is possible to connect sequences that otherwise appear incommensurable. The most important cohesive factors between the sequences of a section are:

1) Shared main character(s) (roles and settings may change);
2) Causal continuity of the character’s actions (cause–effect–consequence);
3) Conventional structural patterns, such as the Travel Pattern, which is bound by a tripartite narrative pattern of a journey: departure–journey–return; and
4) Difference from the overall tone or mode of the saga both in terms of contents and style. The introductory parts of a saga, as well as a possible epilogue, often differ from the general tone of the saga in this respect (as, for instance, the introductory sequences of Gísla saga, Grettis saga, and the whole sequence Spesar þátr as a sort of epilogue to Grettis saga).

---

150 See discussion on the two meanings of the term þátr in Harris 1972, 1976a.
151 The smallest meaningful structural unit in saga narration is the proposition, which is an utterance that expresses an event or a state of things (Tulinius 2002, 77). A lexically fixed or crystallized proposition is a formula (Lord 1960, 30–34). The formula is described in connection with saga literature by Lars Lönnroth as “…a particular kind of phrase associated with a particular type of content” (Lönnroth 1976, 44). Lönnroth’s description is developed from the definition of the formula proposed by Milman Parry and quoted by Albert B. Lord in his influential book entitled Singer of Tales (1960, 30): “a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea.”
8.1.2 Structural Cohesion

Theodore Andersson (1967, 31–64) conducted a general survey of the rhetoric that the saga writers tended to depend on when they organized the constituent narrative elements of a saga into a narrative entity. Andersson emphasizes the centrality of a single climax in the narrative structure of a saga, adopting the term *scaffolding* to describe the accumulation of apparently detached sequences in preparing the ground for the climax of the narrative (ibid., 35–37), and the term *escalation* to refer to how the narrative tension increases towards the climax (ibid., 38–43, 54–60). Andersson argues that *symmetry*, often achieved by *foreshadowing*, seems to have been an esthetic element in the narrative structure of the Family Sagas (ibid., 43–53). These literary narrative devices used by an individual saga writer were similar to those used by his continental contemporaries (see Clover 1982a; Tulinius 2002). In continental Europe, *romance* was a form of storytelling that compiled stories into (new) compositions.\(^{152}\) For instance, a twelfth century French troubadour, Chrétien de Troyes, was a self-assertive romance writer who claimed that his craft surpassed that of an ordinary story-teller’s (*conteor*). Eugène Vinaver notes that, “it is […] the art of *composition* in the etymological sense of the term that he [Chrétien] seems to regard as the proper means of turning a mere tale of adventure into a romance” (Vinaver 1971, 37), and that for Chrétien, the purpose of poetic composition seems to have been to give meaning and coherence to amorphous matter (ibid., 68).

This poetic composition could be constructed by using different structural elements. These elements were analyzed by Carol Clover (1982a), who attempted to place Icelandic saga literature within the framework of European literature on the basis of literary criteria. Drawing largely on Eugène Vinaver (1971), Clover considered compositional strategies such as stranding (Clover 1982a, 61–68) and simultaneity (Clover 1982a, 112–115) to be typical of saga literature. According to Clover, these strategies were adaptations from continental literary practices. Both *stranding* and *simultaneity* are concepts used by Clover to describe the technique used in saga narration of accounting for

\(^{152}\) “In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, more perhaps than at any other time in the history of narrative art, the measure of artistry was the ability not to invent new stories, but to build up sequences out of the existing ones. The aim was not creation, in our sense, but re-creation – the elaboration and transmission of inherited material. It was important ‘to hand on the matter worthily’: not worthily of one’s own genius, but of the matter itself.” (Vinaver 1971, 54)
more than one series of incidents that take place at the same time by interweaving passages. This technique is applied in saga literature ranging from minor scenes and sequences of a saga up to compilations of multiple sagas, as is done in the manuscript Flateyjarbók. To elaborate, stranding is both used to serve the chronological development of the narrative but it also functions as an end in itself. Simultaneity involves a narrative technique used to account for more than one series of events that take place simultaneously in two different locations.

According to Clover, Family Sagas were composed with a key episode in mind. This key episode haunted the events recounted both before and after it: “The single Icelandic saga is conceived as a central action or series of actions from which emanates contingent matter in forward and backward unfoldings in the form of prologues, epilogues, genealogical expansions, pendant þættir, and the like” (Clover 1982a, 59). This notice is sufficiently general that it can be said to be valid for most of the Family Sagas, even for chronicle sagas such as Eyrbyggja saga or Vatnsdeila saga. In analytical terms, it is important to note that the “central action” of a saga is often difficult to determine and that it depends on the point of view. For instance, it may be difficult to determine whether Föstbræðra saga should be conceived in terms of the biography of Þormóðr Bersason, Þorgeirr Hávarsson, or both, and the “central action” depends on this determination.

Occasionally, the saga narrative also introduces people or narrates brief stories that do not have an apparent function in the overall plot of the saga. Instead, these *digressions* appear as curiosities or anecdotes that invoke confusion in a modern reader rather than complement the narrative. Nonetheless, such interpretation may be a problem that is limited to modern reception. For instance, N. Austin (1978) demonstrated that the digressions in Homeric literature serve an organic function within the narrative structure. This means that every expansion of an episode was utilised as a way to direct the attention of the receiver or audience.

Like Homeric literature, all information in a Family Saga is supposedly included for a reason. As for the information that does not serve an apparent function in a saga composition, that information can be presumed to have functioned in other dimensions that are somehow connected to saga production. For example, besides being expansions of minor episodes (Clover 1982a), digressions may indicate interest groups intervening in the saga writing at the expense of the narrative. The meaning of these digressions may also be referential either through narratives that have not been put into writing, through texts that have not been preserved or through the context of cultural reality. The relevance
of the context of cultural reality may be difficult to perceive from the perspective of the present day (Meulengracht Sørensen 1993b).

Distinct structural models could be used in the various modes of saga writing. Moreover, multiple modes (biography, chronicle, feud) may be applied simultaneously in a single saga. In reception, the structural models form the framework of expectations for the audience. Next, individual elements that appear in the narration, for instance personage and events, specify and revise these initial expectations. However, the complexity of the saga texts enables multiple differing readings. Already a single scene in a saga may pertain to more than one narrative structure. For example, an act of an individual may have a function in a certain feud but it is also an element in his own biography, and this act may also have significance in several narratives that constitute the body of locally significant histories.

These structural models include, for instance, the conventional narrative structure that accounts for the feuds. This has been described by Theodore Andersson (1968) and Jesse Byock (1984) (see chapter 8.3.1). Biographies loosely follow the structure of a common course of life with the phases typical to an individual in a given social slot. However, a specific sequence in a stereotypical male biography, the young man’s obligatory journey abroad, follows the stereotyped narrative structure referred here to as “Travel Pattern”, which has been described as a structural model in the þættir by Joseph Harris (1972) and as a structural element in the Family Sagas by Lars Lönnroth (1976). The third mode is the chronicle, which is structurally looser, but where the selected personage and events were considered remarkable and relevant to the people living in the described area at the time that the saga was written.

These strategies and models were applied in saga literature to achieve an esthetically and informatively pleasing narrative. They also created horizons of expectation for the audience, which provided a basis for the audience to anticipate the narrative to follow. The role that an individual character assumed in these narrative structures affected the way that he was received by the audience, and the opposite is also true, that a character with a certain reputation was eagerly attributed a role that suited this reputation. This is why whatever one attempts to determine on the basis of the outlaw narratives needs to be analyzed within the larger narrative environment. In the following, I will describe how the different outlaws’ roles in the saga narratives affected their representation and reception.
8.2 Main Characters and Secondary Characters

The analysis and description of a saga character is tightly linked to his position in the saga narrative. A change in the point of view of the saga leads to a different type of representation, even when the narrative material remains the same (Sigurðsson G. 1994b; 2004, 201–246). A main character is the character in the central position throughout a saga narrative. Due to the narrative complexity of the Family Sagas, the main character of a saga is not constantly in focus in the sequences and sections that constitute the saga. As the Family Sagas are predominantly compilations of passages that are interconnected only to a certain extent, and as the focus of the narration may shift from one sequence to the next, it is generally more correct to speak about the focal character of a given sequence. The term “main character” is reserved here solely for the characters that function as the binding force of the whole saga. The reason for this distinction is that even when a saga has only one main character, it may nonetheless have other focal characters in some of its constituent sequences.

In the context of a whole saga, secondary characters are those who do not have a central role in the overall plot. In the case of a biographical saga, all the other characters but the one receiving the overall focus are secondary characters. Secondary characters that do not become focal characters in any of the constitutive sequences of a saga narrative remain exclusively supernumerary characters, who often correspond to the qualities of a stock character. The same applies to characters whose point of view may occasionally be followed for narrative reasons, but who remain anonymous or who are merely given some name without a patronym or other identifiable characteristics. It is worth remembering, however, that from the perspective of the present day, it is often exceedingly difficult to determine whether a given character was not identified with any kin group or district in the period of saga writing, or this identification could be assumed as specific knowledge of the Saga World.

The saga texts that are written in a biographical mode are a case in point, and by definition, they have one main character. Some examples of this type of biographical sagas are Gísla saga, Kròka-Refs saga and Gunnars þáttir Þiðrandabana, and these concentrate predominantly on their main character. By comparison, the focus shifts several times between Þorgeirr Hávarsson and Þormóðr Bersason in Fóstbræðra saga. Yet despite being one of the most biography-like sagas, Grettis saga divides the focus between Grettir and his brothers, Atli and Þorsteinn.
drómundr in the constitutive narrative sequences of the saga (Ahola 2005). As for Family Sagas that predominantly depict a feud, they concentrate on a series of actions in which the actors basically remain the same. As the focus is usually on one of the parties in the conflict, the character(s) in that party who are most significant for the narrative are therefore elevated to the position of a main character and treated accordingly. Finally, sagas of the chronicle mode are not concerned with any one individual. However, there was a strong tendency in the Family Sagas to examine a district or a community through events that were connected to an individual. Characters who are elevated this way, such as Snorri godi in Eyrbyggja saga or Guðrún Ósvifrsdóttir in Laxdæla saga, hold a position that is close to that of a main character of these sagas.

8.2.1 The Sympathetic Narrative Character

The focal character is the character with whom the audience both identifies and develops an emotional relationship. The focal character’s actions receive the most attention in a narrative, which in turn allows the audience to form an opinion of that character. This opinion is predominantly formed on an emotional basis, for instance, through a feeling of sympathy. Sympathy is generally an important factor in the reception of a literary work. Sympathy differs from empathy, which is defined by the literary historian Suzanne Keen (2007, 5) as a feeling of “what we believe to be the emotion of others” in terms of its evaluative element. Empathy can be correspondingly defined as “simply an imaginative reconstruction of another person’s experience” (Nussbaum 2001, 302). The empathetic position of the receiver (audience) makes the receiver incapable of forming objective evaluations of the focal character. Essentially, a large part of the affective power of a narrative in general is based on the receiver’s tendency to identify with the focal character and to judge the accounted action from his or her point of view. Hans Robert Jauss (1982, 172) states that one of the ways that readers identify with a narrative character is sympathetic identification, “knowing from the inside.” Sympathy is therefore defined as the

153 Action described from the point of view of a narrative character is called character-bound focalization or internal focalization (Bal 2009, 147–152). The distinction between external focalization and internal focalization is less illustrative in the case of saga literature, however, than it is in modern literature. This is because in sagas, the narrator conventionally maintains a distance from his subjects, and focalization is definable rather on a quantitative basis than on a qualitative basis: the character that is discussed most is the focal character, or the character in focus.
diminished distance between the receiver and the narrative character (Sklar 2008, 68). Sympathy, like compassion, “includes a judgment that the other person’s distress is bad” (Nussbaum 2001, 302; for further discussion, see Sklar 2008, esp. 74–83). In short, the audience tends to hope for the best for the focal character of a narrative.

A traditional saga character, such as the stock character of an outlaw, is inherently established in the extratextual tradition, which is also the saga writer’s point of departure in his depiction and narrative in a saga text. Thus depicting a character by traditional attributes of a stereotype has two main functions. First, this depiction establishes the given character as being traditional. Second, it strengthens, modifies or reverses the nature of that character in relation to the traditional character in how his depicted actions correspond to the schematic expectations that are connected to the traditional character. An individual narrative character’s actions are evaluated depending upon his initial introduction and upon the traditional model with which the character correlates (see Sklar 2008, 80–81).

The narrator (saga writer) could guide his audience’s sympathies in narration (Keen 2007, 140). The rhetorical techniques used by a saga writer to potentially guide the sympathies of the audience included, following Lars Lönnroth (1976, 99–100; 1989, 87–97), commentary, stylistic variation and staging. In a commentary, the author may either give a direct evaluation of the character, as in the conventionally formulaic introductory descriptions of characters as overbearing, popular, trustworthy, or he may have a narrative character utter such an evaluation. Where a character’s conventional appearance or features are of a typical stock character (for example, of a hero or a villain), these direct the audience’s expectations and their attitude towards that character. The perspective of narration is predominately that of the sympathetic character: he is usually allowed direct speech, his deeds are described in greater detail than those of other characters, and he is often given the last word. In addition, a character who is depicted in homey situations also gains the sympathy of the readers (Lönnroth 1989, 80–83; see also Lönnroth 1963–1964).

The attitude that a saga text expresses toward the main character is, nevertheless, not always unanimously positive. This is especially true for outlaw characters. For instance, the depiction of the title characters of Haensna-Dóris saga or Dórarins þátr ofsa does not reflect an attempt to persuade the audience to feel sympathy towards them. The argument above for a correlation between a character’s position in the narrative and the sympathy he receives nevertheless still remains valid. Even though Haensna-Dórir is the main character of the saga by the same
The focal character is the despised villain of the narrative, whereas the attitude expressed towards Þórarinn ofsi in Þórarins þáttir ofþsa remains rather neutral. One exception to that neutral attitude, however, is when King Óláfr Haraldsson is told to condemn Þórarinn ofsi, and King Óláfr’s opinion is generally considered in the Family Sagas to be authoritative, especially when no counter-arguments accompanied it. Yet it is necessary to consider that only the beginning of Þórarins þáttir ofþsa has been preserved as a fragment and most of the narrative is an object of speculation. By contrast, we do know that Þórarinn ofsi was the slayer of Þorgeirr Hávarsson, one of the two main characters of Fóstbraeðra saga. And, as Guðni Jónsson (1943, lxviii) suggests, Þórarins þáttir ofþsa was perhaps written as an extension of this saga. If we accept Jónsson’s quite plausible suggestion, Þórarins þáttir ofþsa ought to be seen as a sequence of reconciliation in terms of the typical structure of a saga feud as presented by Theodore Andersson (1967). In the sequence of reconciliation in this structural model, the narrative character that needs to be sacrificed in order to gain an equal number of killings on each side of the parties in the conflict can be expected to lose his life. As Þórarinn ofsi caused the imbalance in killings in the first place, his death could not be considered unjustified.

The last moment in which a saga character can win the sympathy of the saga audience is the necrology, or obituary, which is dedicated to the character after his or her death in the narrative. The necrology provides a final retrospective look at the previously accounted deeds of the saga character and may even offer an evaluation of them (Andersson 1967, 60–61). For example, even though the Outlaw Sagas are not parsimonious in their use of rhetorical techniques to elevate the outlaw heroes, the necrologies especially of Grettir Ásmundarson and Hörðr Grímkelsson are extensive with an effusion of praise in their attempt to convince the audience of the outlaws’ excellence (Grettis saga, Ch. 82, 93; Harðar saga, Ch. 41).154

8.2.2 Sympathy towards the Outlaw

A saga writer could affect the way that a saga character was evaluated either by narrating his deeds with approbation, or by presenting them in historical traditions that were less approved of in a narrative environment

154 The necrologies of all Outlaw Sagas are thematically similar, but those in Grettis saga and Harðar saga are formally similar to the extent that this similarity has been considered to be the result of a direct loan from either of the sagas to the other (see Hast 1960, 103).
that justified those deeds. For instance, the disapproved state of outlawry is explained to be caused by ill fate or as being unjust for the main characters of the Outlaw Sagas. It was indeed an essential part of their heroism that their actions were justifiable by moral standards even though the law convicted them. The sympathy towards a narrative character depended on the values that were embedded in the Taleworld or in the frame of reference that the narrative reflected. For example, events that took place in one Taleworld, in this case the Saga World, could be evaluated in different terms, for instance, by referring to Christian values or to heroic values.

In the Outlaw Sagas, the actions that lead to the outlawry of the main character are depicted as being morally acceptable while fate appears as the real factor behind their outlawry. For example, in *Grettis saga*, to save his shipmates following a shipwreck in Norway, Grettir Ásmundarson accidentally causes the burning of the house from which he was fetching fire. The men inside the house are terror-struck by the sight of Grettir, who appears in the middle of the night, covered with frost. Mayhem ensues; fire breaks out, burning down the house, and the people inside perish. The sons of the Icelandic chieftain Þórir Skeggason happen to be among those victims. As a result, Þórir summons Grettir, who is sentenced to outlawry *in absentia*. (*Grettis saga*, Ch. 38.) In other words, the deaths that caused Grettir’s outlawry were accidental and therefore, Grettir was sentenced as an innocent man.

In contrast, Gísli Súrsson was sentenced for a killing that he deliberately committed. However, the killing was justifiable on the basis of the principles of blood vengeance. According to *Gísla saga*, Gísli avenges the death of his brother-in-law Vésteinn. Vésteinn’s killer is not revealed, but the saga indicates that there are two alternatives for his identity: either it was Gísli’s brother Þorkell, or it was his other brother-in-law, Þórgrím. According to the principles of honor, the killing needs to be avenged, and Gísli chooses the only possible target for him – i.e. not his brother but Þórgrím. Because the killer’s identity is not known, Gísli cannot slay Þórgrímr openly (*Gísla saga*, Ch. 16). Later, Gísli is eventually exposed and sentenced (*Gísla saga*, Ch. 19–20).

Even though Hörðr Grimkelsson is depicted in *Harðar saga* as a righteous man who does his best to survive outlawry honorably, the actions that lead to his outlawry are not that easily justified. *Harðar saga* (Ch. 21) recounts that Hörðr’s companion Helgi kills a boy called Sigurðr. Hörðr attempts to reconcile with Sigurðr’s father, Auðr. However, Auðr has already asked Torfí, Hörðr’s uncle who is not that fond of his nephew, to summon Helgi for the killing. Hörðr states that it was an ill deed to make him quarrel with Torfí and, consequently, he
draws a sword and cuts Auðr in two. This killing is not that easy to accept as being justified but still, it is obvious that the saga writer does his best to make Hörðr’s actions seem that way, as will be argued below.

The most common grounds for becoming an outlaw in the Family Sagas are by killing someone. This killing was most often motivated by a will to take revenge, which was a central juridical mechanism and principle as discussed in chapter 5.9. Some were outlawed for avenging the death of an unrelated person for whom they were reported to feel morally responsible.\(^{155}\) Avenging an insult also seems to have been considered to be appropriate in some cases,\(^{156}\) as well as avenging any unjust violations.\(^{157}\) Blood vengeance as such was a completely acceptable means to defend one’s interests, and the circumstances related to vengeance were addressed in the law. This made legislation highly technical, which easily led to a discrepancy between the sense of justice and the legal judgment. This discrepancy becomes evident, for example, in the cases of avenging one’s close relatives such as a brother,\(^{158}\) sworn brother\(^{159}\) or father.\(^{160}\) In the legal system of the Saga World, vengeance was a standard reaction to the death of a relative and even morally expected; for the saga audience, the legality of the circumstances under which vengeance was performed remained secondary. More important were the commitments that engaged one’s honor, such as oaths, like the oath that established sworn-brotherhood. Oaths were highly esteemed in the Saga World, and an oath provided a sufficiently justified basis for instance for a character such as Hrafnkell Freysgoði to kill a person and to retain the sympathy of the narrator of Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða.

To return to the case of Hörðr Grímkelsson, he does not technically avenge his sworn-brother Helgi when he kills the helpless Auðr, who threatened to have Helgi outlawed (Harðar saga, Ch. 21). Instead, the saga writer provides a reasonable explanation for Hörðr’s exaggerated support of his sworn-brother in anticipating Hörðr’s inevitable fate of becoming a sentenced outlaw. Hörðr’s unexpected violent action can be

\(^{155}\) Kolgrímr feeling responsible for his master in Þógrims þáttur Hallasonar; Gunnarr þiðrandabani for his host in Gunnars þáttur þiðrandabana, Fljótsdæla saga; Þróttólfur and Fóstólfr for a man to whom they had promised protection in Vatnsdæla saga.

\(^{156}\) Þórsteinn stangarhögg in Þórsteins þáttur stangarhöggss; Króka-Refs saga in Iceland and in Greenland (Króka-Refs saga); Þórkell in Vatnsdæla saga; and Þórarinn svarti in Eybyggja saga.

\(^{157}\) Sigr Sigridarson in Fóstbræðra saga; Þórólfr in Laxdæla saga.

\(^{158}\) Grímr Droplaugarson in Droplaugarsona saga; and Grettir in Grettis saga (although the sentence was mitigated because Grettir was already an outlaw by the time he had committed the killing).

\(^{159}\) Gisli Súrsson in Gísla saga; Þormóðr Bersason in Fóstbræðra saga.

\(^{160}\) Hrafn in Hrafnis þáttur Guðrúnarsnar and also Víglúss Glúmsson in Víga-Glúms saga, sentenced for avenging his foster father.
explained by his premonition of both Helgi’s sentence and of his own death, and he thus takes his revenge in advance. This interpretation cannot, however, find support in the text but merely in the fact that outlaws were conventionally conceived as possessing the capability to foresee things.

Because quarrels and feuds always had two sides, any killings involved in them could be evaluated and narrated in at least two ways, from two different points of view. Outlawry could also occur if a quarrel arose over the division of collective benefits. This could be the case, for instance, in connection with beached whales, which were conceived as collectively exploitable sources of meat. In this and other types of situations, resorting to violence could lead to outlawry even when violence was resorted to as self-defence. But self-defence as an unjustified reason for outlawry is referred to only in the late Family Sagas and in those sagas that focus on acts of chivalry, which would indicate that self-defence was not a central concept in the Saga World.

Some of the sympathetic outlaws were sentenced for protecting a woman’s honor. For instance, Þórsteinn fagrí apparently kills Einarr in revenge for marrying the girl who was promised to him (Þórsteins saga hvíta, Ch. 6), which is, in fact, a very common cause of conflict. Furthermore, men could even be outlawed for deeds they either committed unintentionally or were guiltless of. For example, Óspakr kills his young friend, thinking he was an attacking enemy, and is consequently sentenced to outlawry (Bandamanna saga, Ch. 4). In addition, there are two sympathetic outlaws in Víga-Glúms saga and Reykdæla saga who are actually framed for killing.

In the Outlaw Sagas, not only are the incidents that led to the outlawry sometimes problematic, but the court sessions in which

---

161 Eiríkr in Eiríks saga rauða; Grimr Helguson in Grettis saga; Vermundr in Finnboga saga ramma.
162 Þorgeirr Hávarsson was sentenced after killing Þorgils Máksson in a quarrel over rights to a stranded whale (Fóstbræðra saga, Ch. 7; Grettis saga, Ch. 27); and so was Klængr in Víga-Glúms saga.
163 Trausti and Viglundr in Viglundar saga; Búi in Kjalnesinga saga.
164 Kolr in Flóamanna saga; Króka-Refr in Norway (Króka-Refs saga, Ch. 16); Þórðr hreða in Póðar saga hreðu (Ch. 5).
165 According to Hánsna-Þóris saga (Ch. 6), Hánsna-Þórir incited men to burn Blund-Ketill in his house after Ketill accidentally shot an arrow into a group that Hánsna-Þórir had gathered for his support and brought to Ketill’s farm in order to summon him for theft on false premises, and the arrow accidentally hit a boy called Helgi, who had actually supported Ketill. Note also that Gunnarr Þiðrandabani in Gunnars þáttr Þiðrandabana (Ch. 3) shot Þiðrandi accidentally, apparently attempting to shoot anyone in the group who was responsible for killing his host.
166 Guðbrandr in Víga-Glúms saga; Háls Fjörleifarson in Reykdæla saga.
sentencing occurred may be as well. Such circumstances provided sympathy to the outlaws in narration. Grettir Ásmundarson was sentenced against the general opinion and against the law when Grettir’s prosecutor, Þórir, prosecuted his claim by force (Grettis saga, Ch. 46). In Norway, Grettir was given an opportunity to prove his innocence by performing the ordeal of holding a hot stone in his hand, but a young boy caused him to fail by making him lose his temper (Grettis saga, Ch. 39).\(^{167}\) Losing one’s temper at a crucial moment is likewise a factor in the outlawry of Gísli Súrsson and Hörðr Grimkelsson. At a moment of tension in the middle of a ball game, Gísli reveals in a boasting poem that he is guilty of killing Þorgrímr. Gísli’s sister hears the poem and spreads this information, which leads to his outlawry (Gísla saga, Ch. 18). Hörðr’s fatal, violent fury during his discussion with Auðr also seems to come out of nowhere (Harðar saga, Ch. 21). Both Gísli and Hörðr accuse their brothers-in-laws of being incapable at the court session where they were not allowed to participate themselves. This incapability was the ultimate reason for their outlawry because the court session was not fair to begin with. (Gísla saga, Ch. 21; Harðar saga, Ch. 21.)

The unjust (and hence, unsympathetic) actions that led to the outlawry of the outlaw heroes was explained by an apparent involvement of fate, which resembles the Homeric concept of áte, defined by Eric Dodds as, “action of a hero that leads to his downfall.” Áte labels mysterious forces and, as Dodds argues, “unsystematized, non-rational impulses, and the acts resulting from them, tend to be excluded from the self and ascribed to an alien origin.” (Dodds 1967, ix; quot. Friedrich 1977, 299.) The irrational deeds that lead to the outlawry of the heroes of the Outlaw Sagas could be conceived as being of external origin and became explainable as the involvement of fate, which excused the heroes morally if not legally.

8.2.3 The Outlaw as a Secondary Character

As discussed above, a focal character in a saga remains a secondary character if the overall focus of the saga is on another character. An example of these dynamics is Óspakr in Eyrbyggja saga. This saga is a rather loose compilation of local and family traditions in the district of Eyri. This saga narrates many conflicts between people and gives added local color with details from the local traditions. Thematically, the saga

\(^{167}\) This boy is referred to in the text as óhreinn andi, an unclean spirit, which does not have a place in the Church or the ritual environment in the Saga World.
revolves predominantly, though not solely, around the character of Snorri godi, a famous chieftain. Öspakr appears in the later part of the saga when it is told that he moves to the district. Öspakr turns out to be a troublesome man and the saga tells about his ravaging in the district. The narrative concentrates on the events he is involved in, and it even acknowledges his significance. However, the little sympathy that he receives is recollected by Snorri goði after he decides to bring Öspakr down (Eyrbyggja saga, Ch. 61–62). In short, Öspakr is a secondary character in the saga and his presence is primarily motivated by the connection to Snorri and by the possibility to celebrate Snorri’s capability by depicting how he overcomes Öspakr. Nevertheless, Öspakr’s story is detailed and lively enough to consider him having been the main character in some sort of a narrative, possibly in oral form, of which the saga account is a faint reflection. In contrast, Hrafn, who appears as a companion on Öspakr’s side, is never given a proper role in the narrative. Even though he had apparently been notorious in the district, he merely remains a name without deeper characterization in the saga.

A secondary character can be defined only in relation to the main character or focal character. In narratives about outlawry, the relations of outlaws as secondary characters to the focal character can be divided into seven types in three categories as follows:

Harmful relation to the focal character

Opponents of the focal character display their negative relation through feuding against the focal character, which means that the opponents constitute the antipode or antagonists of the focal character.\(^\text{168}\) The opponent may attempt to assassinate the focal character, usually on someone else’s orders, and therefore acts as an agent of the opponent.\(^\text{169}\) In several cases, the opponent’s agents appear to the focal character in successive sequences and in parallel, often stereotyped forms, and this reflects their narrative conventionality. As a bad advisor, an outlaw housed by the focal character can be even more harmful to the focal character’s reference group than as an assassin.\(^\text{170}\)

\(^\text{168}\) Öspakr in Bandamanna saga; Hænsna-börir in his own saga; Þórólfr in Bolla þáttir Bollasonar; Eysteinn Máason in Reykðela saga.
\(^\text{169}\) Þórleifr in Eyrbyggja saga; Þorgrím and Borbjörn in Finnboga saga ramma; Grimr and Þórir rauðskeggr in Grettis saga; Grimr, Óláfr and Þorgautr in Reykðela saga; Þórir in Vamsdela saga.
\(^\text{170}\) Hrappr in Íjáls saga.
Passive relation to the focal character

In a passive relation, an outlaw is neither for nor against the focal character but may serve as a catalyst to action in which the focal character is involved or as a narrative agent who reveals the characteristics of the focal character. Hence, an outlaw may kindle the smoldering conflict at hand as an extraneous agent. An outlaw can also provide an opportunity for a (young) man to prove his worthiness by killing the outlaw who is a threat to society. In this function, an outlaw elevates his killer in the narrative to a figure who protects society.

Helpful relation to the focal character

An outlaw may also appear into a saga narrative as an unexpected aid, helper of the focal character. Within the Saga World, helping and asking for help are often related as forms of social exchange. Help may be offered but reciprocity is often expected, and a request for help includes a promise for something in exchange as well. Minimizing one’s own personal loss counts as a positive result, as in the case of helping a relative in a conflict that potentially threatens the family honor and a conflict that would also affect the helper’s status. Correspondingly, a successful result in these cases results in gaining honor in relation to the opponent in the conflict. However, many apparent helpers turn out to be agents of the opponent; assassins often appear in such role. More often, outlaws attempt to be receivers of help from the focal character, either for the sake of mercy, or due to family ties, or in exchange for a service. Helping usually adds to the honor of the focal character.

The main character of a Family Saga can appear as a secondary character in the saga’s individual sequences and he can therefore be

---

171 Gunnarr Píröðrandabani in Laxdæla saga; Pórolfr in Laxdæla saga; Pórir Akraskeggr in Ljósvetninga saga.
172 Svartr in Vápnróðinga saga; Grettir in Grettis saga, Ch. 67–68; Pórolfr Heljarskinn and Pórolfur Sleggja in Vatnsdæla saga; Óspakr Kjallaksson and Hrafni in Eyrbyggja saga; Jorgeirr Gyrligskeggr in Hjarðar saga; Hánefr in Reykdæla saga; Önundr in Hálfs saga (Sweden); Atli and Kolr in Njáls saga (Sweden); these correspond in narrative function to the berserks in Norway that the saga heroes defeat and, in doing so, they gain fame and favor from their king.
173 Vermundr in Finnboga saga ramma; Ásbjörn functions as a helper of the focal character when Skúta hires him as an assassin in Reykdæla saga, but in Viga-Íglums saga, which narrates the same events from the point of view of Skúta’s opponent, Ásbjörn functions reversely as an agent of Viga-Íglumr’s opponent.
174 Kolr in Flóamanna saga; Vermundr in Finnboga saga ramma; Veglægr in Fóstbæðra saga; Grímr Helguson in Laxdæla saga; Gunnarr Píröðrandabani in Laxdæla saga; Pórolfr in Laxdæla saga.
treated and interpreted in these sequences in a wholly different light, although usually with recognizable features. This is a reflection of the multivoicedness of the Family Sagas. A saga entity is a compilation of minor structures, and for this reason, the whole work is not necessarily the primary structure when it comes to characters’ positions in an individual sequence. *Grettís saga* is a good example, even if rather extreme: Grettir has many roles in the saga. Grettir’s feats in conquering otherworldly threats on behalf of people are heroic, but many of his acts towards his fellow countrymen display arrogance and quarrelsomeness. This is highlighted in the final sequence of Grettir’s biography, in which he can be interpreted as an outright monster. (R. Harris 1973; Ahola 2005, 194–195; see also Hume 1974, 470; Óskar Halldórsson 1982; see also chapter 14.4.)

As I mentioned earlier in this analysis, the structure of a saga is hierarchical. The sequences in a saga can be characterized as key sequences, binding sequences and digressive sequences. *Key sequences* are essential to the overall plot of the saga, whereas *binding sequences* function in a subordinate position in relation to the key sequences. Sometimes the actions of the protagonists are explicable only in contrast to larger structures of the saga. For instance, the roles of Þórgírmr nef in *Gísla saga* are primarily those of his forging the fateful spear, which became the tool in the killings that led to Gísli Súrsson’s outlawry, and his putting a curse upon the then-unknown killer of Þórgírmr godi (*Gísla saga*, Ch. 11, Ch. 18). These are both acts that contribute to the events that constitute Gísli’s biography. Þórgírmr nef’s secondary role in the saga is his being a member of Gísli’s opponent party. The primary roles of Þórgírmr nef explain why Gísli attacked and killed him at his first opportunity, even though the immediate narrative context would suggest that it was because he just happened to be a nearby opponent.

The outcome of a saga is derived as a sum of its parts, but the function of some sequences is to connect the constituent key sequences to the whole narrative. Examples of this technique for cohesion are the scene in *Fóstriðrá saga* (Ch. 8, Flateyjarbók redaction), in which Þormóðr departs from Þorgeirr, and the scene in *Grettís saga* (Ch. 41), in which Þorkell drómundr predicts he is going to avenge Grettir even though his arms are lean. These scenes include prefiguring utterances that initialize the subsequent key sequences and that connect these sequences to the overall plot.

Digressive sequences are connected to the main plot of a saga only secondarily and they do not serve to bind separate sequences together. Sequences or scenes can be argued to be digressive only in terms of the larger narrative structures of a saga (especially in feud narratives or
biographies) since, as discussed above, every passage in a saga is assumed to have been included for a reason.

8.2.4 The Varying Position of a Character

Historical tradition was able to provide the saga with actors to occupy the required roles, but in some cases, actors could also be found from the bulk of stock characters, or from among the group of well-known people who populated the Saga World. These two groups were not fully distinct: there were distinctive personages who were established to the degree of becoming sketches of themselves. Carol Clover (1982a, 69–70) suggests that, “Once introduced, characters can be recalled into the action, as either central or side actors, whenever and as often as the story requires or the narrator wishes.” Clover discusses the sagas’ internal referential economy as an artistic virtue (ibid., 70) but the “recalling,” which Clover mentions, was not necessarily limited to the saga text itself. Instead, popular characters from the Saga World could be brought into a saga without further explanation, on the basis of a mere distinctive quality. For instance, Geistr Oddleifsson, who was a renowned wise man (*Njáls saga*, Ch. 103; *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, Ch. 4), was chosen in *Gísla saga* (Ch. 6) for the person who utters predictive words about the disaster falling upon the family of Gísli Súrsson, and Snorri godi seems to appear in *Grettis saga* (Ch. 49, 51, 68) merely in order to articulate the positive attitude of a respected chieftain towards the accomplishments of Grettir Ásmundarson (Ahola 2005, 108–109).

The characteristics of a saga character seldom seem to differ considerably in different texts. Narrative characters from the Saga World may have been connected to given features, or the features that were assigned to them in a dominating (perhaps written) piece of narrative followed them to other narratives as well. Nevertheless, a narrative character’s features were not fundamentally transformed in another narrative even though his role may differ in the other narrative.

The outlaw Grímr, who appears in *Grettis saga* and in *Laxdæla saga*, may serve as an example. According to *Grettis saga* (ch. 62), Grímr killed Grettir Ásmundarson’s friend, a trollish figure known as Hallmundr. In the saga, Grímr is thus assigned the role of the opponent of the main character, Grettir. Notwithstanding this, Grímr is the focal character throughout the sequence (*Grettis saga*, Ch. 62) and he is depicted in a favorable way. In the same connection, the writer of *Grettis saga* refers to the account in *Laxdæla saga* (Ch. 57) in which Grímr is depicted as an outlaw living in the wilderness. According to this
saga, the man named Þorkell Eyjólfsson attempts to kill Grimr but is unable to, and ends up transporting Grimr to safety in Norway. Grimr is praised in *Laxdæla saga*, too. It appears rather clear that while writing this account, the writer of *Grettis saga* had in mind the character depicted in *Laxdæla saga*. (See Ahola 2011.)

Another example is Þorgeirr Hávarsson, who is depicted consistently as a crude, ascetic and impulsive warrior in all accounts where he is mentioned in (*Fóstbræðra saga* and *Grettis saga*). These features motivate most actions he is associated with, and the additions made to the saga in Flateyjarbók reinforce this characterization (Meulengracht Sørensen 1993b, 1994). Moreover, the account in *Grettis saga* (Ch. 50), in which Grettir is forced to stay at the same farm together with Þorgeirr Hávarsson, is implemented in a way that supports this characterization of Þorgeirr Hávarsson. The confrontation of the two proud and obstinate champions is depicted as a series of symbolic struggles in which their personal characteristics become visible. The writer of *Grettis saga* seems to have known *Fóstbræðra saga* and it is possible that Þorgeirr’s characterization in *Grettis saga* was adopted from the version that was represented in Flateyjarbók (Jónsson G. 1943, lxvi–lxviii).

The roles of outlaws need to be interpreted against the possible numerous narrative structures of differing extent. Only seldom does the appearance of an outlaw in a single sequence have relevance in that connection alone. In such a case, the sequence ought to be fully digressive in relation with the overall plot of the saga, and this is rare. The following sections will discuss the roles in which outlaws appear in two characteristic structural patterns of the Family Sagas, namely in the conflict structure and in the biography.

### 8.3 Narrative Roles

The variety in representation of a traditional (conventional) outlaw character follows the differences in its roles in saga narrative. Different roles require different qualities of the characters enacting them. As the character appears in numerous roles, the range of its qualities expands. In order to understand a character, it is necessary to understand the prerequisites that the roles in which he appears pose upon him. Outlawry in the Family Sagas is posited between two extremes: either outlawry is a tragedy to a valiant man or it is a just consequence of a man’s true nature. In the case of outlawry being a *tragedy to a valiant man*, outlawry seems like a task or an obstacle, and overcoming it is a way for the sentenced man to demonstrate his capabilities and superiority. In the
case of outlawry being a *deserved and just consequence* of the deeds and the nature of the person in question, the characteristics of the outlaw are in accordance with the deeds that led to his outlawry and therefore, his outlawry appears as an inherent quality. This division reflects the different narrative roles that an outlaw may occupy in the Family Sagas, and the role almost directly reflects the outlaw’s position as either the focal character or as a secondary character.

In the Aristotelian discourse, characters are discussed from the point of view of the plot (*mythos*). They are not considered as sets of personal qualities which explain and determin the characters’ actions and responses to situations within the plot (Aristotle 2007, 13). The approach to the narrative characters as elements of the narrative structure was the approach of the literary critic Vladimir Propp as well.

In Propp’s discussion, a narrative consists of the described actions of personae. These personae have roles in the narrative according to their actions, which Propp gathered further into spheres of action. (Propp 1968, 79.) The spheres of action are basically abstracted sets of different types of action that determine the characters’ roles within a narrative. Vladimir Propp claimed that certain spheres of action in fairy tales are recurrent and conventional, such as those of the villain, donor (provider), helper, princess and her father, dispatcher, hero and false hero (Propp 1968, 79–80). Propp discussed folk tales from the point of view of stereotyped structural sequences, functions (ibid., 79), that served as evidence for his point that the personae who perform spheres of action in a narrative can be rather random and selected by the general qualities associated with the group that they represent.

Semiotician A. J. Greimas further personified the narrative-oriented spheres of action by relabeling them as *actants*. According to Greimas, an actant is the abstract character that personifies the sphere of action that Propp discussed. In a concrete piece of narrative, the actant role needs to be filled by a specific actor. The actant roles can be filled by actors of any imaginable quality as long as they can fulfil the requirements of the actant role as characters: “If an actant can be manifested in discourse by several actors, the converse is equally possible, just one actor being able to constitute a syncretism of several actants” (Greimas 1987, 107; cf. Propp 1968, 80–82).

### 8.3.1 Roles in a Conflict Structure

The study of structural morphology, discussed above in connection with Vladimir Propp, was further developed and applied in western
folklore, primarily and foremost by Alan Dundes (1963, 1965). At the same time, Theodore Andersson worked on the structural morphology of the Family Sagas. Andersson’s work (1967) was an attempt to theorize the narrative structure of saga literature even though Andersson never was clear about the theoretical framework within which he worked (Harris 1972, 2–4).

Andersson suggested that a structural model based on bilateral conflict was the basis for all saga literature. This structural model is divisible into morphological units that he labeled introduction, conflict, culmination, revenge, arbitration, reconciliation, and aftermath. (Andersson 1967, 6–29.) The first unit provides an introduction of the protagonists and often an anticipation of the following action. According to Andersson, the conflict “gives the saga its special character, its narrative unity, and its dramatic tension” (1967, 11). The function of the conflict section in a saga narrative is to motivate and describe the irritation between the confronting parties, usually consisting of an erotic rivalry, theft, insult or homicide. According to Andersson, the conflict leads to a culmination in all but five sagas (1967, 16). The simplest, plain form of culmination is a violent confrontation that leads to the death of one of the antagonists. Revenge was the violent reaction of the injured party to this culmination. The revenge was occasionally legally justified by having the target of revenge outlawed. Reconciliation was the necessary element in a conflict pattern in order to regain balance, to close the conflict narrative. Reconciliation was reached by allowing either party to unilaterally decide the terms under which the reconciliation was reached, by nominating an arbitrator to find solution, or by leaving the case to an arbitrating commission. Saga narrative is typically closed by an aftermath that does not have a function in the conflict narrative but rather gives an account of possible later vicissitudes of the protagonists or their descendants.

Jónas Kristjánsson criticizes Andersson’s model on the basis that it hardly covers even the Family Sagas, much less other saga genres (Kristjánsson J. 1988, 98–99). However, Andersson’s theory was influential even if it was not fully descriptive of all Family Sagas. Carol Clover illustratively describes the principle of the theory: “The sagas subscribe to a principle of open composition. The whole has no fixed shape, but is a flexible structure that can be adjusted to the needs of a particular story or the whims of an individual narrator.” (Clover 1982a, 27.) The flexibility of the structure was emphasized by Andersson’s pupil Jesse Byock. Byock divided the structural units proposed by Andersson into smaller constituent units, grounding this approach on the shortcomings of Andersson’s theory: “This proposed structure, which is
ill-fitting in many cases, serves only to summarize the action rather than
to tell us anything about the particular nature of Icelandic narrative”
(Byock 1982, 50).

Byock was influenced by so-called Oral-Formulaic Theory that had
been introduced by Albert B. Lord in The Singer of the Tales (1960).
One of the basic principles of this theory was that lengthy epic poems,
such as those of the Serbo-Croatian epics, were composed while they
were being performed. This composition-in-performance leaned upon
traditional narrative units (which Lord called “themes”) that were
utilized in the composition of the poems (Lord 1960, esp. 68–98).
Byock suggests that the Family Sagas were compiled in a similar
manner. Byock points out that they may have numerous parallel conflicts
instead of one central one, and he suggests that the saga texts were
compiled by combining three active narrative elements (feudemes) that
he labeled conflict, advocacy and resolution. According to Byock, these
feudemes also define the medieval Icelandic feud process and its
reconciliation (Byock 1982, 57–59). Connected together, feudemes form
scenes and episodes. Moreover, they can be expanded by attaching travel
units either before or after them. “Feudemes combine to form clusters
which are usually separated from another by shifts in location, character,
season, and time.” (Byock 1982, 114.) Hence, Byock defines the
feudeme cluster basically in the same terms that Carol Clover had
defined the scene (see chapters 7.3 and 8.1.1), and he continues:

Because saga narratives progress by clusters, the focus at any
one time is on the conflict or the resolution in the cluster at
hand rather than on the first major conflict or the final
resolution in the saga. This narrative strategy freed the
sagaman to develop the tale as he composed without having to
memorize a fixed saga-long structure, and it was suitable
whether the sagaman was writing or telling his story. (Byock
1982, 115.)

Byock rightly stresses the flexibility of the structural models that
were applied in saga composition. However, in any saga, there are
numerous passages that only secondarily if at all may be interpreted as
feudemes. Moreover, the feudemes, feudeme clusters and cluster chains
may be used to describe a saga’s minor structures, which are discussed in
the present study in terms of scenes and episodes, but they are not
similarly suitable for describing the overall structure of a saga. The
applicability of the feudemes as analytical tools is limited. They cannot
be used in the analysis of saga narratives that represent other modes than
the feud mode or in the analysis of the narrative structures that are larger than a sequence. This is the reason that they are not used in this study.

The conflict structure of saga narration presupposes the implementation of certain actant roles. According to Lars Lönnroth, the feud of *Njáls saga* has the following dramatic roles, which occasionally intermingle: “hero,” “prima donna,” “wise counsellor,” “brother-in-arms,” “villain,” “villain’s helper,” “messenger,” “witness,” “agent of fate,” and “judge or arbitrator” (Lönnroth 1976, 61). The hero, his borthers-in-arms, the villain and the villain’s helpers form the two conflicting parties. The *prima donna* is typically the cause of a conflict. The mediating characters (such as the messenger, witness and judge or arbitrator) have central roles in the saga feuds because of the often juridical nature of these feuds. The Family Sagas utilize narrative characters that prefigure events (the agent of fate and the wise counsellor) as narrative devices (for further discussion, see Ahola 2009a).

In the Family Sagas, the focal character (“hero”) presents the standard in relation to which the other actant roles are possible to define. Hermann Pálsson (1974, 28–32) defined those actant roles that are connected to the death of a hero as follows: the “instigators” who urge others to kill the hero, “attackers,” “mitigators” who try in vain to protect the hero, “spectators” and “avengers.” All of the characters who fill these roles may have different roles in the overall saga, and their roles can be further abstracted into enemies and friends. The instigators and attackers are opponents of the hero but only seldom can they be called villains: in the Family Sagas, the juxtaposition of roles is seldom so strict. The hero is often separated from the villain merely by perspective.

In contrast, William Ian Miller (1984, 105–106) defined the roles in narratives about lawsuits as “settlers,” “heroes” and “ójafnaðarmenn” (“overbearing men”). Conventionally depicted actors typically occupy these roles. The settlers have laid the ground for a conflict by creating the circumstances that are being threatened in the initiation of that conflict. The blood-thirsty and vengeful heroes and the overbearing ójafnaðarmenn are the roles that instigate skirmishes. These skirmishes are one prerequisite for conflict narratives. These groupings are not categorical in the Family Sagas but rather represent the saga characters’ different attitudes towards their fellow humans.

In those saga narratives that do not focus upon the vicissitudes of an individual but have a wider perspective on a feud, outlawry is generally
treated as one type of act of aggression. In contrast, in those sagas that focus on individuals, outlawry appears as an extended heroic final stand of the main character. An outlaw is always the defeated party in a legal feud, and in being banished from society, the outlaw becomes an outsider to social conflicts. As a main character in a saga, he is the tragic hero, whereas when appearing as a secondary character in a conflict narrative, his possible roles are more diverse. Outlaws appear as brothers-in-arms mainly for other men who are in the same position, who are of the same social rank. Conversely, the outlaw’s social rank may rise if he acts as a comrade-in-arms for a socially superior person. For example, in Finnboga saga ramma (Ch. 41–42) the outlaw Vermundr proves his worth by standing by his helper at a moment of need in the conflict between Finnbogi and Brandr Vermundarson. Actually, Vermundr had caused the conflict by appealing for refuge with Finnbogi. Hence, Vermundr merely does what could be expected but nevertheless, his efforts are valued highly in the saga narrative.

The difference in social status between outlaws and free men usually prevented them from being equal opponents. However, men like Óspakr Kjallaksson in Eyrbyggja saga were secondary characters who were nevertheless capable of harassing their fellow men and still protecting themselves to the degree that they were considered to be a considerable inconvenience or opponents worthy of the focal character, which in this case was Snorri godi. A villain can be defined by his function to prove the valiance of the hero by being defeated by him. Such is the case with most land-cleansing episodes in the Family Sagas, in many of which the villain is an outlaw. Good examples are the two Þórólfs in Vatnsdæla saga (Ch. 28, 30), both of whom are notorious thieves and hence, acceptable prey for the young chieftains of Vatnsdalr who are pursuing recognition.

Outlaws often function as helpers of the major characters in saga narratives. Typically, they serve as assassins who are mainly used by the

---

175 Especially Eyrbyggja saga; Bolla þáttr Bollasonar, Ch. 84–87; Droplaugarsona saga, Ch. 14.
176 But note that the conventional connotations of moral superiority, righteousness or of the function as an exemplary character do not apply to this kind of use of the term “hero.”
177 Other examples are Eilífr in Ljósvetninga saga; Þórir Ketilsön in Reykdæla saga; Ýsteinn in Reykdeila saga.
178 Other examples include Svartr in Vápnfirðinga saga, Þórolfr in Bolla þáttr Bollasonar and Þorgeirr gyvölskeggi in Harðar saga. Þorgeirr gyvölskeggi is not an opponent of the main character of the saga but he receives only little sympathy from the narrator in spite of being a comrade-in-fate of the main character, Hörðr Grimkelsson. The viking berserks that the saga heroes kill abroad belong to this group. For instance, Hrútr kills an outlawed son of a jarl of Gautland, who is a fierce viking (Njáls saga, Ch. 5; a corresponding account is found in Ch. 82).
opponents of the main characters in the sagas. This implies that the utilization of outlaws for questionable deeds was considered a dishonorable way to solve problems.\textsuperscript{179} The Family Sagas notably seldom report successful assassinations. Instead, the assassins usually appear in the Family Sagas in order to provide instances in which the focal character survives a threatening situation with his luck or ability. In \textit{Finnboga saga ramma} (Ch. 39, 41) and \textit{Grettis saga} (Ch. 55, 56), assassins appear to the focal characters as successive pairs, which emphasizes the stereotyped nature of this actant type.

The outlawry of a person called for solidarity on behalf of his in-group (see chapter 9.1). If this solidarity was shown, it could shake the established relations between the outlaw’s in-group and other groups. In the saga narratives, the relations between groups often manifest in the relations between individuals – even those between spouses. According to \textit{Laxdæla saga} (Ch. 14–15), a man called Hallr has a fishing company together with a wanderer (nálega lausingi) called Þórólfr. They disagree over the division of a catch, and Þórólfr beheads his companion. He seeks refuge with his relative, the lady called Vigdíis. Vigdíis’s husband intends to turn Þórólfr in for money. Vigdíis manages to get Þórólfr to safety, but the relationship of the married couple is ruined and Vigdíis soon announces their divorce. This event brings the tension between the families of Þórðr gellir and Höskuldr to its peak and initiates an open conflict, which has a fundamental role in the overall plan of the saga. Another example is in \textit{Ljósvetninga saga} (Ch. 14–16). According to this saga, the distributing of the confiscated property of the outlawed Þórir Ækraskeggr is the initiation of the conflict between Guðmundur inn riki and Þórir Helgason that becomes the focal conflict of the saga. Still another example is Gunnarr’s outlawry and death in \textit{Njáls saga} (Ch. 73). It functions as a phase in the process that leads to the eventual death of Njáll’s family, the dramatic centre of the saga. The final example is Hánefr’s sentencing to outlawry for sheep theft in \textit{Reykdæla saga} (Ch. 4). This sentence initiates a series of violent encounters between chieftains, and “few considered it a loss when he died” (Ch. 6).\textsuperscript{180}

Chris Callow (2004) discussed Norwegians as narrative actors in the Family Sagas. Callow notices that the Norwegians often occupy the same neutral actant roles as outlaws do by being socially incompetent

\textsuperscript{179} An exception is Snorri godi, who as the main character in \textit{Eyrbyggja saga} seems to have hired an assassin (Ch. 36) but he did so only after assassins had made an attempt on his life; clearer cases are those in which the following outlaws were hired as assassins: Þorbjörn and Þorgirmr in \textit{Finnboga saga ramma}; Kolhakr in \textit{Fóstbræðra saga}; Grímr and Þórir ravðskeggr in \textit{Grettis saga}; Ónundur in \textit{Hallfreðar saga}; Þórir in \textit{Vatnsdæla saga}; Grímr, Óláfr, Þorgautr in \textit{Reykdæla saga}; Æsbjörn in \textit{Reykdæla saga} and \textit{Víga-Glúms saga}. \textsuperscript{180} “Þótti þat fám mœnnum skaði, þó at hann væri dreppinn.”
and politically neutral characters to whom the Icelanders prove superior in an ethnocentric fashion: “The Icelandic audience of the sagas expected generic Norwegians to be marginal and weak like the old, the young, women, outlaws, and slaves” (Callow 2004, 329). Callow is correct stating that “the appearance of Norwegians in saga narratives represents a conscious choice by the author to mention austmenn [Norwegians]” (ibid., 327). However, the social and political neutrality that was required of the actor in an action-launching actant role could be embodied in several alternatives – foreigners, ghosts, trolls, slaves and, it has to be emphasized here, in outlaws.

8.3.2 Roles in a Biography Structure

A saga narrative consists of selected threads of a network of events that are acted out by certain individuals. Conversely, the biographies of these individuals constitute the network of events. Theoretically, each saga character is the main character of his or her biography. Whereas the feud descriptions (conflict narratives) may have numerous equally important focal characters, biographies by definition only have one main character. The narratives about a saga character’s career were construed following a conventional model of a biography, within the given social circumstances of the Saga World, and in the framework of historical knowledge about the individual.

Biography is a central structural mode in the Family Sagas. The model for biographical texts was familiar to the saga writers already from saints’ lives and the Kings’ Sagas, which preceded the Family Sagas as literary genres. The first secular narratives written in Iceland were biographies of the kings of Norway, but quite plausibly, the written biographies of the Icelanders of the Saga Age had predecessors also in the oral tradition that prevailed prior to the time that the biographies were put into writing (Sigurðsson G. 2004, esp. 328–330; Andersson 2006, 16).

These branches of biographical writing also depict the two premises that seem to have had impact on the selection of the subjects of the biographical sagas and on the way that they were represented. First, a notable family background established the subject as having a remarkable position in society. This position justified his presentation as the focus of a saga, but only if his biography enabled a compelling narrative in terms of a Family Saga. Second, intriguing vicissitudes,
which suited the literary taste and generic expectations of the time that
the saga was written, seem to have been justifiable grounds for a
biography to be refined into a saga. For example, literary historian
William Paton Ker notes that the tragedy of outlawry is utilized in
Grettis saga and Gísla saga to dramatic ends in the extreme:

There are two sagas in which a biographical theme is treated in
such a way that the story produces one single impressive and
tragical effect, leaving the mind with a sense of definite and
necessary movement towards a tragic conclusion – the story of
Grettir the Strong, and the story of Gisli the Outlaw. These
stories have analogies to one another, though they are not cast
in quite the same manner. (Ker 1957, 163.)

The privileged background of the sagas’ eponymous characters
highlighted this tragedy and the tragedy also resonated with the
concurrent cultural circumstances. This is recognizable in the
biographies’ resemblances to accounts in other literary genres, as will be
discussed in the third part of this book.

A stereotypical, schematic male biography, as depicted in the Family
Sagas, includes the following phases:

• The narrative provides information about the individual that extends
from preceding generations, often from the generation that settled in
Iceland, down through numerous generations of descendants. The
depictions of ancestors often seem to be selected and treated in a way
that supports the biography that is treated in the saga (see chapter 10.2).

• Events connected to the subject before his adulthood can be included as
well, often on the same grounds (see Jakobsson 2003, esp. 21–22). For
instance, Grettis saga (Ch. 14) and Harðar saga (Ch. 7) establish the
essential traits of the eponymous characters in the accounts of their
youth.

• A journey abroad, or to Norway, seems to have been an expectation of a
young man from a good family. An Icelander who should become
noteworthy (having a good family as well as decent physical and mental
qualities) and who travels abroad is expected to have a successful, fame-
bringing journey.\footnote{This was conceived to be true in spite of a sentence or impending sentence of outlawry, as
expressed in the prophetic words that Njáll utters to Gunnarr after he is sentenced to lesser
outlawry, persuading him to leave the country in accordance with the sentence: “And just like
your former journey abroad brought you great honor, this one will bring you even greater
honor” (“Ok svá sem þér varð in fyrri utanferð þín mikil til sæmodar, þá mun þér þó sjá verða
miklu meir til sæmodar”) (Njáls saga, Ch. 74). See also chapter 8.3.3.}

186
• A sufficiently prominent young man was expected to get married and to start running a farm, at which point he was expected to participate the societal activities. These activities could then initiate the possible conflict focused on in the saga about this person.
• Death is the eventual terminal point of a biography.
• Description of the subject’s death is often followed by a list of acknowledged descendants.

Outlawry disrupts this expected course of life dramatically. Whereas lesser outlawry causes an obligatory halt or delay in an individual’s career (or provides an opportunity to travel to Norway), full outlawry generally has two alternative consequences: death or emigration. Often, a representative of one family group urges the individual to make a journey abroad at a moment when the hostility of another group is a strong enough reason to prompt the journey, even without a legal obligation. For example, Þorkell krafla (Vatnsdæla saga, Ch. 42–43) was sent to Norway after killing a man even though he could not be sentenced because he was less than twelve years old. He was evidently sent away in order to calm things down.

8.3.3 The Travel Pattern

Young Icelandic males’ visits to Norway are recounted in a conventional manner in the saga literature. Joseph Harris brought attention to these patterned narratives in his article “Genre and Narrative Structure in Some Íslendinga þættir” (1972). These þættir tell of young Icelanders whose worthiness is questioned by a foreign ruler. The Icelanders prove their capability by performing remarkable deeds after which they travel back to Iceland. Joseph Harris’ study was based on 31 short stories, or þættir, in which he observed a common narrative structure. Taking his departure from Vladimir Propp’s ideas of the morphology of folk tales and the work of Theodore Andersson on the structure of Family Sagas, Harris (1972, 7) discerned six structural phases or functions in the narrative structure of the þættir: 1) Introduction 2) Journey in 3) Alienation 4) Reconciliation 5) Journey out 6) Conclusion. He found this sequence “employed in a highly straightforward manner” in about half of his corpus whereas the rest varied it somewhat. However, this variation remained within limits that justified considering all of the þættir to be “variants of a single plot structure” (1972, 20). (See also chapter 6.4.)

This pattern is not exclusive to the rather short þættir but instead, it forms a structural element also in extensive sagas. Lars Lönnroth (1976,
71) refers to a very similar pattern, embedded in saga narration, as the structural sequence “Travel Pattern.” The Travel Pattern consists of the following phases: 1) departure, 2) a series of tests, including visit to a court and viking adventures, and 3) homecoming. These phases are structurally similar with the four middle sections of the structure Harris suggested for the þættir.\textsuperscript{183}

In the Skálds’ Sagas,\textsuperscript{184} the main character gains fame at the court of the king of Norway by composing excellent poetry, but he nevertheless eventually returns to Iceland. These sagas, as well as the poems attributed to the main characters, focus on Icelandic topics (see also Gade 2001). The point of view of these narratives is focused in Iceland and the Norwegian throne only serves instrumentally as a place for the main characters to show prowess. Indeed, the Travel Pattern is a central structural model for them (Clunies Ross 2000b, 43–44; Lindow 1993, 661; 2000).

The Travel Pattern functions in the Family Sagas to represent the “rite of passage” of Icelandic young men, during which they may prove their capability in foreign trade. Kirsten Hastrup notes the nature of these journeys as initiation rites. She points out that it was important for Icelandic men to learn the basics of foreign trade already at a young age since the Icelandic economy was dependent on it and it is therefore only natural that successful journeys were acknowledged in narratives (Hastrup 1985, 224–228). Not only were the journeys important for learning trade but also for other experiences and – first and foremost – for gaining a reputation in Iceland (Ólason 1998, 79).

Outlaws, rejected in Iceland, could be recognized for their capabilities by a king abroad. Indeed, outlawry gave these men an opportunity to prove their worthiness. Sometimes the outlaws are said to be successful even if they were not considered particularly gifted in Iceland, such as Kolbakk in Fóstbræðra saga (Ch. 9–10). As a journey abroad was potentially a successful way to escape outlawry, not succeeding to escape was considered to be all the more tragic. For instance, Grettir’s first journey to Norway after he was sentenced to lesser outlawry (Grettis saga, Ch. 17–24) corresponds to the Travel Pattern: his accomplishments bring him great fame both in Norway and in Iceland.\textsuperscript{185} In contrast, his second journey (Grettis saga, Ch. 38–41) resembles a perverted Travel Pattern: in spite of all his efforts, everything he does

\textsuperscript{183} However, Lönnroth does not refer to Harris.
\textsuperscript{184} Bjarman saga Hítdeilakappa: Björn, bóðr Kolbeinsson; Halfréðar saga: Halfréð Öttarsson; Gunnaugr saga: Guðrunar Illugason; Fóstbræðra saga: Þormóðr Bersason.
\textsuperscript{185} Other examples of an outlaw fleeing represented in terms of the Travel Pattern are discussed in chapter 6.4.
further tarnishes his reputation, and eventually, he is outlawed both in Norway and in Iceland. Even his successful battle with a berserk who threatens a decent farmer and his womenfolk (Grettis saga, Ch. 40) does not mend the damage. The tragic outcome of Grettir’s second journey to Norway stands in sharp contrast to the success of his first journey. Indeed, the failed journey prefigures the total disaster that follows Grettir’s “second initiation.”

It seems obvious that the critique by Jónas Kristjánsson (1988, 98–99) that the Travel Pattern is too general to be informative is somewhat exaggerated. Even if the Travel Pattern in itself does not provide extensive additional information about any one saga passage, it depicts well the audience’s expectations towards a sequence that was supposed to follow the pattern. This sequence gained meaning in relation to these expectations.

8.3.4 The Schematic Model of an Outlaw’s Biography

The conventional narrative elements that are connected to outlawry are the actualized constituents of a schematic model of an outlaw biography. Indeed, these stereotypical narrative elements reflect the conceptions of a typical outlaw biography and they serve as constituent elements of that biography. This model also functions as a frame of reference for the individual scenes in which an outlaw appears. Fundamentally, there are two different models for the biographies of outlaws: the tragic and the fortunate (see chapters 6.1, 6.2). The schematic biographies of an outlaw are also reflected in the law texts as previously discussed in chapter 5.

The schematic model for a tragic biography of an outlaw, which was complied with the intended consequences of outlawry as a penalty, was rather straightforward and can be reduced to the following elements:

**Offense → (Attempt at an arbitration) → Sentence → (Fleeing) → Death → (Revenge)**

Hermann Pálsson expressed a similar idea in somewhat different terms, although without specifying the saga material he refers to: “The life of a tragic hero tends to follow a certain conventional pattern, which could best be described as four successive phases.” According to Pálsson, these phases are: 1) the introductory rebellion against paternal authority; 2) the journey abroad and achieving accomplishments; 3) the return to Iceland and clashes with the eventual killer; and 4) the death struggle. (Pálsson 1974, 7.) Indeed, this characterization is appropriate to
the biographies of the main characters of the Outlaw Sagas.\footnote{Examples of this include Grettir Ásmundarson, Gisli Súrsson, Hörðr Grimkelsson (+ Geir Grimsson and Helgi Sigmundarson) as well as Gunnarr af Hliðarendi, whose role in Ínáls saga is only secondarily connected to the brief period during which he was an outlaw.} However, the biographies of the tragic outlaws in a minor position in the Family Sagas are rather fragmented in this respect.\footnote{Examples of this include Klængr Narfason in Viga-Glúms saga and Þormóðr in Gunnars þáttir Piðrandabani.}

The main characters of the fortunate biographies of an outlaw (the term including pioneering outlaws) manage to avoid their pursuers, either by travelling abroad or by hiding in Iceland, and they settle in another location or have their sentence annulled through mitigation. When the character’s saga-worthiness lies in his personal history, and the vicissitudes during his outlawry are accounted for, the positive exceptionality required of a saga hero is demonstrated by his later success either as a settler, as a chieftain, as a farmer or in the service of a foreign king. The tragedy of outlawry therefore turns out to be an opportunity. The schematic model of a fortunate biography of an outlaw, accordingly, can be sketched as:

\[ \text{Offence} \rightarrow (\text{Attempt at arbitration}) \rightarrow \text{Sentence} \rightarrow \text{Avoiding the pursuers} \rightarrow (\text{Re-establishment}) \]

For example, according to Fljótsdæla saga (Ch. 22), the Norwegian Gunnarr Piðrandabani manages to return to Norway in spite of being sentenced to outlawry in Iceland, and he lived thereafter in the privileged position of a son of a hersir who ruled over Hálogaland. This establishes a type of ultimate level for success after being outlawed. However, even if the outlaw manages to escape Iceland, his future success is not in all cases accounted for, or this success can be somewhat dubious. Such is the case of the notorious thief, Veglágr, who is said to have become a master-thief abroad (Fóstbraðra saga, Ch. 13), and of Þormóðr in Gunnars þáttir Piðrandabani who is told to have died in Norway, although he died under heroic circumstances (Droplaugarsona saga, Ch. 15).

### 8.4 Conclusion

The nature of outlawry in a saga text largely depends upon the role that is attributed to the outlaw. The clearest division in this sense is that of outlawry either as a quality of a focal character or as a quality of a secondary character. The focal perspective correlates with the attitude towards the outlaw, which is discussed here in terms of sympathy. This
determines how the outlaw is perceived and presented. In other words, the role of the character is inseparable from the way he is depicted. However, the action that occurs in a single scene can serve numerous functions in a saga plot and, correspondingly, an actor in this scene can assume numerous roles in the overall plot of a saga. In addition, action defines the narrative character not only in the narrative structure itself but also in the referential relations to other narratives and different schematic models. These frames of reference will be discussed in the third part of this study that concentrates upon the referential meanings that are connected to outlawry. However, before turning to those frames of reference, it is necessary to discuss the social and spatial spheres of the Saga World within which the outlaws act.
9 Social Structures

The Family Sagas are narratives in which social relations play a central role. Outlawry was defined in the law as a separation from all human contacts, which was connected to the fact that outlawry was a legal consequence of a person breaking social norms. This means that the social circumstances surrounding outlawry also provide information about the social system as a sphere of action. As accounted for in the Family Sagas, this separation seldom actually occurred completely. There would not have been much to recount about outlaws who disappeared completely from the people’s consciousness. Examples diverging from the principle of total separation in particular reflect the social structures and impact that outlawry had upon an individual in relation to his society.

This chapter presents a discussion of outlawry that occurs in the Family Sagas in relation to the different social structures of the Saga World that are possible to reconstruct on the basis of both the sagas and the law texts. Since these social structures are discussed from the point of view of outlawry, it becomes relevant to divide the structures into two, partly overlapping fields. This two-part division comprises the hierarchical and formal public field, which consisted of contractual and institutional relations between the Icelanders, and then the private field, which consisted predominantly of kinship relations. Everyone was a member of networks in both these fields, and when outlawry totally severed an individual’s connections to the public field, his connections and status were put to test in the private field as well. Assisting an outlaw was strictly forbidden by law, which meant that acts of solidarity towards an outlaw had to be motivated. I will describe in this chapter the expected impact that outlawry had upon an individual’s social relations and further, how the social structures appear as observed from the point of view of outlawry.188 These aspects are illuminating concerning how meanings in an individual narrative on the actualized social impact of outlawry were generated in relation to the expectations of the typical impacts of outlawry upon one’s social relations and to the available sources of assistance.

---

188 The following discussion of the social structure of the Saga World is based on the discussions of William Ian Miller, whose outstanding work Bloodtaking and Peacemaking (1990), is a cornerstone of the social analysis of saga literature; on anthropological analysis of the social aspects expressed in law, conducted by Kirsten Hastrup (1985), and an offspring study, which also included saga literature as a source, by Agneta Breisch (1994); on the feminist reading of these sources by Jenny Jochens (1995); and on the readings of the Family Sagas conducted by Jón Viðar Sigurðsson (1999) with emphasis on the institution of chieftaincy.
9.1 Outlawry and Social Status

Becoming an outlaw entailed drastic consequences for one’s social status. Putting outlawry completely into effect meant the death of the sentenced, but during the transitional period, an outlaw was fundamentally marginalized with regard to society. The Family Sagas are principally interested in social actions, and this social orientation is reflected in their depiction of outlawry mainly in terms of its social effects. Knowledge about social structures in the Saga World was represented in a definitive form in the law whereas the Family Sagas reflect this knowledge in a form that applied to narration. As the law texts were more prescriptive than descriptive, it can be assumed that the relatively high correspondence between the laws and the saga texts reflects the importance of these law texts as sources for the Saga World (Hastrup 1985, 106; Breisch 1994, 41–43). As marginal figures, outlaws belonged to the margins of this society, hence they can provide an alternative perspective.

However, it is necessary to bear in mind that social relations and family relations are discussed in the Family Sagas with a very high degree of sensitivity. The different types of relations between families and allies, as well as their conflicting interests and strategies, are richly depicted with nuances that are not fully comprehensible for a modern reader. Even a very thorough and close reading cannot give a full comprehension of the references to families or individuals that remain outside the scope of a saga text.

The Iceland that the Family Sagas depict was approximately as densely populated as that in which the saga writers lived. The number of Icelanders has been estimated to have been approximately 50,000 throughout the Commonwealth Period. This was a relatively small number of people who were quite evenly distributed through the inhabitable areas of the island: there were no urban centers in Iceland; the population lived in self-sufficient farm units.

Iceland in the Saga Age was comprised by a society that can be called rather homogenous as compared to the contemporary European feudal states because the Icelandic society did not have such strict hierarchical power structures. However, this society certainly did not lack hierarchies, as will be shown. The population in Iceland consisted predominantly of farmers and their families and of men and women who were hired or thralls and lived on the farms to assist as a labor force. Even though the legal principle was that all free Icelanders were equal,
there were major differences in the wealth of farmers, and this created inequality.

The Icelandic social structure could be traced to Norway, which had three social classes: slaves, free men and nobles. This division was mythically legitimized in the mythological poem entitled Rigsþula (Hastrup 1985, 107). This poem describes the origins of the three social categories and attributes them with appropriate stereotypical characteristics. The social system in Iceland did not have a noble class, at least in principle, but the preservation of the poem Rigsþula in Iceland indicates that the idea was at least principally well-established there as well. The lack of an appointed nobility does not imply that all free men were of equal status, for the settlers had arrived in groups that were already hierarchically organized. Later, the existence of upper-class families and the tendency to make access to political offices hereditary was construed as paralleling a nobility (Hastrup 1985, 107; Sigurðsson J. V. 1999, 94–101; see also Vésteinsson 2000, 12–13). These social and political relations were at the root of most conflicts in the Family Sagas. As for outlawry, these relations were often confronted with yet another network of social relations, those of family relations. Each free Icelander held a position within an acknowledged frame group. This frame group could consist of numerous families or family lines that were connected through different types of relationships, such as marriages or alliances.

Kirsten Hastrup has discussed the relationship between society and law in the use of the words in medieval sources and concluded, “In Iceland ‘the social’ was coterminous with ‘the law’” (Hastrup 1985, 136). The law was therefore the cornerstone of the state that had no central power and similarly, a symbol of the society as a whole. This is because the law was fundamentally an agreement upon how the members of the society were to relate to each other in recurrent situations with an ever-present possibility of disagreement. This is reflected in the famous phrase attributed to Njáll: “With laws shall our land be built, but with disorder (ólög) laid waste” (Njáls saga, Ch. 70). Even if the law can be interpreted as being a reflection of the social dynamics in predicting and defining the ways of conducting social interaction, it does not describe life or constitute the society. Instead, the law only secondarily reflects the actual procedures, conventions and lifestyle within the society. However, it was exactly the law that was considered to be a major element distinguishing one society from another in the Middle Ages. For instance, the area in England that was ruled by people of Danish origin in the Viking Age was referred to as

189 “[…] með lýgum skal land várt byggja, en með ólögum eyða.”
Danelaw, *Dena lög*. This was an area in which people lived according to a different set of rules, conventions or habits (= those of Danish origin) than elsewhere on the island. This means that, likewise, the Icelandic law could be conceived as an expression of the set of social customs that characterized Icelanders as a people. In other words, the Icelandic law, referred to as *vár lög* (Hastrup 1985, 136–137), was conceivable in similar terms as “our community as opposed to others” (Miller 1990, 221).

A person who offended this legal tradition and societal peace seriously enough could be denied his right to have a place within the society. Hence, outlawry could be conceived as a collective rejection. The symbolic charge of the law made the outlaw a condemned offender of deeper values than merely the word of law. He was an offender of the noble heritage of the law, and of societal peace. An individual summoned the outlaw, but the court procedure brought a collective acknowledgement to the condemnation. Likewise, acts on behalf of an outlawed individual offended the collectively accepted rules and led to respective consequences. Agneta Breisch (1994) interpreted outlawry as a total loss of freedom in categorizing the members of medieval Icelandic society in terms of their “freedom,” or right to membership in society. However, not all of the outlaw’s social connections and his ability to lead a life ceased to exist just by the declaration of full outlawry.

Conceptually, outlawry was a conviction that was feminizing. The assemblies, which serve as relatively central settings for action in saga narration, comprised a forum that was exclusively available for men. As a result, the status of a free male guaranteed one the right to attend, and therefore, attending an assembly was a manly occupation. Outlawry stripped one of all protection of the law, which naturally included preventing him from attending the gatherings of the central institution of that law. Consequently, an outlaw was stripped of a significant share of his masculinity with the denial of his right to fulfill male obligations, and for a man, it was a shame to be associated with feminine properties (Meulengracht Sørensen 1983; Bagge 1992b, 10–11). On the level of narrative motifs, the outlaw heroes were connected to the heart of the feminine sphere of occupation by applying the *kolbitur*-motif in their biographies (see chapter 7.3). A *kolbitur* youth, a motif that was associated with numerous saga heroes, introduced the hero in his youth as a most unpromising, lazy figure who dwelled in the female realm, the kitchen. As for the heroes in the Legendary Sagas (such as *Örvar-Odds saga* or *Áns saga bogsveigis*), this point of departure functions as an effective contrast to their later ultimately masculine achievements. As
for the outlaw heroes Grettir Ásmundarson or Króka-Refr (see Meulengracht Sørensen 1983, 39–43), the questioning of their masculinity in the narrative seems indeed to have inspired them to further masculine feats comparable to those of the legendary heroes.

That the social background of the outlaw continued to follow him after his rejection from society in the Family Sagas is visible by the fact that there was a correlation between the way that the outlaw was discussed and his previous social status. For example, outlaws with a respectable social background were depicted and treated in the sagas differently from those with less significant backgrounds. In addition, an outlaw’s social network could still affect his life and his position within society. Even if an outlaw was denied a place in society, he had an indirect social status through his previous social networks.

Even though the society of the Saga World was by definition hostile towards outlaws, the members of the society can be divided into two groups of people who had different types of relationship with an individual outlaw. Here the two social spheres that these groups constituted will be referred to as the public field and the private field. Jürgen Habermas (1991, 12–18) sketched the societal spheres as the private sphere, associated with the home, and the public sphere, which stood rather for the sphere of a public authority (ibid., esp. 18). William Ian Miller (1990, 305) observed that this division is not suitable for the medieval Icelandic society, which lacked public authority. In other words, the enforcement of rights cannot be referred to as being private when there is no public as a counterpart. Instead, the enforcement of rights was done with the help of all possible social allies. However, as a communicative sphere between the representatives of the private sphere (compare Habermas 1991, 30), the public sphere was a decision-making body that authorized the representatives of the private sphere to execute the decisions that it yielded. According to the distinction suggested in this study, both the decision-making and the execution of the decisions took place in the public field, and the private field constituted of the interaction between the representatives of the private field.

Leidulf Melve developed Habermas’ concept of the public sphere into a model that is applicable to medieval reality. Melve’s model of the public sphere is characterized by plurality and communication as opposed to the qualities of the private sphere, which lacked plurality, and the authority of the king, which did not rely on interactive communication (Melve 2007, 8–12, 22–44). My approach is different, and in this discussion, instead of sphere, I use the term field in the sense used by the social scientist Pierre Bourdieu (1977). Bourdieu stipulates that a “field” is a social arena in which agents act according to the rules
of that field, seeking valuables that have value within that field. The division of the Icelandic society into private and public fields is relevant neither in all social matters nor in connection with all social agents, but in describing the position of an outlaw in (or rather, outside) society, this division is illustrative. The purpose of this distinction is to determine how it is possible that even though an outlaw was banished from society or civilization, he is nonetheless rarely encountered in isolation in the saga texts.

Within the society, people had administrative and contractual relations with each other, which defined the role of each individual in societal relations. This means that the law largely defined the categories that people belonged to. Everyone was equal before the law, but the rituals that constituted the core of the public field were highly hierarchical. This hierarchy was achieved primarily within the division between the two sexes and within the distribution of representational power. The space reserved for the public field in medieval Iceland consisted of those areas where everyone had equal rights to move and where people met. The heart of this space consisted of the assemblies that renewed and actualized the public field through regular gatherings in which the rules of the public field (the law) were articulated and confirmed, and in which conflicts were reconciled in accordance with these rules.

The actors within the public field were representatives of the private field but whereas the public field included all Icelanders and visiting foreigners, the private field consisted of a number of more or less closed networks of people. The members and representatives of different networks interacted in the public field and hence, the networks can be conceived as consisting of loose units. The relations between people within these networks were primarily defined through family relationships. Family relationships were also the most important uniting factor of the units that the networkds consisted of. The space reserved for the private field was located within the limits of individual farms (compare Hastrup 1985, 141), where the residents led lives according to the rules that were developed according to the needs and premises of each family unit and only secondarily characterized by the rules of the public field, the law.

An outlaw was excluded from the public field. This was the field in which public encounters took place, whereas individuals constituted the private field with stronger bonds than those in the public field, which were largely contractual. The private field consisted of those relations that an outlaw could expect to be hospitable in spite of his outlawry. The relations defining the public and the private fields were interwoven in
many ways in the small community, but for the outlaws, there was a big
difference between these two types of relations. Outlawry meant a
rejection from the public field, which in principle concerned the private
field as well. But the difference in social relations in these fields granted
the outlaw access to the private field. Moreover, as the wilderness in
Iceland was extremely hostile, the private field, notwithstanding the
dangers it posed, was a tempting alternative.

9.2 The Two Sexes

The two sexes were affected by the societal system of the Saga World
in radically different ways, which are also significant for understanding
narratives about outlawry in the Family Sagas. The point of view in the
Family Sagas is male, just as Helga Kress (1986, 181) has pointed out,
and therefore, she argues following Bertha Philpotts, for example
Laxdæla saga that has the female central character Guðrún Ósvifránsdóttir
“could not quite be Guðrún’s saga” (Kress 1986, 192). The Family
Sagas, in general, adopt a male perspective (Mundal 1992, 108). This
does not mean, of course, that these sagas could not be produced,
consumed and enjoyed by women as well.

The outlaws in the Family Sagas are all men although in principle, the
law also concerned women. In fact, a woman had to face the same legal
consequences for her actions as a man, which is specifically expressed in
the law texts: “A woman is outlawed to the same extent as a man if she
slays or injures a man or a woman, and the same applies to all cases of
offences against the law” (Grágás, 246). However, in practice, the
normative supposition in the law as well as in the Family Sagas was that
this concerned only men. Women were not supposed to exhibit the type
of male behavior that would potentially lead to outlawry, such as
violence.

The gender roles and the respective social expectations, as depicted in
the saga literature and the law texts, were rather clear-cut: Women were
responsible for managing the farmstead (fyrir innan stokk), whereas the

---

190 However, she does not consider it impossible that Laxdæla saga was written or dictated by
a woman (Kress 1986, 193).

191 “Jafnsek verður kona sem karlmaður ef hún vegur karlmann eða konu, eða vinnur á, og svo
er um öll lagafræðið melt.” In addition, the legal code of Jónsböð (ed. Ólafur Halldórsson
1904. Møllers: København. P. 35) mentions both sexes separately in this connection, which
means that this was a contemporary aspect throughout the saga writing period and that the
collectively expressed potential of female violence, which was lacking in narratives about the
Saga World, was a contrastive aspect in it.
men took charge of activities outside it (*fyrir utan stokk*) (Jochens 1995, 116–117). The women’s range of responsibility was therefore limited to the private field of the society, and women did not have an immediate role for example in feuding (Jochens 1989, 109). Women naturally had their share of interests in issues such as family honor or inheritance rights, but women lacked the direct means to promote them. Only men were permitted to attend the General Assembly and the local assemblies, whereas women were only given the right to accompany men to the assembly site. In short, women had no share of the public wielding of power: they could not assume legal or juridical responsibilities and they could neither talk at assemblies nor attain the position of a chieftain (Jochens 1995, 113–114).

This reduced women’s opportunities to participate in the public field except through mediators. Some women were capable of acting through mediators and, with the support of their social networks, these women could be successful at this. For instance, the matriarchal figure of Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir, the principal character of *Laxdæla saga*, was considered by Anne Heinrichs (1986) in her analysis to be comparable to mythical heroines. Usually, however, women were able to take an active role only when the conflict in the public field came to them, such as when a man escaped from the conflict into the spatial realm of the private field. Indeed, as a feminizing conviction, outlawry seems to have brought the sentenced men closer to the female sex.

Private relations with women, when they bypassed the hierarchical order that was construed in the public field, are exceptional for men in the Family Sagas. The frequently described encounters that the outlaws had with women attest to the shared social field. Many outlaws were associated with uncontrolled sexuality, both as a reason for their conviction and as an activity during their outlawry. This is because a socially independent agent such as an outlaw could act within society without the moral restrictions that society had established for its members; the norms that prevented people from following their instincts were not binding to an outlaw, as he was potentially freer to realize his innate tendencies for instance to take lives and to have sex. Sexual relationships were strictly regulated in the Saga World, and disregarding these regulations is one regular origin of the conflicts in the saga literature.

---

192 *Eyrbyggja saga* (ch. 38) indicates that women were not capable of running demanding legal cases such as of manslaughter in court. According to the saga, the unsuccessful action against the killers of the remarkable chieftain Arnkell godi, which was undertaken by his under-aged and female relatives in the lack of male relatives, resulted in a law which prohibited women as well as men under the age sixteen from taking up manslaughter cases.
Sexual assaults were punished by outlawry. In the Family Sagas, mentioning that a man has been outlawed for a sexual offense marks him as low in terms of honor and during his outlawry, he becomes a potential threat to women. The two outlaws sentenced for sexual assaults that are included in the research material of this study are both unsympathetic secondary characters and they function in the saga narratives as unsuccessful assassins in the service of the focal characters of the narrative passages. It seems reasonable to conclude that rapists were considered to be justifiably disposable in moral terms.

Many of the outlaw characters that are described to any extent in the Family Sagas are said to be engaged in sexual activity while still fugitives. Grettir Ásmundarson’s sexual endeavors are described, among his other manly adventures, whereas the account of Hrappr entails a far more provocative and less approvable affair (Njáls saga, Ch. 87). Furthermore, the main character of Kjalnesinga saga, Búi Ændriðarson, kidnaps a girl named Ólöf to a cave where he is hiding as an outlaw. The result is that the girl gives birth to a daughter. (Kjalnesinga saga, Ch. 7–8.) In addition, romantic affairs were connected less tightly in Fóstbræðra saga to Þormóðr Bersason in his outlawry but all the more clearly to his character in general, beginning with the added name kolbrúnaskáld, which he received as a result of a peculiar love triangle (Fóstbræðra saga, Ch. 10–11). The outlawed Stígandi seduced a servant woman out in the meadows with his attractive size and handsome looks, consequently putting his life at risk (Laxdæla saga, Ch. 38).

Guðni Jónsson (1943, 255–256, note 4) suggests that the outlaw named Helgu-Steinarr (“Helga’s Steinarr”: Fóstbræðra saga, Ch. 24) had earned his added name by a misfortunate love affair with the lady who it refers to. Jónsson bases his argument on parallels among the saga characters’ added names, such as those of Gefnar-Óddr and Gull-Ásúrðr.

---

193 “kvennamál,” “konumál”: Eyrbyggja saga, Ch. 36; in Gull-Póris saga (Ch. 9–10) the word konumál refers to an event in which a woman is married to a man in spite of being promised to another.
194 Þórleifr in Eyrbyggja saga, Ch. 36; Þórir in Vatnsdæla saga, Ch. 39.
195 See Ahola 2000, 67–72: Grettir verging the reluctant servant maid (Ch. 74–75); the half-troll Þórir’s daughters (Ch. 61); begot a son to the widowed Steinvör of Sandhaugar (Ch. 67).
196 The humiliating witchcraft of a lover of the hero is a motif encountered in the Legendary Sagas, such as in Siggrarð’s saga frækna (Ch. 4–6) included in the “Outlaw Manuscript” Eggertsbók. Siggrárðr is represented in the saga as an irresistible ladies’ man (Ch. 2).
197 Note similarity with the huldufólk-themes in later Icelandic oral tradition; outlaws and “hidden people”, huldufólk, both formed a threat to women (Árnason 1980, 189 ff.), whereas outlaws seemed to be less of a threat to the women who dwelled in remote shepherd huts according to the popular opinion (Hastrup 1990, 109; see Jónasson 1961, 63).
The married women in the Family Sagas are seldom reported to have had extramarital sexual encounters. *Grettis saga* implies numerous of these encounters but only vaguely. On his first journey to Norway, Grettir Ásmundarson prefers the favors of the shipmate’s wife over ship labor, which is well noticed by the crew and the shipmate (Ch. 17). In Norway, he saves the womanfolk of a farmstead from a band of horny berserks, and consequently, the lady of the house expresses her gratitude by placing Grettir in the master’s seat and by treating him “well in every way” (*alla hluti vel*) (Ch. 19). Furthermore, the wife of the chieftain Vermundr mjövi, Þorbjörg digra, saves Grettir from the gallows and invites Grettir as her guest while her husband is absent. Grettir composes poems about the incident in which he uses so-called *ofljóst*-kennings to praise her. These kennings were typically used in love poems (*mannsöngvi*). Margaret Clunies Ross suggests that the *ofljóst* kennings in these poems were meant to express Grettir’s respect (Clunies Ross 1998, 72) but if the incident is examined in the light of Grettir’s other encounters with women who dwell home alone in the saga, it is reasonable to interpret the passage as implying a possibility of their having a more intimate relationship.

A girls’ honor, or her sexual integrity, was part of her value as social capital of the family. Marriage was an important way to form alliances and strengthen bonds between family groups (Hastrup 1985, 93; Jón Siguðsson 1999, 141–147; Jochens 1995, 27–29). The Family Sagas offer numerous examples of how girls could meet boys (who were approved by the family) and that the girls could have their say as to whom they were to marry, but the nature and density of their premarital

---

198 This can be compared to the metaphor in *Fóstbræðra saga* (Ch. 17): “þeim ðorgrími reynðisk meiri mannraun at sækja ðorgeir heldr en klappa um maga (*júgr*, Flateyjarbók) konum sinum” in which tapping the belly of a wife stands for an unmanly waste of time.

199 Earlier, the leader of the gang of berserks that had taken over the house had said to the housewife: “Don’t be upset, lady. You won’t be any the worse off for your husband’s absense, since you’ll get a man in his place – and so will your daughter and all the other women, too.” Reference to the husband in a sexual sense right before Grettir is seated in the husband’s seat makes a direct association.

200 The sexual nature of the encounter is further suggested by the attachment of the curious poem *Grettisfærsla* (“Grettir’s Transportation”) to the scene. This poem is referred to in all the preserved manuscripts, and it is included in the manuscript AM 556 4to. The poem represents a “Grettir” as a personification of sexual appetite. The poem recounts that Grettir “sleeps with maidens / makes the beds / sleeps with widows / every man’s wife / and their sons...” (*kváðu hann far í eyjar / og serður meyjar, / gjörir grepp rekkjur / og seður ekkjur, / hvers manns konu / og alla bónadasonu... *) (Órnólfr Thorsson 1996, 224; translation by the present author). Ólafur Halldórsson (1990, 43–49) does not believe that this poem originally spoke about Grettir Ásmundarson, but that *Grettisfærsla* was sung in connection with a carnevalistic play in which a penis of some livestock animal (“*grettir*”) circulated among the participants and finally was “hung.” According to Halldórsson, it is possible that the passage in the saga is based on this type of game.
interactions with the opposite sex are strictly regulated.201 The marriage guardian, who was normally the girl’s father, made the final decision concerning the bridegroom (Hastrup 1985, 94–95; Jochens 1995, 24–26). The lowering of a girl’s value as a match is described rather harshly in *Kjalnesinga saga*. Here Búi Andríðarson (after he is reconciled and his outlawry abrogated) refuses to marry the mother of his child, Ólöf, because she had been captured and “spoiled” (*spíllt*) by a man while Búi himself was absent, although this was against her own will (Ch. 16). Guarding the honor of a girl was conceived of as the duty of the men in a family, which is evident in the law stipulating that any person sexually harassing a woman was allowed to be killed on the spot. In the law, this is limited to the offenses that were presumed to raise immediate instinctive reactions, such as assault or insult. However, the right to immediate revenge was limited to only carefully defined male relatives, as was discussed in chapter 5.6.

In *Grettis saga* (Ch. 74–75), Grettir Ásmundarson proves his manhood by raping a servant girl who ridicules the small size of his penis.202 Most of the population in Iceland consisted of domestic servants and they had virtually no hope of being married honorably (Miller 1988, 330). Ruth Karras suggests that the old habit of sexually exploiting female slaves probably continued after the end of slavery in the form of sexually exploiting female servants (Karras 1992, 290). This would mean that Grettir could not violate the maid’s honor because she was not considered to be honorable. Moreover, sexual insatiability was thought to be the feminine counterpart of male *ergi*, sexual perversity (Clunies Ross 1973, 86; Ström 1974; Meulengracht Sørensen 1983, 18–19). In these terms, the maid had already exposed her perversity by paying overbearing attention to Grettir’s organ. Therefore, Grettir’s

---

201 According to Ruth Karras (1992, 294), premarital sexual relationships were not fully disapproved of in medieval Iceland, and the decent discourse in sagas may be a reflection of a sublime (Christian) idea of the Saga Age.

202 The obscene poems that are attributed to Grettir in this scene have the closest parallels and perhaps the only parallels in *Bósa saga*, which belongs to the group of the Legendary Sagas. *Bósa saga* was apparently written in the first half of the fourteenth century (Tómasson 1996, 62) and hence, possibly at approximately the same time as *Grettis saga*. This scene in *Grettis saga* has also been associated with *Decamerone* in its playful eroticism. Robert Glendinning (1970, 57–59) suggests that the scene was written in the spirit of the European short, narrative and comic *fabliau* tradition. There are several versions of this tradition dating back to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and that the many Icelanders who studied in Italian universities brought the models of the *fabliau* and *novella* to Iceland, which would be the connection between the scene and the Italian narrative tradition.
sexual assault can be interpreted not as a rape, but as his being able to satisfy the maid, thus “curing” her from her abnormal interest.  

Whereas the hero saving a girl from seduction was handled as a heroic motif (as discussed in chapter 14.6.2), the seduction of a farmer’s daughter by an outlaw was effective as a structurally opposed characterization of the dangerous other from whom a hero should be doing the saving – that is, of course, in addition to the seduction being condemnable in more general social terms. Hrappr seduced the daughter of his host in Norway and killed the man who caught him in the act, which resulted in Hrappr being outlawed (Njáls saga, Ch. 87). Hrappr expressed reckless arrogance in this connection, and the incident was only one among his numerous condemnable deeds. This passage does not confront the norm of refraining from premarital relations with farmers’ daughters. In contrast, Búi Andriðarson, who is depicted as an exemplary hero in Kjalnesinga saga, captured the farmer’s daughter, Ólöf, which could only be justifiable by his general superiority. This motif does not seem to suit the social norms that are otherwise reflected in the saga literature, and therefore it is probably an adaptation of the continental literary tradition.

9.3 The Public Field

People’s relations in the public field were mainly contractual and characteristically hierarchical. Even if people were equal before the law, in practice, the society was hierarchically structured. In terms of the public field, the core of people’s relationships consisted of contractual relations between free men.

The farming landowners formed the core of society. They constituted the dominant class and owned the land and the resources. They were capable of having other people work for them, and they had access to political positions of significance (Hastrup 1985, 109). This means that the hierarchy among the farming landowners was basically created by their wealth. In the Family Sagas, the farming landowners were a social standard and they constituted the central protagonists in the sagas.

These farming landowners chose their chieftains from among themselves. The peculiar nature of power that the chieftains wielded has

---

203 Compare this with the Thunder God Þórr, who cured female giants of their abnormalities, such as extra arms (Lindow 1988). See further in chapter 13.3.2.1.

204 For the motif of abducted bride in the continental medieval literature, see Bornholdt 2005, and especially pages 160–202 in connection with the Nordic exemplars.
been discussed in many rather recent studies. In this connection, the chieftains are especially interesting as an entity that stands in contrast to the outlaws. The chieftains represented and embodied social order and collective activity, whereas outlawry meant rejection from all that these entailed.

The main hierarchical relationship within the society was that between the *chieftain* (*göði*) and his followers, *assemblymen* (*þingmenn*). However, this relationship was representational and mainly concerned assemblies. The duties of the chieftains were to organize district assemblies, to represent the farmers who had elected them at the General Assembly, and to serve as judges at the assemblies and as members of the legislative organ of the Law Council (*lögrettata*). Furthermore, a chieftain was expected to manage his followers in a more general sense as well, for instance, by settling disputes and by keeping overbearing bullies and wrongdoers in check (Byock 1988, 111–112, 124; Sigurðsson J. V. 1999, 160–184). For example, when thieves and robbers were a menace, the chieftains were supposed to repel them, and examples of this are found in *Vatnsdæla saga* (Ch. 28, 30) and *Eyrbyggja saga* (Ch. 62).

Orri Vésteinsson (2000, 67) has claimed that the power of chieftains from the tenth to the eleventh centuries has been greatly overestimated. However, the power of individual chieftains in Iceland gradually increased throughout the Commonwealth Period, and at the beginning of the twelfth century, only five families controlled almost half of the population (Sigurðsson J. V. 1999, 69). In the thirteenth century, the position of a chieftain was desired to justify one’s demands for power (Vésteinsson 2000, 9). Moreover, around the year 1220, Iceland was divided into seven domains (*ríki*) with relatively clear boundaries, each controlled by a chieftain. These chieftains had significant power over their domains because they were in charge of managing the local assemblies, settling conflicts, authorizing residency within their domains, and organizing trade (Sigurðsson J. V. 2007, 175).

The Family Sagas suggest that there were 50–60 chieftains in Iceland during the Saga Age (Sigurðsson J. V. 1999, 55) but during the time that the sagas were written, power remained in only a few hands, which naturally affected the depiction of chieftains in saga narration and the discourse surrounding them. In the saga-writing period, when the feuds

---

205 Byock 1988; Sigurðsson J. V. 1999; Orri Vésteinsson (2000) emphasized that chieftains had a different bases for their power and that power structures differed areally in Iceland. Consequently, the conceptions of chieftaincy, the chieftains’ power and how it was wielded, were not necessarily uniform throughout the country, although the discussion provided here is on a general level.
between the chieftains grew into wars and the sacredness of the institution of common peace, the General Assembly, was threatened with violation, the earlier period (the Saga Age), with its minor feuds and chieftains with limited power, came to be discussed with the more recent experience of chieftains in mind. The result was that the chieftains of the Saga World were partly depicted with contemporary conceptions.  

Tenants rented the land that they cultivated from landowning farmers. Cottageers rented the land they cultivated and additionally were obliged to offer a stipulated amount of labor to their landlords. Whereas the tenant and his landlord made a bilateral contract for one year at a time, a cottageer needed permission from the local commune (hreppr) to settle in the area (Hastrup 1985, 110–112). The law assumed that everyone was attached to a household and had work to do. The majority of the population in the thirteenth century consisted of free household servants (húskarlar or heimamenn) (Breisch 1994, 69–70). Those who neither had a permanent residence nor work were designated as göngumenn (wandering people) or húsgöngumenn (people who wandered from house to house). These people were forced to move around continuously in search of mercy, either as legal vagabonds, who had appointed households (hreppr) among which they moved, or as illegal vagabonds who were basically outlaws. The lowest rank in medieval Icelandic society was that of slaves. Slaves were the property and responsibility of their owners and had no position within the public field.

Vagabonds posed a threat to the prevailing social system, which was based on the connectedness of each individual to a group. Although not formally judged, vagrants were outlaws from the point of view of the law. Martina Stein-Wilkeshuis describes vagrants as follows: “Through not having a fixed domicile, causing social problems, and being unwilling to work, these groups of free people lost their immunity and their right of inheritance” (Stein-Wilkeshuis 1991, 97). This lack of a permanent residence was considered to be such a threat that the law permitted extreme measures of cruelty towards the vagabonds.

Anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup (1985), following Emmanuel Terray (1975, 93), discussed social stratification in Iceland during the Commonwealth Period in terms of social classes. These social classes were either characterized by closed, predetermined recruitment (by birth,
such as being born either as a slave or as a freeman) or by open recruitment (when a position could be earned). The ideological stance behind these forms of recruitment can be described, respectively, as aristocratic and meritocratic. According to Hastrup (1985, 105–106), during the Commonwealth Period, the Icelandic societal system changed from one that was predetermined towards one that used open recruitment. This meant that both aristocratic and meritocratic conceptions were intertwined in the discourse of the Family Sagas. As evidence, even the relatively higher position of a chieftain had to be earned, because people were (at least in principle) allowed to select for themselves the chieftains whom they wanted to follow. On the other hand, it is clear in the Family Sagas that lineage was important at that time. Aristocratic thinking was based on the association of innate properties with social class. Aristocratic thinking meant that, on the level of explicit ideology, a person who was socially above another was also regarded as being superior to that person in terms of his personal qualities. This was on analogy to the expectations concerning different social classes (even if observations in reality disagreed with these expectations). When a change in the social status of an individual occurred, such as in outlawry, the personal qualities implied by the former social status continued to follow that individual even in his new status.

The interlinkedness of a person’s social status and his assumed personal qualities is perhaps best conceived in terms of the concept honor. In the Family Sagas, an individual’s value in the public field was evaluated according to his honor. According to Julien Pitt-Rivers, honor can be conceived as “the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of the society” (Pitt-Rivers 1977, 1). Honor was represented in the Family Sagas as social capital, which was an evaluative result of action that acknowledged social norms as the basis for personal reputation and a contribution to the social capital of the family and to other social networks of the individual in question. In the Saga World, honor therefore meant the capability of having one’s own way and attaining both economic and social profit, or maintaining economic and social status. This was to be achieved in relation to one’s fellow countrymen and by means that were acceptable according to social norms. This means that honor was of relative value: an individual’s honor was determined by the honor of others he was interacting with. In short, gaining honor was taking it away from someone else (Pitt-Rivers 1977, 3) as in a zero-sum game (Miller 1990, 30).

---

209 A good example of aristocratic thinking expressed in a verbal form is found in the poem Rígsþula, which has been referred to already above.
The Family Sagas depict a man’s honor in terms of displays of manly virtues. Likewise, Paul Friedrich demonstrated how honor in the *Iliad* consists of a complex of other values such as power, wealth, magnanimity, loyalty, precedence, fame, courage and piety, in addition to the characteristic referred to as *arête*, which can be translated as “excellence over others” (Friedrich 1977, 290–294). All of these were indicators of a man’s capabilities and all contributed to his value in social terms. In the Family Sagas, the male virtues that enhanced an individual’s honor are expressed mainly in terms of physical strength, bravery, intelligence and verbal skills. Honor and manliness are closely related in the vocabulary of saga literature: the virtues of *drengskápr*, *mannleiki* or *gervileiki* all designate general honorable properties which, as indicated by the stem of the first two terms (*drengr* and *maðr*: “a man”), were predominantly gender-specific. This gender-specificity is especially visible in the negation of the concepts: the usage of the words *mannleysi* and *ódrengr* refer not only to a lack of manly virtues, but rather to their total absence, to unmanliness in the insulting sense (Meulengracht Sørensen 1983, 76–77). Honor occupies a very sensitive position in the Family Sagas. It is important to note that offending a person’s honor in a way that may appear rather trivial to a modern reader could have lethal consequences (Meulengracht Sørensen 1993b, 406). This is quite logical bearing in mind William Ian Miller’s observation that, in the accounts of the Family Sagas, honor “was, for people of self-respect, coterminous with social existence itself” (Miller 1990, 31).

Honor was not only a property affected by an individual’s actions but in the Saga World, one was also born with a certain amount of it. Julian Pitt-Rivers divided honor into the *claim to pride* and into the *right to pride* (Pitt-Rivers 1977, 1). In this sense, honor can be discussed as social capital that is claimed according to the actions that would add to one’s pride within the prevailing code of behaviour, or alternatively, as one’s innate right to pride. The family background provided the saga characters with a presupposition of a certain level of honor. Julien Pitt-Rivers argues that, theoretically, “no man of honor ever admits that his honor = precedence is not synonymous with his honor = virtue” (Pitt-Rivers 1977, 15). In other words, the presupposition of honor guides the saga audience’s interpretations and evaluations of a character’s deeds and also seems to affect the representations of characters’ actions so that these conform to those expectations (compare Pitt-Rivers 1977, 14–15). Therefore, a villain presupposed to have honor provided by a noble

---

210 In a similar sense as was the case with the aristocratic / meritocratic positions, social position and honour were tightly interconnected.
lineage, is never depicted in a wholly dishonourable light in the Family Sagas.211

The deeds that were evaluated in terms of honor affected not only the honor of an individual, but also the honor of his whole frame group. Theoretically, an acknowledged claim to pride resulted in a right to pride that extended throughout the frame group. This meant both that an individual represented the potential and quality of his reference group and also that an individual’s honor affected that of his whole reference group (Pitt-Rivers 1977, 14–15). In medieval Iceland, a person’s honor had an effect through generations, as is discussed in chapter 10.1. Furthermore, an individual’s interests within a network depended on his place within it. For instance, close family membership meant far stronger involvement than any contractual affiliation. In the same vein, an assault on any single member’s honor also meant, metonymically, an assault on any other’s, and the family network’s reactions to that assault demonstrated the capability of the network to protect any of its members.

The behavior of the members of lower social strata is depicted in the Family Sagas differently than those of higher strata. Those in lower strata may be portrayed as cowardly, beguiling, helpless, or outright stupid, whereas the members of the higher strata are usually depicted as being brave, strong and resourceful. Social rank, especially at the higher levels, generally followed lineage: the highest social status required a position in a significant family. However, outlawry was a social state that could potentially fall upon representatives of any social strata. As a potential member of the higher social strata, an outlaw could present a more severe threat than those individuals whose social status or innate right to pride was obviously low, such as vagabonds. Nonetheless, saga narration often anticipates a shift in social status teleologically by attributing a character properties that were associated with his future class – as if the person had been “truly” a representative of his new social class already before it was actualized. This discrepancy between the original and new social class is a central factor that creates tension for instance in the Outlaw Sagas, as the main characters are all from dignified families. Within the social framework, outlawry is not only a convenient narrative device as a quality of a stock character, but it becomes a subject matter that was saga-worthy in its own right, particularly when this social marginality is cast upon a person who belongs to the heart of society. Outlawry then becomes an attractive

211 For example Mórör in Njáls saga, Börkr in Gísla saga or Þorbjörn öngull in Grettis saga, all appear in these sagas as antagonists of the main character but are not depicted in an exclusively dishonorable light.
discrepancy; the tragedy of a noble individual resulted in interesting heroic behavior.

9.3.1 Outlawry and Social Stratification

As stated in the discussion above, an individual’s social status and background created certain types of expectations for his mode of action, and the accounts of his actual actions were evaluated and acquired meaning in relation to these expectations. Let us now turn to a discussion of the impact that social background had on an outlaw. The social background of a narrative character affected the horizon of expectation and consequently the way that the character was depicted and his deeds were recounted. This effect will be discussed in relation to two quite different backgrounds: the top of the social hierarchy and the bottom of it.

Chieftains are seldom outlawed in the Family Sagas. For instance, the attempt to have Snorri goði outlawed in Eyrbyggja saga resulted in an arbitrated outcome. This involved Snorri being able to send a substitute to suffer his temporary banishment abroad on his behalf and Snorri himself merely paid a fine (Eyrbyggja saga, Ch. 27; also in Ch. 56). Another example is Víga-Glúmr, a prominent chieftain, who was accused of a killing. In court, he put his words in a vow cleverly enough so that even though he actually revealed his guilt, it appeared as a denial. Hence, he avoided the sentence (Víga-Glúms saga, Ch. 25). However, afterwards the proceedings were restarted and Glúmr was sentenced to district outlawry (Ch. 26). In yet another example in Bandamanna saga, Óspakr Glúmsson assumed Oddr Ófeigsson’s chieftain status when Oddr travelled abroad. He was seemingly reluctant to give up the position of chieftain when Oddr returned, which was the beginning of a series of events that led to Öspakr’s tragic outlawry. Öspakr was a farmer from a dignified family (although his lineage included famous outlaws among his forefathers). Öspakr attempted to rise in the social hierarchy, but as he was incapable of protecting his interests in court, he lost everything. The theme of an attempted displacement in connection with outlawry is likewise central in Hrafnkels saga. Hrafnkel’s outlawry is, however, only of a milder form, namely district outlawry. Outlawry as a phase leading to sovereign leadership occurs in the Kings’ Sagas as well, as discussed in chapter 15.1.

The inherited qualities that suited being a chieftain followed an individual even into his outlawry. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson has observed that “shrewdness is the characteristic which the sagas emphasize most in
descriptions of the chieftains” (Sigurðsson J. V. 1999, 86), and this is largely the constant against which any individual chieftain is evaluated. Theodore Andersson (1989) has pointed out that mild-mannered behavior was expected of successful chieftains (such as Njáll or Snorri godi), and this becomes especially visible in the opposite cases: overbearing arrogance, personified in the stock characters who were referred to as ójafnáðarmenn (“overbearing men”), called for trouble. Generous chieftains were popular, and they had many friends who were crucial to their influence and to maintaining their power. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson continues, “other important qualifications and qualities in chieftains were noble birth, loyalty, courteous behavior, eloquence and good voice” (Sigurðsson J. V. 1999, 93). According to Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, these qualities reflect the requirements for chieftains during the rather peaceful Commonwealth Period (Sigurðsson J. V. 1999, 94–95).

If this type of person was sentenced to outlawry and lost his earlier position, he could find new retainers and lead a bandit group. These groups were part of the Saga World, which is reflected in the Family Sagas (for instance, Vatnsdæla saga, Ch. 41), other texts (Landnámabók, p. 75) and a later “saga” text that was based on local histories (Hellismanna saga). Óspakr Kjallaksson (Eyrbyggja saga, Ch. 57–62) was the leader of a similar band of outlaws as well as of otherwise suspicious individuals that the sworn-brothers Þorgeirr and Þormóðr were in their youth (Fóstbræðra saga, Ch. 2–7).

Harðar saga tells about such a band (Ch. 22–36) and especially about its leader, Hörðr Grímkelsson. Hörðr is depicted in the saga as a chieftainly character, who attracts loyal followers and who rewards their loyalty in a chieftainly manner. After his return from a journey abroad, Hörðr is depicted in the saga as a warrior who readily shows his determinacy by purchasing his maternal inheritance from his father (Ch. 20), and as a man who is ready to arbitrate immediately following this incident (Ch. 21). Hörðr’s depiction throughout the saga is governed by a sense of justice and by a maintenance of moderateness, with the single exception of the unfortunate deed which led to his outlawry. His position depends on the support and loyalty of his followers. As a result, he has to yield to their wishes even though the narrative lets us understand that he is aware of the fatal consequences (Harðar saga, Ch. 30). Hörðr Grímkelsson is an embodiment of a chieftain’s virtues, even under the difficult circumstances of outlawry, and he enjoys the respect of his followers.212 This chieftainly quality is also associated with Vigfúss, the

212 In connection with Hörðr Grímkelsson, it is worthwhile to refer to the discussion about King Sverrir in chapter 15.1.2.
son of the chieftain Víga-GLÚMR, who is said to have been hiding in his father’s house in outlawry, in an attempt to make others believe that he is abroad. In a moment of need, he appears in the midst of a battle to turn the tide favorably for his father. The sentence of Vigfúss is later nullified in compensation for the killing of one of Víga-GLÚMR’s followers. (Víga-GLÚMS saga, Ch. 19, 23.)

Those outlaws for whom a dignified family background is not reported also normally evoke the least sympathy in saga narration. The men from the lowest social strata had the least backup from their family or allies and hence were the most vulnerable. An outlaw who had an influential social network backing him was less vulnerable to attack even if the law guaranteed that killing an outlaw was, in principle, without consequences. Outlaws without noteworthy social networks could be used either as free labor or even as assassins or as mere targets of an assault by young men who wished to prove their valiance. Vatnsdæla saga (Ch. 2) contains an example of this. According to the saga, a man named Ketill complains in Norway to his young son that in his youth, young men strove to accomplish great feats, and urges his son to attack a highwayman who dwells in the forest. Hence, killing highwaymen and other outlaws is represented as a great feat in this text. A similar scene situated in Iceland appears in Grettis saga (Ch. 68). Here, Snorri goði urges his son Þóroddr to prove his manliness by killing an outlaw.

In Laxdæla saga (Ch. 14), a man named Þórólfur is described to be “like a penniless freed-man”, 213 i.e. a slave who has been given freedom. The description apparently refers to his lack of property rather than his background as a slave, which becomes evident later in the saga when he appeals to his relatives who include characters strong enough to protect him from his pursuers after he has been outlawed. He was outlawed in the first place, however, for killing his partner in a fishing company, an influential man named Hallr, who cheated him. Hallr had a wealthy and influential brother, Ingjaldr. Hallr hardly would have even attempted to betray Þórólfur had he considered him able to seek justice, and Þórólfur was forced to resort to desperate action. It is, preposterously enough, through the deeds that led to his outlawry that Þórólfur receives respect. This is because he is rescued by his family, and this act removes a significant amount of the social capital of honor from Ingjaldr and his family to Þórólfur’s family. In this process, the slave Ásgauatr, who has helped Þórólfur, is rewarded with freedom and, according to the saga, he turns up to be acknowledged as a “brave man” in Denmark (Ch. 16).

---

213 “[…] náliga lausingi einn félauss.”
This was another way for the saga writer to indicate that the outcome of the events was appropriate.

Outlawry associated a free man with a slave, who also had nothing to lose in his desperate position except his life. Slaves were considered virtually non-humans in the Family Sagas. By definition, they were the property of free men, and hence their family ties were not acknowledged or cared for.\footnote{214}

Chieftains hired strangers in a desperate position for shady enterprises. Notably often, these strangers were outlaws. Flugumaðr (pl. flugumenn) is the native term for an assassin in the Family Sagas.\footnote{215} Even though outlaws are hired in the sagas as assassins mainly by chieftains,\footnote{216} also a revengeful farmer\footnote{217} could hire one if only he had a socially superior relation to the assassin candidate. In addition to outlaws, also servants,\footnote{218} slaves\footnote{219} and foreigners\footnote{220} are considered suitably desperate and socially inferior individuals for such deeds. The stereotypical assassination attempt is made either from a hiding post (such as in Eyrbyggja saga, Ch. 36) or by seeking a position in the target’s household and attacking after confidence is gained. Reykdæla

\footnote{214} Unless they were noble enough: an example of a slave whose social status is raised when her royal blood is recognized is Melkorka in Laxdæla saga, (Ch. 20) or the Droplaugarsons’ great-grandmother Arneiðr whose father was the Earl of Hebrides.

\footnote{215} The term (literally “fly-man”) has been suggested to derive as a metaphor from a term in Swedish law where it refers to wizards (Claesby & Vigfússon 1957, 162; Heide 2006, 184) or from flies that were presumably associated with the corpses that these men left behind. Frog made an interesting remark in line with the discussion presented in Heide 2006: “It seems most natural to me to read this expression as rooted in ignoble killings conceived as accomplished through a magical mediating agent called a ‘fly’. In other words, sorcery, and therefore also simultaneously a commentary on the type of sorcery that causes harms through this mediating unseen agent as a (or perhaps the ultimate) form of secret killing. It is consistent with the conceptions and categories of the most powerful and dangerous shamans of Sámi tradition (Rydving 2010), which is more striking when the term gandr and other terms for magic and ritual practices appear to have been adapted from Germanic or Old Norse.” (Frog, personal communication.) I would suggest, in more practical terms, that the term refers rather to the tactics of an assassin, hit-and-run, which stood in stark contrast to honorable battle as it was conceived in those days and therefore a differentiating sign. Hence, a translation for the term would be as flugarmaður or fljúgumaður, “man of flight”.

\footnote{216} Snorri goði in Eyrbyggja saga, Ch. 36; Finnboga saga ramma, Ch. 39–40; Grettis saga, Ch. 55–56; Reykdæla saga, Ch. 21,22,26.

\footnote{217} Óttarr in Vatnsdæla saga, Ch. 39.

\footnote{218} Kolbakr in Fóstbræðra saga, Ch. 9; Spá-Gils in Eyrbyggja saga (Ch. 32) was urged by Þóroðr to kill a man called Úlfar. He killed Úlfar with the sword he asked to see but died in a cowardly manner. There is another Spá-Gils in the saga (Ch. 18) in the role of a warning foreseer. As a seer, Spá-Gils was apparently a suspicious marginal figure who could fill the role of as an assassin as well, even if it compromised the consistency of the narrative.

\footnote{219} An anonymous slave in Flōamanna saga, Ch. 19; two slaves in Eyrbyggja saga, named Svartr (Ch. 26) and Egill, (Ch. 43).

\footnote{220} Svartr in Vatnsdæla saga, Ch. 40.
saga (Ch. 26) applies the semantics of flugumenn inventively. According to this saga, an outlaw named Ásbjörn agrees to do a favor in exchange for protection from Skúta, but he refuses to perform assassination. However, he agrees to lure Skúta’s enemy, Glúmr, into an ambush, and Skúta rewards him with a place in his household. The flugumaðr theme returns to the narrative later when Skúta attacks Glúmr with a sword or an axe (the saga writer refers to two disagreeing traditions) that is called Fluga, whence Skúta himself could be called, literally, Flugumaðr (“the man of [the sword] Fluga”). Assistance of an outlaw posed the threat of being sentenced even to an influential chieftain. For instance, Björn Hítðælakappi was summoned for assisting outlaws (skógarmanabjǫrg) but he managed to settle the case with a monetary fee (Bjarnar saga Hítðælakappa, Ch. 22).

9.4 The Private Field

At a moment of crisis, an individual in the Saga World could resort to his family, but the society intervened between an outlaw and his family through the law: it was forbidden even for the kindred221 to help an outlaw in any way. In this contradiction between the interests of the society and the family, outlawry either brought the family together or pulled it apart. The strong bond between kinsmen, as represented in the Family Sagas, posited obligations to family members that were readily at odds with the interest of the society that was articulated in the letter of law. The dilemma between the family interests and society is at the dramatic centre of many saga narratives about outlawry.

Conflict within the family is the central theme of Gísla saga (Meulengracht Sørensen 1986, 238). According to the saga, Gisli Súrsson’s brother Þorkell is forced to choose whether to help his outlawed brother or not, and an explicit evaluation of disapproval of not supporting his kindred is put into Gísli’s mouth (Gísla saga, Ch. 23, 24). In contrast, in Grettis saga, the outlawed Grettir Ásmundarson’s brother Illugi is praised for accompanying him on his flight to a desert island and to his death there. In the case of the two major outlaw heroes (Gísli and Grettir), characters of differing relations to the outlaws give varied reasons for not helping them: in spite of the fact that it was forbidden by the law, a reason not to break law seems to have been required in their cases, as though breaking the law for the sake of (retrospectively)

221 These are the immediate relatives (as discussed in Hastrup 1985, 70–72).
acknowledged heroes was considered a norm. The denial of help is explained in both sagas with a curse.

The kindred also included, in addition to the extended family, more distant relatives. Cousins up to a second cousin were acknowledged by the law (Hastrup 1985, 79–83). In practice, kinship concerning cousins and uncles (mágr) was acknowledged (in the Family Sagas) to whatever distance was found beneficial (Andersson & Miller 1989, 15–16). The hierarchy of family relations and consequent levels of obligations is indicated in the law in, for instance, the lists of inheritance rights or in the lists of wergild (Hastrup 1985, 87–89). Kin groups were bilateral, meaning that they extended to other family groups through marriage. Due to the limited number of inhabitants in Iceland, groups in conflict often shared kin and this led to a strong desire to settle (Karlsson 2000, 59; Þorláksson 1994, 399–406). Even a distant kinship could be seen as grounds for an obligation in the Family Sagas, and fulfilling obligations was considered a virtue, such as in the case of Helgu-Steinarr in Fóstbræðra saga (Ch. 24). Refusing to help a close relative was considered a strong statement in the saga literature.

9.4.1 Father and Son

The relationship between an outlaw and his father has a remarkable role in numerous saga narratives about outlawry. The bond between a father and a son is considered in the Family Sagas to be the strongest bond possible (Guðrún Nordal 1998, 44), manifested in the fact that there was a special designation, feðgar, for “father and son(s).” However, the son had to earn his place as the father’s successor, which required the father’s acceptance. Sons were supposed to become at least equal to their fathers. This was expressed in the Family Sagas with the special term betrfeðrungr (“better than father”). This was, for instance, a condition for Höðr Grímkelsson to inherit from his mother in Harðar saga (Ch. 10, 20).222 There are numerous passages in the Family Sagas that describe how a son attempts to demonstrate his potential and capability to become the head of a household, to serve the interests of the household or family by accomplishing successful trading and raiding voyages or by hunting down collective threats such as bandits.223 Tensions between fathers and sons are common in the Family Sagas, and, for instance, the tensions described in Ljósvetninga saga (Ch. 2–4,

222 To be precise, this was expressed as not becoming verrfeðrungr, “worse than father.”
223 The heroic feats can perhaps be considered as narrative expressions of rites of passage in the sense suggested by the anthropologists van Gennep and Victor Turner.
20, 22) are explained by Theodore Andersson and William Ian Miller as “jockeying for position within the social groupings”: the expectation for a son to become superior to his father could lead a father and son to become rivals (Andersson & Miller 1989, 16).

The father functioned as an outright role model for Gísli Súrsson. In Gísla saga, the plot starts proceeding towards Gísli’s outlawry when his father Þorbjörn súrr dies and Gísli gets the position as the head of the household (Ch. 4). He is unable to manage the responsibilities in a way that would please his siblings, and the tragedy starts unfolding when he obstinately attempts to maintain his ideal of family unity that does not meet with the ideals of his brother and sister. Similarly, in Þorsteins þátr stangarhöggss, Þorsteinn’s father is forced to guard the family honor and to egg his son into action when he himself fails to act. He functions as a role model in spite of his old age and blindness. Þorsteinn is outlawed when he does his father’s will but this will proves successful when Þorsteinn actually manages to meet the great expectations that his father has placed upon him.

In the case of the heroic outlaws Grettir Ásmundarson and Hörðr Grímkelsson, the fathers are not very pleased with their offspring. The relationship between Grettir and his father Ásmundr has a parallel in the preceding generation. Grettir’s quarrelsome youth with his father Ásmundr is described in Grettis saga (Ch. 14–17) in largely same terms as that between Ásmundr and his father Þorgrím in Ch. 13 of the saga:

Ásmundr was unwilling to work, and he was on poor terms with his father. This continued until Ásmundr was of a mature age. At this time, Ásmundr asked his father for goods to trade abroad. Þorgrím said that he would give little of that but gave him a few movables, though. (Ch. 13.)

Despite the conspicuous similarities in temperament, Ásmundr shows only little respect to his son. Not before returning from his glorious first voyage to Norway does Grettir achieve his father’s acceptance: “then Ásmundr received him with honor” (Ch. 28). Grettir has to earn this respect – and thus fulfill his father’s expectations in the same way that for instance his own forefather Ketill Hængr had to, although with a somewhat exaggerated delay (see chapter 10.2.2). In contrast, Hörðr Grímkelsson, as a child, destroys his mother’s dear necklace when he takes his first steps. His father Grímkel becomes furious enough to expel him from his sight and to give him away in fosterage. (Harðar

---

224 “Ásmundr vildi lítt vinna, ok var fátt um með þeim feðgum; fór svá, þar til r Ásmundr var roskinn at aldri; þá beiddi Ásmundr fararfna af fóðr sinum. Þorgrím kvað þau lítil verða mundu ok fékk honum þó nokkut flytjanda eyri.”

215
saga, Ch. 7.) He is only promised his inheritance if he proves a better man than his father, which he does, as could be expected.

The problematic relationship with the father in these accounts, together with that of Ketill Hængr and many other legendary heroes of the pre-settlement past, repeat the kolbitr theme in which a boy who not much is expected of proves valiant in his later age. This narrative element is a conventional way to express their growth into distinct individuality, required of a heroic character, which requires separation from authorities. In the patriarchal society of the Saga World, a father easily represents or symbolizes authority in general. Acknowledging the superiority of the father, who is the representative of household interests, and thereby family interests in general, is necessary for a young man in order to overtake and maintain the position of his father as a successor. However, this obedience or submission conflicts with the discrepant virtue of a competent patriarchal leader (and especially a hero) who should be characterized by individualism in the sense of making one’s own decisions and standing behind them (see also Jakobsson 2003).

In a noteworthy number of cases, the loss of the exemplary and authoritative figure of the father precedes outlawry. Gísli Súrsson’s path to outlawry opened after his father died and he obtained the farm and his father’s position as the head of the family (Gísla saga, Ch. 4). Króka-Refr’s father died of illness, and the events that finally led to his outlawry started when he took his place as a protector of his mother against a bullying neighbour at the early age of twelve (Króka-Refs saga). Þorgeirr Hávarsson avenged his father at the same age, which was the incitement for his enterprises seeking heroic fame. The excessiveness of these enterprises led to his outlawry (Fóstbræðra saga, Ch. 2). Hrafn Guðrúnarson, as told in his þáttr, was outlawed for avenging his father by killing the son of his father’s killer. According to Kjalnesinga saga (Ch. 4), the outlawed Búi’s father died instead of his son when the father of Búi’s victim sought revenge but could not reach Búi himself. It is implied in Laxdæla saga (Ch. 57) that the outlaw Grímr’s father had died earlier.

Even though Grettir’s father Ásmundr is described in Grettis saga as being on rather cool terms with his son, Grettir is attributed warmer sentiments in the saga. Grettir avenges the mockery of his father on Þorbjörn ferðalangr, killing him (Grettis saga, Ch. 37). Þorbjörn ferðalangr falsely claims that Grettir’s father is dead and that he died dishonorably. Grettir’s violent response is fully justified and from the angle of the honor of his family: he was even obliged to respond to it, despite being on bad terms with his father. Later, Ásmundr gives an evaluation of Grettir on his deathbed from the point of view of a
responsible head of the household, concerned of the future of his family: “But I cannot say about Grettir because I think that his nature is on a turning wheel. And even though he is a strong man, I am afraid that he will bring more difficulties than support to his family” (Ch. 42). Ásmundr was able to have Grettir’s first killing settled to a reasonable punishment (lesser outlawry) and Ásmundr’s death practically coincides with Grettir’s sentencing to outlawry. The personal tragedy that follows losing a father, highlighted in outlawry in the accounts discussed here, can be interpreted as a social drama. The father functions as a settling figure who smooths the sharpest edges of his son’s rash ambitions and who buffers the most drastic consequences of his son’s heroic endeavors. After his affect is gone, the fate of the young man becomes more predictable as a direct collision between him and the ideal of stability of a farming society. In extreme cases, this collision has fatal consequences.

An outlawed father was a threat to his sons and to his whole family, even if the tragic fate of an outlaw guaranteed his son a good point of departure to become better than him, becoming betreföðruins. Hörðr Grímkelsson’s young sons had to run for their lives from pursuers that were after their lives on behalf of their outlawed father (Harðar saga, Ch. 38), and in mature age, the older son died while avenging his father (Ch. 41). In Víglundar saga (Ch. 6, 13), the pursuers of Þorgeir pruði, who had been outlawed in Norway, initiate the whole adventure of his sons Víglundr and Trausti that the saga consists of. Eyrbyggja saga (Ch. 62) tells that the bandit troop leader Óspakr Kjallaksson is killed in a battle but that his son Glúmr survives the battle and even marries a girl from a respected family. On the other hand, a foster son could play a settling role between his outlawed foster father and his biological father.

The “jockeying for position” in the father–son relationship belongs to the youth of the son, and ceases to be significant when he grows independent and his father turns dependent. Socio-structurally, there is a discrepancy between outlawry and the role of a father as a man with children, implying his role as the head of a household and as its representative in the public field of the society. This discrepancy is so deep that it rarely has a place even in the narratives. On a narrative basis,

---

225 “En til Grettis kann ek ekki at leggja, þvi at mér þykkr á mjók hverfanda hjóli um hans hagi, ok þó at hann sé sterkr maðr, þá uggir mik, at hann eigi meir um vandráði at vela en fulltinga frændum sinum.”

226 The foster son Eiðr of the outlawed Þóđr hreða had a settling effect in the confrontations between Þóðr and Eiðr’s father Miðjarðar-Skeggi, and eventually successfully arbitrated between them (Þóðar saga hreða). Eiðr was not a biological son of the outlawed Þóðr but through fosterage a trusted male family member of succeeding generation. In this role, Eiðr was an effective reconciler between his biological father and his foster father.
a protecting and authoritative father does not support the narrative character of an outlaw as an independent, individualistic figure. The notion of outlawry is at variance with an ideal father–son relationship. What the recognition of a father’s authority represents is lacking in outlaws, and outlawry of a father prevents him from providing his son with means to a successful life.

9.4.2 Brothers

The expectation of a brother was complete loyalty that would override the law. Brothers were an embodiment of the closest possible relationship between equals in the male dominated, family-centered and hierarchical Saga World. This is why brotherhood functioned as an effective metaphorical element in the designation of sworn-brotherhood. The Family Sagas suggest expectations that the brother of an outlaw will either share his fate or unconditionally support him, and fulfilling these expectations or deviation from them would generate meanings in narration.

The loyalty between brothers in the saga narratives is most visible in the depictions of the similarity between brothers. For example, in Víglundar saga, the brothers Víglundur and Trausti are constantly depicted together: they fight together, they are outlawed together, they travel and harry together. However, they do not marry the same girl, and the romance of the brothers who is the focal character, Víglundr, is indeed the main theme of the saga. As the focus of the saga is on this romance, Trausti necessarily falls into the margin in the narration and acts most actively in the role of an advisor who attempts to limit the devastating effects of Víglundr’s love (Ch. 22). Another example is the outlawed brothers Föstólfur and Þróttólfur who are represented in Vatnsdæla saga (Ch. 47) in the same manner as Víglundr and his brother are in Víglundar saga. Similarly, according to Droplaugarsona saga, the two sons of Droplaug, Helgi and Grímr, stand by each other’s side all the way until the death of Helgi, whom Grímr avenges and is consequently outlawed.

Loyalty dominates the descriptions of brotherhood in spite of possible differences between the brothers. The depictions of contrasted characters tend to emphasize those features that differentiate the characters. Lars Lönnroth noticed that companions in the Family Sagas are typically depicted as opposites of each other in terms of certain characteristics. He labeled the sets of conventional features of these opposites as those of the robust Grettir type and the lean Siegfried type (1976, 62; see also
chapter 7.2 for further discussion). This characterization is a stark generalization but seems to depict the conventional models of saga writers quite well, and it suits especially well to the often contrastive depiction of two brothers, foster brothers or other permanent companions in the Family Sagas.

For example, Egill Skalla-Grimsson and his brother Þórólfr (Egils saga) differ from each other according to Lars Lönnroth’s contrastive types. Likewise, the three brothers of Grettir Ásmundarson differed from him and from each other, but all remained loyal to each other through the difficulties that Grettir caused. In contrast, the expectation of loyalty among brothers makes the separation between Gísli Súrsson and his brother Þorkell exceptional. Þorkell had a reason to turn his back on his brother when Gísli was found responsible of killing Þorkell’s friend and brother-in-law Þorgrímr Þorsteinsson (Gísla saga, Ch. 19). The code of loyalty towards blood relatives, which was further emphasized in Gísli’s actions and statements, set expectations of more help than a secret warning (Ch. 19) and some provisions (Ch. 23). This gave Gísli a reason to state, “I would have not have answered you in this manner and refused to do more” (Ch. 19).\footnote{227 “[… ] mynda ek eigi þér svá svara sem þú svarar mér nú ok eigi heldr gera.”} These failed expectations established the contrast between the two brothers.\footnote{228 The fragmentary version B of the saga constructs a more positive image of Þorkell and therefore conforms better to the presumption of a brotherly relationship in the Saga World (Lethbridge 2010, 146–148). However, the overall image of Þorkell remains an opposite to Gísli.} However, the poem that Gísli later composes after learning of his brother’s death (Ch. 30) expresses violent sorrow and Gísli swears revenge in a way that resembles in spirit the poem composed by Grettir when he heard of the deaths of his brother and father (Grettis saga, Ch. 47). Grettir’s reactions to the news were inhibited: “People say that Grettir’s appearance did not change with this piece of news but that he was as sorrowless as before” (Ch. 47).\footnote{229 “Svá segja menn, at Grettir brygði engan veg skapi við þessar fréttir ok var jafnglaðr sem áðr.”} Indeed, the capacity to hide emotions is generally regarded as a virtue and as a sign of inner strength in the Family Sagas (Miller 1992, 94–97). This proposition has an even more verbose parallel in Fóstbræðra saga (Ch. 2), in the scene in which Þorgeirr learns of his father’s death. The saga extensively describes different kinds of autonomous bodily reactions to distressing situations, of which there are no signs on Þorgeirr, and this is intended to prove his sturdy heart. Actually, the depiction of Grettir’s reaction to the news of his father’s and brother’s deaths is like a combination of the reactions of the two other famous saga outlaws. This combination results in an image of an assertive man...
who nevertheless feels sensible, empathy-evoking agony for the deaths of his close relatives.

Permanent companionships were often formed through, or sealed with, sworn-brotherhood. The contractual, non-consanguine bond between men, be it sworn-brotherhood or foster-brotherhood (two boys having been raised in the same household, one of which was not a biological son of the head of the household), was perceived strong and labeled with the same designation fóstbraeðralag. For example, sworn-brotherhood was the binding connection between Hörðr, Geirr and Helgi in Harðar saga. Hörðr and Geirr were raised as foster brothers (and hence, they were actual fóstbraeður) whereas Helgi joined their company as a servant on a Scandinavian trade journey (Ch. 12). After a year, as they spent time in the court of a Swedish jarl (Ch. 16) Helgi, together with the jarl’s son, was counted among the sworn-brothers (fóstbraeður), and in the midst of his final battle, Hörðr himself refers to Helgi as his sworn-brother (fóstbróðir) (Ch. 36). It is noteworthy that the title of Fóstbraeðra saga (“the saga of sworn-brothers”) refers to sworn-brotherhood, but the saga also represents a different, exceptional term for sworn-brothers, svarabróðir (Ch. 18; Ch. 20) although only in the vocabulary of the king of Norway. Sworn-brotherhood and foster-brotherhood brought along strong responsibilities: the bond, be it emotional or based in the social mechanisms, seems to have been considered at least as strong as an oath in which the gods were called as witnesses (articulated only in Gísla saga (Ch. 6), however).

Jón Viðar Sigurðsson (1999, 126–140) discussed sworn-brotherhood in terms of a dyadic, i.e. reciprocal companionship in which both parties had similar responsibilities. This aspect probably had a function in the institution of sworn-brotherhood but the institution was more than that. Agneta Breisch compared sworn-brotherhood with félag (“company”) that was an economic unit (Breisch 1994, 116). This comparison, if it was acknowledged in medieval Iceland, would mean that turning down a félag was possible to equate with breaking an oath. Such equation would justify the lethal reaction of Þórhólf to the fraud of his companion in Laxdæla saga (Ch. 14) and make the sympathy that he receives more understandable even in his consequent fugitive state.

In Gísla saga and Fóstbraeðra saga, sworn-brotherhood is depicted as a formal bonding of men through a ceremonious, respected oath (Breisch 1994, 112–114, 153). 230 In the narrative structure of these sagas, the

---

230 In the sagas, an oath strengthens the horizontal ties (in the terms of Hastrup 1985, 102), but in Sturlunga saga, it is applied as an oath of loyalty to the superior, chieftains or kings (vertical loyalty). The alliance created by fostering was similar in many respects to that created by marriage (Hastrup 1985, 99).
bond functions as a central binding element. The significance of this element is strengthened by fate-connected associations that are developed for instance through the depiction of ritual ceremonies. Ceremoniousness is not a necessary element for sworn-brotherhood in the Family Sagas but sworn-brotherhood rather seems to have been used as a notion of a close functional comradeship such as that among men who sail together to alien lands for plundering expeditions (e.g. Viðlundar saga; Harðar saga; Bjarnar saga Hitdælakappa). This naturally does not exclude the possibility of the men having supposedly sworn ceremonious oaths. Companionship, however represented in the saga literature, was associated with the obligations of fóstbræðralag.

9.4.3 The Female Family Members

A mother’s emotional tie to her children is expressed with special warmth, even in the predominantly rigid discourse of the Family Sagas. A similar, and occasionally even stronger, bond could develop between a foster mother and her foster child. In the sagas foster mothers are attributed with supernatural gifts remarkably often – which seems to have been an approvable way to bring witchcraft-associated power into a respected family.

It is interesting how central a role is assigned to Grettir Ásmundarson’s mother, Ásdís, in Grettir’s biography. Grettir’s reliance and dependence on his mother is in apparent contrast to his individualistic, rebellious character. Indeed, Ásdís has become a symbol of motherly love in Iceland (Kristjánsson Ó. 1978, 19). Ásdís appears as a very strong figure in Grettis saga. She supported her son when he was at odds with his father at an early age: “I do not know which I would object to more, that you constantly give him tasks or that he does not accomplish them” (Grettis saga, Ch. 14). She also gave Grettir her support when he was leaving on his first journey to Norway, providing him with a valuable family sword. Grettir’s gratitude is expressed in a poem he composed: “a mother is best for a child” (Ch. 17).

According to the saga, Ásdís acquired the management of the farm after her son Atli died, and she managed it well (Grettis saga, Ch. 47). She fulfilled her representational duties completely as the head of the household. Grettir kept returning to his mother for refuge during his outlawry, and Grettir’s

231 “Eigi veit ek, hvárt mér þykkir meir frá móti, at þú skipar honum jafnan starfa, eða hitt, at hann leysir alla einn veg af hendi.”
232 “Enn réð orðskvið sanna / auðnorn við mik fornan / ern, at bezt es barni, / benskóðs fyr gjöf, móðir.”
farewells and reunions with his mother are regular markers of narrative turns in the saga. Ásdis even gave up her only other living son to be a companion for Grettir in his final refuge on the solitary island Drangey, in spite of ominous dreams she had concerning his poor fate (Ch. 69). According to the saga, Grettir eagerly appealed to his mother in anxiousness. Russel Poole even analyzed Grettir’s psychological traits (called such with tongue in cheek) through his dependence and attachment to his mother (Poole 2000, 404).

The protective function of the mother is a reverse element of the father’s dislike in the conventional kolbitur-theme. It was the mother who provided Grettir with a weapon for his initial journey abroad, whereas his father refused to equip him in any way (Grettis saga, Ch. 17). Similarly, Hörðr’s stepmother persuaded Hörðr’s reluctant father to give him the necessary capital for his journey (Harðar saga, Ch. 13), hence the significance of the stepmother is emphasized in the scene at the expense of his father. It was necessarily the mother who equipped also Króka-Refr (Króka-Refs saga, Ch. 3) and Þorgeirr Hávarsson (Fóstbræðra saga, Ch. 2) at their departure from home because their fathers had died while they were children. Egill Skalla-Grímsson’s mother expressed pride over her violent, “viking-like” son after he had killed a playmate, while his father was less pleased (Egils saga, Ch. 40).

Hrafn Guðrúnarson is labeled in Hrafnþátr Guðrúnarsonar with a matronym even though his father is named in the saga as well. This choice reflects the importance of Hrafn’s mother’s role in the early phases of Hrafn’s outlawry in Iceland (Hrafnþátr Guðrúnarsonar, Chs. 1–3) and the significance of outlawry as a central element of the saga. In Vatnsdæla saga (Ch. 19–24), Hrolleifr, an evil-doer and outlaw, is protected by the sorcery of his mother. She gave him a shirt that weapons would not bite, and she was ready to use witchcraft to cause a landslide to fall on his pursuers (Ch. 24). In contrast, Hörðr Grímkelsson’s mother’s dislike of her son (Harðar saga, Ch. 7) is an exception against this general tendency and emphasizes Hörðr’s paternal...

---

233 Farewells before Grettir’s first journey to Norway (Grettis saga, Ch. 17); when Grettir’s flight as an outlaw begins (Ch. 48); and when he leaves home for his final refuge on the island Drangey (Ch. 69). Reunions gain attention in the narration when Grettir returns from his unfortunate journey to Norway (Ch. 47); after he has avenged his brother Atli (Ch. 48); and before Grettir departs for his final refuge on the Island Drangey (Ch. 69).

234 When Grettir was humiliated by the trollish mountain spirit Loptr, he expressed his feelings with a reference to his mother: “brúður spyr hósk eft hraðumst / hvarma Loptr hinn arma” (“The wise bride of eyebrows (mother) asks if I was afraid of lousy Loptr”) (following Örnolfur Thorsson, 1996); Guðni Jónsson interprets the stanza somewhat differently: “brúðr strýkr hósk, eft hraðumk, / hvarma, Loptr enn armi” (“my mother would wipe her eyes if I was afraid of the lousy Loptr”) (Guðni Jónsson 1936, 177–178).

235 “Bera kvað Egil vera vikingsefni.”
lineage as a frame of reference for his character. Protective motherly characters in connection with outlaws were not necessarily biological mothers. Búi was cared for and protected by his foster mother Esja (*Kjalnesinga saga*) and the protective role of a regular female helper was manifested in other female relationships as well.

As discussed earlier, daughters were important social capital to the farmers and their families. The protection of a sister’s honor was the reason for the deeds that led to Kolr’s outlawry in *Flóamanna saga* (Ch. 19) and for the fugitivity of Þóðr hreða in his saga. The sympathies of the saga writers were dedicated to both of them, which implies that the deeds that led to their outlawry were morally approvable in terms of saga discourse. Gísli Súrsson’s actions in the prelude of *Gísla saga* (and in the later sequence that takes place in Iceland, as suggested by Hermann Pálsson 1974) echoes this same inclination but the protective gesture of killing an intrusive suitor does not improve the relationship between Gísli and his sister Þórdís, who turns against Gísli later in Iceland. Indeed, the sisters of Gísli Súrsson and Hörðr Grimkelsson are given central roles in their biographies. The complicated relationship between Gísli and his sister Þórdís has been dealt with in many articles, and they all conclude that this relationship, which was marked by Gísli’s protective possessiveness and Þórdís’s repetitious tendency to attach to potential grooms who did not please her father, determines the tone of the whole saga. Gísli’s sister Þórdís becomes a reason for Gísli’s outlawry after she reveals Gísli’s guilt in her husband’s murder, and Þórdís even marries the man who is principally responsible of avenging him (*Gísla saga*, Chs. 18–19).

In contrast, Hörðr Grimkelsson’s sister Þorbjörg is an embodiment of sibling love that endures even Hörðr’s attempt on her life. Hörðr does not approve of the marriage of his sister with a man named Indriði, and *Harðar saga* implies that Hörðr’s foster brother Geirr was also against it, having born wishes of marrying her himself. This justifies their attempt on Indriði’s life, which endangered Þorbjörg as well. (*Harðar saga*, Ch. 31.) Þorbjörg’s loyalty towards Hörðr is notable in the end of the saga in an account where she violently urges Indriði to avenge Hörðr in spite of the evident danger involved in the effort (Ch. 38). The sisters of the outlaws do not often have similarly important roles. For example, in *Grettis saga*, Grettir’s sisters are in a rather nominal role and have significance mainly as recruiters of male family members when all the men in the family have deceased.

---

236 See e.g. Holtsmark 1951; Andersson 1968; Pálsson 1974; and Meulengracht Sørensen 1986.
Most outlaws are depicted as solitary, unmarried refugees. Grettir Ásmundarson never settled to marry, and Þorgeirr Hávarsson is stated in *Föstbræðra saga* to have despised courting and female company as too “unmanly” for a warrior like him. Generally, reasons to the unmarried status of outlaws in the Family Sagas can arguably be sought both in the phase of life in which they usually were outlawed, as has been discussed above, and in the narrative focus that is on the deeds of these men as outlaws who are separated from the social networks, not as husbands. Therefore, we are told hardly anything about the families of Hrafnkell Freysgoði or Eiríkr rauði, even though their wives followed them to exile, not to mention outlaws as minor characters that have a definite function within a saga plot and hence appear as stock characters. The loyalty of Króka-Refr’s wife was similar to that of the other pioneering outlaws: she followed her husband from land to land in search of a peaceful life. However, there are a few notable exceptions. To Gísli Súrsson and Hörðr Grímkelsson, the wife was an important figure who unselfishly shared the difficulties of a fleeing lifestyle and stayed as their husbands’ support in remote places and under poor circumstances.

Else Mundal (1992, 104) has stated, “Women had a double loyalty: to their own family and that of their husband.” Numerous saga passages mention an outlaw who appears on a farm and this forces the mistress of the farm to choose between her loyalty towards her husband or towards the outlaw who often is her relative. There is no unanimous preference in such a choice that would cover the accounts in the different sagas, and the outcome seems to be determined by the perspective or focalization of the narrative. Gísli Súrsson’s wife Auðr selects not to side with her husband only once in *Gísla saga*. This is when she shelters her nephews, who have killed Gísli’s brother Þorkell in revenge for the death of their father Vésteinn, during their escape from the consequences of this deed (*Gísla saga*, Chs. 29–30). The choice based on the loyalty between the two available directions is typically bound to the protective function: solidarity is shown to the one who needs it most. So, at a moment of acute distress, the narrative role of women is typically one that is settling or protective.

The wives of the outlaws Gísli Súrsson, Hörðr Grímkelsson and Króka-Refr are depicted as loyal followers of their husbands. These women are ready not only to share the difficulties of the fugitive life but, especially in the case of Gísli’s wife, Auðr, to put their own health and life at stake in order to protect their husbands. Hörðr Grímkelsson’s wife, Helga, may have had but few choices since, as the daughter of a Gautish earl, she did not have blood relatives in Iceland and she could hardly rely on her contractual family network before Hörðr was deceased. Gísli’s
wife, Auðr, joined her husband in his final battle with a club, hitting the leader of the attackers, Eyjólfr on the arm and disabling him from continuing the fight. Gísl conjunct his admiration: “I have known it for a long time that I married a good wife, but I did not know that I had as good a wife as I do” (Gísla saga, Ch. 34). This was not the first time Auðr hit Eyjólfr. Earlier in the saga, Eyjólfr offered Auðr a purse full of silver for handing over Gísl. Auðr responded by hitting Eyjólfr in the nose with the purse, underlining the humiliating nature of the deed: “Take this, together with shame and disgrace” (Gísla saga, Ch. 32).

A similar scene is found in Gunnars þátr Þiðrandabana. The saga recounts how Gunnarr kills Þiðrandi and escapes the revenge. Gunnarr goes to Helgi Ásbjarnarson who accommodates him in an outbuilding. Helgi asks his wife Þórdís to take good care of Gunnarr while he is away. Þórdís’s brother Bjarni, who is aware of Gunnarr’s whereabouts, uses the opportunity and, together with the other pursuers, demands Þórdís deliver Gunnarr to them. Þórdís assures him of her will to cooperate and asks the men to return the next morning when she would turn over Gunnarr. However, during the night, she gathers a large troop of her relatives to the farm, and in the morning the pursuers are forced to withdraw. (Gunnars þátr Þiðrandabana Ch. 5–6.) Later, after returning, Helgi says to his wife: “I knew that I had married well, and it is good that she is like her parents” (Ch. 6). This expression of admiration has a direct parallel in Gísl’s Súrsson’s statement quoted above. The loyalty of the lady of the house towards an outlaw, together with the similarity of the expression of praise, establishes a connection between Gísla saga and Gunnars þátr Þiðrandabana. This intertextual connection between the biographies of Gísl Súrsson and Gunnarr Þiðrandabani elevates Gunnarr to the same group of heroic outlaws as Gísl. Furthermore, Þórdís’s solidarity towards Gunnarr binds the fate of Helgi with that of Gunnarr. Therefore, the eventually fortunate outcome of Gunnarr’s outlawry confers honor upon Helgi as well.

In direct contrast to the loyalty of wives towards their outlawed husbands is the ready willingness of an anonymous maid to turn over her outlaw lover Stígandi in exchange for her freedom (Laxdæla saga, Ch. 38). The maid’s behavior is not praised in the saga text: she is not even given a name. Even slaves are normally named if they have a significant role in narration, whether good or bad. However, Stígandi was a member

237 “Þó vissu ek fyrir lónu, at ek var vel kvæntr, en þó vissu ek eigi, at ek væra svá vel kvæntr sem ek em.”
238 “Haf nú þetta ok með bæði skómm ok klæki.”
239 “Vissu ek, at ek var vel kvæntr, ok er þat vel, at hon sagðisk í ætt sína.”
240 “Óláfr bauð at kaupa at henni.”
of a family that was involved in witchcraft, and a foreigner on the top of that. These two factors reduced the sympathy that he receives in the narrative. This lack of sympathy made deceiving him appropriate in the eyes of the saga writer and justified leaving the implicitly disapproved disloyalty of the servant woman unpunished in the narrative. Another good example of a wife’s disloyalty is articulated in Gunnarr af Hliðarendi’s comment to his wife Halgerðr (Njáls saga, Ch. 76) when she refuses to provide him a single hair as a replacement for a broken bow string when he is trying to defend against an attack to his home: “‘Everyone earns certain kind of fame’, Gunnarr says, ‘and this kind of fame will not serve you long.’” 241 Hallgerðr became an icon of what a good wife was not supposed to be, articulated in the words that Gunnarr’s mother Rannveig aimed at her: “‘You do badly and your shame will last long.’” 242 Hallgerðr’s action inversely defined the expected behavior of an ideal wife as being ready to compromise her own life for the sake of her husband, manifested in Auðr and Þórdís in the above examples.

9.4.4 Outlawry in the Private Field

In the Family Sagas, outlaws only seldom appear fully separated from society but they find vital assistance from different directions. Even though all Icelanders were members of the public field, others had a greater tendency to defy the regulations posed within the public field on behalf of the outlaw. From the point of view of the outlaw, these individuals formed another field. This field was labeled above as the private field because the assistance they provided was motivated by personal ties to the outlaw. These ties were not fully separable from the public field because, to the degree that they were acknowledged in the public field, for instance as kinship ties, they contributed to social mechanisms in the public field that were manifested, for example, in the concept of family honor. Family honor was affected by impacts on the honor of each family member. Therefore, all assistance that prevented the outlaw’s pursuers from reaching their aim added to the family honor of the outlaw’s reference group, at the expense of his pursuers’ honor. Likewise, a chieftain could also gain personal honor at the expense of an outlaw’s pursuers by protecting the outlaw even without family obligations.

241 “‘Hefir hver til sín ágætis nökkut,’ segir Gunnarr, ‘ók skal þig þessa eigi lengi þiðja.’”
242 “Illa fer þer og mun þin skómm lengi uppi.”
Outlawry was an extreme penalty, and any technical flaws in the legal procedure or abuse of the legal system that led an individual to outlawry collided with the sense of justice. As a collectively imposed destructive sentence upon an individual, outlawry that was passed in court as an act of aggression in a bilateral feud was morally questionable. Outlawry in the Family Sagas served as a vehicle to discuss and even criticize societal mechanisms such as legal procedures or the wielding of power – and as a result, such criticism provided the victims of their wrongful abusers with a role that guaranteed them sympathy. Outside the social mechanisms that involve honor, women tend to assist outlaws in the Family Sagas even without family ties to the outlaw. The public and the private field of the social structures in the Saga World overlapped each other and an individual’s choices between the obligations in these two fields, as it regards assisting an outlaw, depicted the outlaw’s relationship to his family and lineage. The lineages of the saga characters possess semantic potential that will be discussed in the following chapter before turning to the reflection of social structures in spatial conceptions in chapter 11.
10 Lineage

Relations between individuals were constituents of social structures. As became apparent in the preceding discussion, a family background defined an individual’s identity in the Saga World, both as a person and in relation to society. The actions of saga characters and their relations with other people in the Family Sagas have meaning not only in relation to social structures but they also have meaning against the family backgrounds of the individuals involved. This is because the saga characters are representatives of family lines that have origins in the period prior to the settlement of Iceland. Furthermore, these lineages have frequently continued into the period of saga writing, and therefore the lineages of saga characters also created a bridge between the Saga Age and the period in which the sagas were written. Indeed, medieval Icelanders perceived the saga characters as actual people and not mere fictional characters because they could draw a lineage from them down to people in the time of saga writing. In addition, it was possible to trace the lineage of these people back to the generations of the settlement era and even into earlier periods. The series of events recounted in the Family Sagas should therefore be seen as belonging to a continuum of genealogical histories.

The contemporaries of the saga writers did not have immediate experiences of the personal characteristics of the particular saga characters. Therefore, saga characters were characterized through the historical traditions associated with them. For example, genealogies comprised an important part of family traditions and these were understood in relation to the lively narrative traditions that connected individual biographies. The lineage preceding and following an individual saga character connected him to the preceding generations and to other family groups that were associated with his predecessors as well as to his descendants. An individual’s biography was evaluated and understood, at least to a degree, in terms of these connections in his or her lineage. This chapter will discuss the significance of lineage in the construal of an outlaw character in two different temporal directions: back in time towards ancestors in the pre-settlement period recounted in the saga literature, and forward in time towards the period of saga writing.
10.1 Genealogy

Medieval Icelanders paid great attention to genealogies. The works *Íslendingabók, Hungurvaka* and *The First Grammatical Treatise* reveal that genealogical lists were among the first vernacular texts written in Icelandic. Genealogical lists also provided a structure or skeleton for larger family-historical narration, of which *Landnámabók* is a good example (Clunies Ross 1998, 85-86). The genealogies and narrative traditions that are reflected in these works were probably an incentive for the development of Icelandic prose, and especially for the Family Sagas. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen has suggested that these historical narratives resulted from expanding the descriptions of certain key characters by incorporating accounts of their births, deaths, travels, settlement histories, family relations, and other significant information (Meulengracht Sørensen 1977, 93). This suggestion seems quite plausible, even though it is impossible to state anything certain concerning the form or contents of the medieval oral lore behind these texts.

The Family Sagas pay great attention to genealogical information and there have been without a doubt many reasons for the significance of the family histories. Modern migration theories suggest that the cultural identity of the settlers in a new land is formed by the acknowledgment of their own indigenous history in the new place as well as the reformation of their relationship to the land of origin (see for instance Friedman 1992; Nagel 1994). In the medieval Icelandic context, the relevance of genealogy to immigrant communities is expressed in the Melabók version of *Landnámabók* (Ch. 335). There, the reasons for paying attention to one’s roots are expressed as follows: “So that, if we know our roots, we can answer foreigners when they claim that we descend from slaves or evil-doers.” The inclusion of genealogies in the Family Sagas is connected with the reasons to have these sagas written in the first place.

As discussed in chapter 2.2, the Family Sagas pay great attention to the settlement of Iceland and the distribution of land as well as to the struggles between the early chieftains. These issues concerned the Icelanders in the period of saga writing in the manner of foundation myths about the origin of the distribution of wealth in Iceland and how society took shape at the dawn of the Commonwealth Period (Eliade

---

243 “Enn uier þikiumst helldr suara kunna utlendum monnum. þa er þeir bregda oz þui ad uier sieum komner af þrelum eda illmennum, ef vier vitum vijst vorar kynferdir sannar.”
Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (1977) has actually suggested that these family histories were used in the Family Sagas for political purposes. For example, he points out that one can find in individual saga texts even apparently purposefully manufactured family lineages that differ from accounts in other sources (Meulengracht Sørensen 1977, 93). Margaret Clunies Ross has pointed out that legitimizing power and pursuing respectability by presenting a favorable lineage was common throughout Europe (Clunies Ross 1998, 55–58). For medieval Icelanders, noble lineage also had significance in foreign politics: it was not only presented to elevate one family above the others but also to justify Iceland’s independence from the Norwegian Crown (Clunies Ross 1998, 90).

Lineage could be fabricated rather freely. Paternal lineage, which follows the successive male generations, is the primary lineage that is followed in the Family Sagas. Nevertheless, if it seemed relevant, the maternal lineage was presented as well. For instance, *Landnámabók* consists of both paternal and maternal lineages as well as lineages drawn by marriage or blood relations, all approximately to the same degree (Clunies Ross 1998, 88). The lineages represented in the Family Sagas and other texts can therefore be presumed to be quite selective. Lineages were used to explain why some families had numerous poets and intellectuals, some had leaders, and why some had strong and turbulent men. The characteristics of remarkable saga characters are also regularly reflected in their forefathers. The concept *fylgja*, a mythic personification of fate or luck attached to a family, is a symbolic manifestation of the idea that a family line shared a common quality of fate (e.g. Bek-Pedersen 2011, 59–60). This horizon of expectation was also exhibited in biographical narrative: the story of an individual was conceived as that of a representative of a group with particular qualities or a particular kind of “fate.”

This is manifested in that the genealogical information in the introductory sequences of the Family Sagas and, in the introductions of saga characters, it often functions to anticipate the themes and events that are to follow in the narrative. The introductory sequences of the Family Sagas, as Theodore Andersson has described them, lay ground for or prescribe the theme or the events of the following narrative but, at the same time, the introductory sequences function as an informative account of the lineage, the possible nobility and the original land claims of the main protagonists (Andersson 1967, 8–9). The treatment of lineage occupies a considerable share of saga narration and therefore, its significance for medieval Icelanders is obvious.
Saga characters tend to represent the same qualities that are associated with those ancestors who are mentioned or referred to in the texts. These ancestors are conventionally represented when the character is first introduced. Certain individuals among these forefathers could be widely known and connected to commonly known historical narratives. These narratives pre-dated the saga characters and characterized them, especially in the eyes of the subsequent generations. These generations had to lean upon the historical traditions in construing images of the saga characters, hence the narratives about the ancestors of a saga character served as a frame of reference for the narratives about the particular saga character. The stories of all significant ancestors of the Icelanders are not recounted to the same degree in the Family Sagas. However, as Anne Holtsmark (1965, 18) has suggested, many of them were presumably so well-known in the period of saga writing that it was considered unnecessary to explicitly and extensively recount them in a written saga. For example, very little is known of Björn buna, the father of Ketill flatnefr, and he is quite rarely even mentioned although he was the Norwegian progenitor of numerous prominent Icelandic families and saga heroes.

Lineages were used in the historical texts to show that a certain individual or family had dignified ancestors and as frames of reference for comprehending the personal characteristics and biographies of certain saga characters. This holds true concerning the outlaws in the Family Sagas as well. The way that lineage is used in narrating about outlaws in the Family Sagas will be discussed in the next section.

10.2 The Forefathers of Outlaws

Like the central protagonists in the Family Sagas in general, outlaws as main characters are also attributed with dignified lineages. This noble lineage is one probable reason for dedicating entire sagas to them. In the biographies of these outlaws, outlawry appears as an unexpected tragedy for a person with a dignified family and hence, this family background contributes to the dramatic effect of the sentence. Indeed, outlawry

---

244 *Landnámabók* (pp. 46, 49) states boldly that nearly all significant men in Iceland descended from the sons of Björn buna, of whom Ketill flatnefr was one, and that Ketill flatnefr’s son was a member of the crew of Ingólfr Arnarson, the first settler of Iceland. Ketill was one of the most legendary settlers of Iceland and he was famous as a rebellious trustee of King Haraldr hárfagr, which becomes evident in accounts in *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Orkneyinga saga*. 
appears as an ordeal for the hero and as a chance for him to display his heroic quality.

10.2.1 Grettir Ásmundarson

Grettir Ásmundarson was associated with the famous family group in Norway called Hrafnistumenn, named for its basis in Hrafnista, northern Trøndelag. Úlf ìnt óargi was the progenitor of this group. Úlf’s son was Hallbjörn hálfröll from whom descended a large group of saga characters including the main characters of the Legendary Sagas Ketils saga Hængs, Gríms saga loðinkinna, Órvar-Odds saga and Áns saga bogsveigis. Hallbjörn was an acknowledged forefather of a number of central characters of the Family Sagas as well: Orms þáttir Stórolfssonar, Bárðar saga Snaefellsáss and Vatnsdæla saga. Úlf ínt óargi’s daughter Hallbera was the common ancestor of the eponymous characters of, for instance, Egils saga and Bjarnar saga Htíðelakappa. According to Alison Finlay, the fierce, violent, and animalistic nature of these forefathers manifested in Egill Skallagrímsson’s character: “These suggestions of supernatural and wolfish family traits probably existed in oral tradition in the form of names that the author is unlikely to have invented” (Finlay 2000, 90). Joaquim Pizarro (1977) has noted that all the sagas connected to Hrafnistumenn have many structural and thematic features in common. This would emphasise, for example, the nature of Grettir Ásmundarson as a late Saga Age representative of a heroic family of strong men, whose biographies in the oral tradition provided plenty of inspiration for the retellings of Grettir’s exceptional adventures (see also Viðar Hreinsson 1990).

The biographical account of Grettir’s paternal great-grandfather Önundr, in the introductory sequence of Grettis saga, has commonly been considered a prefiguration of Grettir’s fate. According to the saga, Önundr was a great warrior hero who reached fame and fortune in the pre-settlement period through violent deeds in spite of the handicap of a missing leg. Indeed, this missing leg itself was a sign of his bravery as he had lost it in a battle against Haraldr hárfragr in Hafsfjörðr. Önundr had chosen to side with the Norwegian free chieftains against a rising single authority, the ambitious King Haraldr, and therefore had to go into exile. This exile made a connection between Önundr and Grettir because the fate of the Norwegian chieftains who opposed the king was comparable with that of outlaws: the king confiscated their property and they had no place in Norway. In addition, Önundr, like Grettir later, was described as

---

245 He was also the connection between Grettir and King Óláfr Haraldsson: see chapter 15.1.1.
being exceedingly strong (*rammr af aflí*, Ch. 4) even after he was lame. Indeed, Viðar Hreinsson (1992) argues that Önundr’s deficiency is a feature that adds to the parallels with Grettir as being comparable to Grettir’s fear of dark. In addition, Kathryn Hume saw an analogue between Grettir and his forefather Önundr in that they both fought authority but gained their heroic merits in the service of men of a higher rank (Hume 1974, 477). Therefore, the concentration upon Önundr tréföt in the introductory sequence of *Grettis saga* can be seen as creating a frame of reference for Grettir’s biography while establishing him within the settlement history of Iceland through his paternal lineage.

However, Grettir’s maternal lineage is also brought forward in the introductory sequence of *Grettis saga*, hence Grettir’s fate is also tied to his maternal line. The saga tells that a man named Þorbjörn killed Önundr’s father-in-law Ófeigr grettir. Öfeigr was related to Grettir by blood through Grettir’s maternal line: he was Grettir’s mother’s mother’s father. There was also another man among Grettir’s ancestors with the nickname grettir: Önundr’s son Ófeigr from his first marriage, named doubtlessly according to his mother’s father, the aforementioned Ófeigr grettir. Grettir did not directly descend from him, but Grettir as a name was rather rare in the period of saga writing (Hastrup 1990, 168–169) and therefore, the name directly connected Grettir to both his forefathers who were named Ófeigr grettir. Hence, Grettir’s maternal lineage is connected to his fate already in the introductory sequence of the saga.

*Landnámabók* has been a source for the introductory sequence of *Grettis saga* but the saga presents information in addition to that provided by *Landnámabók*. This means that the writer has leaned on other sources as well, be they of collective historical or genealogical traditions or personal creativity. The introductory sequence has so many links to Grettir’s biography that, in spite of its stylistic differences, the introductory sequence is a solid part of the saga. The writer of the introduction has been loyal to his literary sources and prompt in their use but his expansions to the accounts borrowed from *Landnámabók* are often directly connected to the section of the saga that focuses on Grettir’s biography (Benediktsson 1986, 198–199). The introductory sequence lays ground for Grettir’s biography by prefiguring events and dispositional

---

246 Note that the central enemies of Grettir Ásmundarson were also named Þorbjörn: Þorbjörn ferðalangr, Þorbjörn öxnameginn and Þorbjörn öngull. These men were involved with Grettir’s outlawry and death.

247 This lineage becomes relevant through Grettir’s close relationship with his mother and through the family sword Jökulsnaut as well as through Grettir’s maternal uncle, Jökull. See also chapters 12.4.2 and 15.1.1.
tendencies through characters from both his paternal and maternal ancestors.

Other genealogical information can also be found in the saga literature that consolidates Grettir’s position as an iconic outlaw hero. In the end of Áns saga bogsveigis, the lineage of Án’s family is brought down to Ingimundr gamli, the progenitor of the Icelandic family group called Vatnsdælir, “the people of Vatnsdal”. Ingimundr gamli was Grettir’s paternal ancestor as accounted in Grettis saga. This genealogical link is quite explicitly articulated and hence, Án bogsveigir, who is an outlaw figure in the Legendary Sagas, could be conceived as a forefather of Grettir. Another example is Óspakr Glúmsson, the tragic outlaw figure in Bandamanna saga. He was related to two notorious outlaws accounted in other Family Sagas: his grandfather Óspakr Kjallaksson is the notorious outlaw in Eyrbyggja saga, and Grettir Ásmundarson was his uncle. Óspakr Glúmsson is discussed in more detail in chapter 6.1.5.

It is also notable that the forefathers of Grettir’s killer, Þorbjörn öngull, were accounted as remarkable men: his grandfather Hjalti Þórðarson was a settler, and according to Landnámabók, Hjalti’s sons Þorvaldr and Þórðr were prominent men who were capable of organizing a feast to which 1200 guests were invited and who showed off at the assembly at Þorskafjörðr in such glamour that “they were considered æsir.” According to the same source, they were the progenitors of a “large and successful family”. (Landnámabók, p. 238.) Furthermore, these brothers are mentioned as two of the most significant men of the Settlement Period (Landnámabók, p. 396). This remarkability showered upon Þorbjörn öngull and made him an enemy whose successful hostility was not a shame for the great hero Grettir.

10.2.2 Gíslason Súrsson

Gíslason Súrsson’s namesake, his paternal uncle Gíslason Þorkelsson, is his only signifying “ancestral” relative, at least of the relatives of preceding generations who are represented. The two versions of Gísla saga differ somewhat in the extensiveness of the sequence that recounts the vicissitudes of Gíslason Þorkelsson’s life. The introductory sequence of Gísla saga represents Gíslason Þorkelsson in a position where he was forced to fight a berserk who had killed his brother Ari in a duel and who claimed Ari’s wife and property as a reward. Ari’s wife Ingibjörg gave Gíslason her slave’s (or foster-father’s, according to the long version of the saga), Kolr’s, magical sword with which to fight the berserk. Indeed, Gíslason Þorkelsson won the duel. However, Kolr reclaimed his sword and, when
Gísli Þorkelsson refused to return the weapon, the result was a fight in which both died, and in which the sword was broken. According to Theodore Andersson, this episode “suggests and previews a number of capital themes in the story” (Andersson 1968, 13) and establishes “a tradition of the erotic quadrangle and ill-starred vengeance” (ibid., 14). This scene lays foundations for the conflicts between Gísli Súrsson and his sister and brother in Norway, and for the later comparable events in Iceland that eventually led to Gísli’s outlawry (Holtsmark 1951, 33-34). The analogue of Gísli Þorkelsson makes it easier to understand Gísli Súrsson’s uncompromising sense of family honour that seems to be the main motivator of his actions (Andersson 1968, 14). In other words, this episode establishes the horizon of expectations within which the following narration becomes meaningful.

10.2.3 Hörðr Grímkelsson

Hörðr Grímkelsson had a noble paternal lineage that included significant leaders, prefiguring Hörðr’s position as the leader of a large troop of bandits. According to Harðar saga, Hörðr’s grandfather Björn gullberi left Norway, like so many other settlers of Iceland, in order to avoid the tyranny of King Haraldr hárfagri. Björn settled in southern Reykjadalr and became a mighty man. Landnámabók (396–397) lists him among the foremost (gofgastir) settlers in the Southern Quarter of Iceland. Björn’s oldest son Grimkell became a mighty chieftain. This information is also found in Landnámabók.

Hörðr would have presumably inherited the chieftaincy had he not become an outlaw. By his maternal lineage, he was a descendant of Björn buna and hence of an acknowledged family line. The previous generations provided Hörðr a natural background to become a leader of a group of men in spite of his conviction. The companionship of Hörðr and Geirr, and the hierarchical relationship between them that manifested in

---

248 Alan Berger (1979) studied the differences between the accounts of Ch. 2 in the two versions of the saga from the point of view of the narration and concluded that Ch. 2 of the shorter version “should not be used to interpret later events because it is a clumsy and tasteless attempt to fill a gap in an older text” (168). Berger’s observations are not watertight, which he readily admits himself, but to the degree they are plausible, these observations are a good illustration of how the scribe responsible of the shorter version could have had the main events of the saga in mind when he compiled the first Norwegian interlude to the saga.

249 Landnámabók, p. 55; Landnámabók, p. 72 (Sturlubók 32): “Björn gullberi nam Reykjardal enn syðra ok bjó á Gullberastoðum. Hans son var Grimkell goði i Bláskógum; hann átti Signýju Valbrandsdóttur, Valþjófssonar; þeira son var Hörðr, er var fyrir Hölmsmönnum.” Jón Jóhannesson (1941, 88–89) believes that the Sturlubók version of Landnámabók has acquired this information from Harðar saga.
Harðar saga’s focus on Hörðr, was correspondingly already prefigured in the previous generation. According to the saga, Geirr was the son of Grímkell godi’s loyal servant Grímr inn litli (“the little”) who was also the foster-father of Hörðr. This servant–master relationship is also reflected in the relationship between Hörðr and Geirr, even though they are represented as being sworn-brothers. Hörðr’s nobility and his consequent saga-worthiness as a tragic outlaw hero was consolidated by his chieftainly lineage that also grounded his competence as the leader of the group of bandits.

10.2.4 Þorgeirr Hávarsson

The lineage of Þorgeirr Hávarsson provides a more ambiguous frame of reference which, however, has a thematic parallel in Þorgeirr’s biography. Þorgeirr’s father Hávarr’s background is very superficially recounted in Fóstbræðra saga, where Hávarr is described as a troublemaker (Ch. 2). On the other hand, Þorgeirr Hávarsson was a descendant of Björn buna on his mother’s side, which emerges in the thorough genealogical account in which Þorgeirr is shown to be Þorgils Arason’s maternal cousin (Fóstbræðra saga, Ch. 2). Þorgils’ role in Fóstbræðra saga is predominantly that of supporting Þorgeirr (for instance, in Ch. 8). The mention that Þorgils’ son Ari was Þorgeirr’s lifelong friend further strengthens their close relationship. The saga gives a rather favourable picture of Þorgils Arason (so does Grettis saga, Ch. 50–51) and he is dedicated a genealogical description that is exceptionally exhaustive for a secondary character. Þorgils is given a lineage reaching all the way to the legendary hero Sigurðr Fáfnisbani (Fóstbræðra saga, Ch. 2). Hence, Þorgeirr Hávarsson has a heroic maternal ancestry and a heritage of trouble-making from his father’s side. These two tendencies are fulfilled in his biography by the descriptions of Þorgeirr’s heroic attempts that are however reduced to petty scrabbling in the social reality of Iceland in the eleventh century and only given full credit abroad in the service of foreign rulers.

10.2.5 Búi Andríðarson

The fortunate outlaw Búi Andríðarson had Irish roots but his kindred were among the most important settlers in South-West Iceland. In addition, his family had close relations to the bishop of Ireland. Búi settled on the land of his respected fellow Irishman Örlyg who was a Christian and had funded the first church in the area. Búi’s family
background was therefore construed from Irish allies that could be considered respectable from the Icelandic point of view. Normally, the genealogies seem to have preferred Scandinavian roots, but special credit was obviously given to Búi’s family for being Christian in the time when Iceland was still a heathen land. Búi’s biography as conceived of within the Christian frame of reference will be discussed in more depth in chapter 12.

10.2.6 Conclusion

The forefathers of an outlaw seem to have been selected for the saga narrative on the basis of their personal characteristics or biographies (that could be partially created for the current need) that would serve to prefigure the events in the outlaw’s biography. It is obvious that the lineage provides an important frame of reference when inspecting the biographies of the outlaws. This holds equally true in those cases where the lineage does not seem to serve as a frame of reference for a particular characteristic of a saga character or a particular phase in his biography. For example, when the outlawry of the focal character does not have a remarkable role in his biography except perhaps as a context of losing his life, such as in the case of Grímr Droplaugarson, the accounted lineage does not signify outlawry either. Grímr’s family background is told in Droplaugarsona saga as being respectable and wealthy and his great-grandmother Arneiðr is told to have been the daughter of an earl of the Hebrides. Indeed, Droplaugarsona saga is a story about the devastation of two influential brothers, one of whom was Grímr, who was outlawed for avenging his brother’s death. The wealthy and noble family background intensified this tragedy and Grímr’s outlawry was the highlight of this process. Indeed, the lineage of the saga characters may be utilized in different ways in both narration and in interpretation, and may require different approaches.

10.3 Saga Outlaws and the Saga-Writing Period

The Family Sagas may present details about the saga characters’ social position that do not originate in the recognized written sources of those sagas. An oral tradition that included more or less precise descriptions of social networks seems to have prevailed in medieval Iceland (see for instance Meulengracht Sørensen 1977; Hastrup 1985, 81–104; Clunies Ross 1998, 88–89), but it can be presumed that the accounts about
relations between the families and family groups included in this tradition changed along with the relations between their subsequent generations. This is because it can be presumed that the changing relations between the families and family groups were reflected in the historical tradition.

Medieval Icelanders were interested in the intersections of family lines, which is evident in the saga literature (Clunies Ross 1998, 113-121). However, the social and political relations depicted in the Family Sagas probably often had contemporary referents. Chris Callow (2006, 299) claims that the political relations that the Family Sagas represent are a “message about local political relationships” in the time that the sagas were being written. Indeed, the concurrent political situation undoubtedly had an impact upon what was depicted in the Family Sagas and how the past was represented. However, it remains obscure whose insights actually ended up in the saga texts and to what extent it was considered necessary that they conformed to the prevailing general conceptions. An active, collectively preserved narrative tradition resists momentary pressure to adapt to political turns better than individual perceptions do, but the individual saga writers had a certain degree of influence on the final product. It is only natural to assume that the different interest groups behind saga production would prefer those personae of the Saga World to be represented in a favorable light with whom they liked to associate themselves (see Lönnroth 1977).

It was in the interests of the powerful families that the saga literature gave a favorable image of their ancestors. The existence of the compilation of settlement history, Landnámabók, is an early testament to the importance of the origins of land ownership in the view of those families. The Family Sagas could serve to legitimize or reinforce the political and social status of a family on historical grounds. In the dynamic processes of political power, a way to support one’s interests was to do it at the expense of the opponents. This could take place by associating a family that lived in the period of saga writing with the opponent of a saga’s protagonist. Lineage was a convenient medium for accomplishing this association. It was fully justifiable to represent the antagonist of a saga in a dubious light and, once achieved, this negative reputation could extend to the descended family who lived in the time that the saga was written. This hypothesis may present a factor that would help explain why the tragic outlaw heroes (whose stories were among the most popular) were represented in as favorable a light as the circumstances permitted even though they were not attributed with direct descendants in the period of saga writing.
10.3.1 Grettir Ásmundarson

Grettir Ásmundarson had no descendants nor did his brothers Atli and Illugi. According to *Grettis saga*, Grettir's sister Þórdís married Glúmr Óspaksson and their son Óspakr was outlawed and died without children. Grettir's other sister Rannveig married Gamli, and their son was Skeggi *skammhöndung* who married the daughter of Þórdoddr *drápustúfr* and took charge of Grettir’s home farm Bjarg after his mother Ásdís. Skeggi’s son Gamli had a son named Skeggi who stayed at Skarfsstaðr. Gamli’s daughter Ásdís’s son Oddr munkr Snorrason was the forefather of many people (*margir menn*) (*Grettis saga*, Ch. 84; *Landnámabók*, p. 199, 212). Oddr Snorrason was the writer of *Saga Óláfs konungs Tryggvasonar* in Latin (1190) as well as the *Legendary Saga of King Ólaf Haraldsson* (Andersson 2008). He was located at the monastery of Þingeyrar in the district where Grettir’s family lived.

*Sturlunga saga* (p. 69) tells that the son of a man called Skeggi *skammhöndung* was named Grettir and that he had a son named Jósep. Jósep’s son Oddr got into quarrels with certain Einarr Þorgilsson and sought support from Sturla Þórðarson who had been in enmity with Einarr already earlier. In an ensuing battle, Oddr slew four men (*Sturlunga saga*, pp. 72–73). Oddr was outlawed together with the eighteen others who had accompanied him in the battle. He got quarters over the winter at Sturla’s farm at Hvammi. (*Sturlunga saga*, p. 74.) Oddr was the great-grandson of Grettir Ásmundarson’s sister Rannveig, which made an association between Oddr and the famous saga outlaw. Oddr became a character worth mentioning in *Sturlunga saga* for his involvement in events in which Sturla Þórðarson, an important member of the Sturlungs’ family, had interests, and perhaps also because his outlawry was readily associable with his famous outlaw ancestor. Oddr’s connection to the Sturlung family is further strengthened by the fact that he had a son named Halldór (*Sturlunga saga*, p. 185), who was a trusted man of Þórðr Sturlason and the foster-brother of Sighvatr Sturlason (*Sturlunga saga*, p. 320).

Skeggi Gamlason had the authorial sympathy in the Contemporary Saga *Íslendinga saga* as a loyal assembly man of Þórðr Sturluson and Sturla Þórðarson. Grettir Ásmundarson was mentioned in his introduction as his forefather (*Sturlunga saga*, p. 53). Skeggi accused a man called Aðalríkr of theft. In recompense, Aðalríkr sank an axe into his head during mass in Hvammr without warning and then he rushed out of the house and into the mountains. Aðalríkr was not caught, but a few years

---

250 One boy given birth by a widow was attributed to Grettir in local rumors that are attested in the saga, but this boy was also said to have died at an early age (*Grettis saga*, Ch. 63).
later in the winter there were games to which a man came from the Northern Quarter and introduced himself with the stereotypical pseudonym connected to outlaw narratives, Gestr Gestsson. Sturla Þórðarson nevertheless recognised him as Aðalríkr. The following summer, Aðalríkr was outlawed (Sturlunga saga, pp. 53–56). It is noteworthy that a man whose later accounts corresponded with those of a stereotyped outlaw refugee killed the man whose lineage was associated with Grettir Ásmundarson.

10.3.2 Gísli Súrsson

Gísli Súrsson did not have any direct descendants of his own. He was the maternal uncle of Snorri goði Þorgrímsson, one of the most respected chieftains of his time. Snorri goði was the primeval image of the centralization of power in the area of Snæfellsnes. Numerous sources offer accounts that reveal how Snorri goði was respected (of which most notable are Eyrbyggja saga and Ævi Snorra goða). The famous saga-writing family, the Sturlungs, counted themselves as his descendants. Snorri Sturluson had direct links to the estates that Snorri goði had possessed. Gísla saga is like an introduction to Snorri goði’s biography in accounting how Gísli Súrsson came to kill his sister’s husband Þórgrímr goði, the father of Snorri goði. According to Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, Gísla saga was first and foremost “concern[ed with] the strange and tragic circumstances surrounding the birth of this famous forefather” of Snorri goði (Meulengracht Sørensen 1986, 259). The significance of Gísli Súrsson for Snorri goði’s reputation is evident for instance in a passage of Njáls saga (Ch. 114), which accounts Snorri goði’s paternal lineage to the first settlers of Snæfellsnes with care, whereas it covers his maternal lineage with the statement “But Snorri goði’s mother was Þórdís Súrsdóttir, the sister of Gísli.”251 Later in the saga (Ch. 119), the sharp-tongued Skarphéðinn Njálsson refuses to listen to Snorri goði’s advice and states, “It would be more useful for you to avenge your father than to make such predictions.” Snorri goði replies: “Many people have said that before, and I will not get angry at such [a remark]”.252 A similar remark is made by Broddi Bjarnason in Ólkofra þátr (Ch. 3). It seems obvious that the death of Snorri goði’s father was a sore spot in his otherwise outstanding reputation.

Gísli Súrsson, although being the killer of Snorri goði’s father, was also the brother of Snorri goði’s mother. The saga presents a family

---

251 “En móðir Snorra goða var Þórdís Súrsdóttir, systir Gísla.”
252 “Margir hafa það mælt áðr,” segir Snorri, ”ok mun eg ekki við sliku reiðask.”
tragedy and the accounts of Gísli’s adventures in outlawry contribute to tragic heroism. The direct and indirect references to heroic poetry (Sigurðarkviða, Atlakviða) and literature (Völsunga saga, Ragnars saga loðbrókar) and the uses of their themes in the composition of Gísla saga, which are more thoroughly discussed in chapter 14.4.1.1, add to the essence of the saga as a family myth. The image of Gísla saga as being a family myth of the family group and descendants of Snorri goði is further strengthened by the fact that Eyrbyggja saga draws the lineage of Snorri goði from Áslaug, the daughter of Sigurðr and Brynhildr who are the main characters in the above-mentioned cycle of heroic poetry. Indeed, many scholars have suggested that the tragic affair of Sigurðr and Brynhildr has been a thematic model to Gísla saga (see chapter 14.4.1.1).

Gísla saga could reflect the relations between family groups that lived during the period of saga writing and that drew their lineage to its characters. The Sturlungs drew their lineage to Snorri goði, and representatives of this group, such as Þórðr Sturluson, possessed a chieftaincy in the same locations in Snæfellsnes where Snorri goði had possessed his. Eyjólfgr grái was the chief adversary of Gísli in Gísla saga. He is repeatedly represented in a less favorable light: he acts as an errand boy of Börkr digri (Snorri goði’s uncle) and constantly receives humiliation on his behalf in his attempts to catch Gísli. However, he was of a respected family whose lineage was acknowledged in the period of saga writing: he became an uncle of the law-speaker Steinn Þorgestsson (Landnámabók, p. 130), grandfather to another law-speaker named Gellir Bólverksson (Landnámabók, p. 173), and Ari fróði Þorgilsson counts him as his forefather in Íslendingabók. In addition, the twelfth-century law-speaker Snorri Hún bogason (d. 1170) was counted among his descendants.

These genealogies provide material to interpret Gísli’s biography within the frame of reference provided by the lineages that were put to writing in thirteenth-century Iceland. The conflict between Gísli Súrsson and Eyjólfgr grái in Gísla saga can thus be interpreted within the saga as a conflict between Gísli and the legal institutions because Eyjólfgr grái effectively represented these institutions as a close relative of two acknowledged central legal authorities and a forefather of a law-speaker closer to the time of saga writing. If Eyjólfgr grái was the personification of legal authority and in this status also a follower of a powerful and overbearing chieftain Börkr digri, as he is depicted in Gísla saga, this would have functioned as an effective metaphor of manipulative use of the legal institutions in the thirteenth century when the powerful chieftains were neglecting the law to an extensive degree. Nevertheless, the acknowledged and reputable lineage of Eyjólfgr grái also elevated his
status as a worthy opponent to the main character of the saga, Gísli Súrsson. This creates an image of him that is equally inconsistent as the image that was created of Grettir Ásmundarson’s killer, Þorbjörn öngull, as discussed earlier.

In Gísla saga, however, Eyjólfr grái also represents those of his descendants who lived during the time when Gísla saga was being written. Ari fróði Þorgilsson counted Eyjólfr grái among his forefathers in Íslendingabók that was a highly respected work among the literary circles of medieval Iceland. Ari’s granddaughter Hallfríðr Þorgilsdóttir (d. 1223) married Magnús prestr Pálsson (d. 1223) who was a godorðsmáðr in Helgafell (Sturlunga saga, p. 99) and later in Reykjavíkar. With Sturla Þórdarson, Páll had a lengthy quarrel in which Jón Loptsson supported him. The quarrel ended with Snorri Sturluson becoming Jón’s foster son (Sturlunga saga, pp. 92–98). Snorri Sturluson redeemed Reykholt from him, and Islendinga saga states for a reason that Magnús did not have a full right to be there because his father Páll Sölvisson had been illegally begotten (see also Sturlunga saga, p. 92; Vésteinsson 2000, 113–114). Snorri Sturluson offered to provide maintenance to Magnús and his wife and to educate Magnús’ two sons in compensation. Snorri became a powerful chieftain, and even though the agreement between him and Magnús Pálsson is presented in a conciliatory tone, this agreement must have been significant and not free of conflicts. This is articulated in the saga by Egill Skalla-Grimsson appearing to one of Snorri’s followers in a dream and prophesying the restlessness that would follow (Sturlunga saga, pp. 211–212).

Ari starkti Þorgilsson’s (Ari fróði’s grandson) daughter Helga married Þóðór Sturluson (Snorri’s brother) but they had no children, and Þóðór had other wives (Sturlunga saga, p. 47). The preceding events unfolded as follows. Þóðór was 18 when his father died and he stayed in Hvammi with his brother Sighvatr. Ari Þorgilsson and Guðný, Sturla’s widow, fell in love, but Ari was married. Einarr Þorgilsson had had a quarrel over some properties with Sturla and after his death, with his heirs. Einarr attempted to take some sheep by force but was defeated by women and a few boys; he died from the wounds he received. Ari received the boys who had inflicted the wounds. Jón Loptsson took the case against the boys because he did not consider it acceptable that men of little rank had killed a chieftain. The boys were sentenced to outlawry but Ari bought them the right to leave the country. Ari sold his farm to Þóðór Sturluson and married his daughter Helga to him, and then travelled abroad with Guðný and the boys. He died in Norway. Þóðór Sturluson and Helga were his heirs but soon after they divorced (Sturlunga saga, pp. 181–183). Þóðór
received half of the chieftaincy, and soon became a chieftain with several chieftaincies (Sturlunga saga, p. 184, 187).

Hallfreðr was directly associated with Ari fróði Þorgilsson in Sturlunga saga (p. 99). In contrast, Magnús was merely associated with the quarrel his father had with Sturla, and his grandfather Sölvi’s two sons became chieftains, otherwise his lineage was not connected with any celebrities. The Sturlungs purposefully drew their lineage to Snorri góði in Íslendinga saga (Sturlunga saga, p. 47), using maternal and paternal lineages to this end. It is worth bearing in mind that Íslendinga saga was written by Sturla Þórðarson, a member of the Sturlungs, who must have drawn his genealogical information largely from his family’s traditions.

The lengthy quarrel between these groups was significant because one outcome was that Reykholt became the centre of power in Iceland. However, Ari fróði’s lineage was only indirectly involved in it through Magnús’ wife Hallfreðr, and Snorri himself was related to Magnús. Ari fróði’s grandson Ari sterki sold his farm Staðr to Þórðr Sturluson of the Sturlungs, and also married his daughter to him, although they begat no children. Ari also fell in love with Þórðr Sturluson’s mother, and they moved to Norway. Þórðr Sturluson inherited Ari’s chieftaincy over Þórsnes. Even though the family lines that descended from Eyjólfr grái and from Gísli Súrsson’s sister Þóraðís were not solidly united in the period when Gísla saga was written, they appear not to have been in an outright hostile relationship with each other either (see Helgi Þorláksson 1992). The information that is possible to draw from Sturlunga saga and other sources concerning the relations between family lines is often scarce and difficult to interpret, and it is hard to draw far-reaching conclusions on that basis. It is worth noting, however, that the two family lines whose forefathers were enemies in Gísla saga had lively and in many ways controversial relations in the period that Gísla saga was written and that the events involved could have left marks on the saga narration, especially on the less flattering characterization of Eyjólfr grái.

10.3.3 Hörðr Grímkelsson

Hörðr Grímkelsson and his wife Helga had two children, Grímkell and Björn. According to Harðar saga (Ch. 41), Grímkell died at the age of twelve while avenging his father. Björn moved to Norway with his mother but returned to Iceland and avenged his father’s killing on many men. However, no sources provide information about his possible descendants in Iceland. Nothing is known about Hörð’s sister Þorbjörg.
outside of the saga and the saga does not attribute any children to her. The Hauksbók version of Landnámbók states that a man called Gnúpr was Hörðr’s brother. It appears, though, that in this version, two different women called Signý were mixed with each other, one of which was the sister of Torfi, a central figure in the killing of Hörðr (Benediktsson 1986, 57 n. 8). The Sturlubók version of Landnámbók distinguishes Signý Valpjófsdóttir, who had a son called Gnúpr (Landnámbók, p. 56), and Signý Valbrandsdóttir, who was married to Grímkel and had a son named Hörðr “who led the Island-dwellers”253 (Landnámbók, p. 72). Thus, no descendants are attributed to Hörðr or his sister Þorbjörg in these sources.

According to Harðar saga (Ch. 1), Hörðr’s father Grímkel had a daughter called Þuriðr from his first marriage with Rannveig Þorbjarnardóttir. Þuriðr married Illugi enn rauði (Harðar saga, Ch. 11) who was labeled a son of Hrólf fraudgi Úlfsson. According to Landnámbók (pp. 78–79, 156), Illugi was the son of Hrólf Kjallaksson and the brother of Sölvi from whom started a lineage down to both the sons of Sturla Þórðarson and Páll prestur Sölvason. This is also acknowledged in Geirmundar þátr Heljarskins (Sturlunga saga, p. 5). Landnámbók names two of Illugi’s wives, Sigríður and Jórunn. Landnámbók (p. 79) tells that Illugi bought Hólmr in Akranes from Hólm-Starri when he married Jórunn. Landnámbók (pp. 63–64) names one son of Illugi, Halldórr, who lived in Hólmr. Halldórr had a son named Illugi (Landnámbók, p. 65). No further information is found about this or other lineages of Illugi. Āvi Snorra goða tells that Snorri goði married Illugi’s daughter Þuriðr. No other sources but Harðar saga mention Þuriðr as Illugi’s wife, and they are attributed no descendants. Illugi enn rauði Hrólfsson is associated in Sturlunga saga and in other sources with the descendants of his brother Sölvi. According to these sources, Hörðr was related through his father’s first marriage to the Sturlungs both through Snorri goði and Sölvi Hrólfsson.

The connection seems rather complex and it remains uncertain whether it was acknowledged in the period of saga writing. The close relations between the family lines of Hörðr Grímkelsson and his opponents in Harðar saga leave little room for speculation about a retrospective juxtaposition of their respective groups. Both of Hörðr’s brothers-in-law, Indriði and Illugi, were among the farmers who plotted against Hörðr’s troop of outlaws and eventually attacked it. Hörðr showed hostility against them already before the final battle when he suggested that one or the other be burned in his house before the outlaw

---

253 “[…] er var fyrir Hólmsmónum.”
band was to leave the district (Harðar saga, Ch. 30). Landnámabók (p. 75) attributes the destruction of the bandit groups Hölmverjar, Hellismenn and Kroppsmenn all to one man, Torfó Valbrandsson, “who is represented as equally capable of bringing down robbers whether they lived on an island or in a cave and whether they were eighteen or ten times eighteen in number” (Laxness 1950, 223). Valbrandr’s father was Valþjófr Örlygsson who lived at Esja (Landnámabók, p. 54). Torfó had a son called Þorkell at Skáney who was married to Arngerðr Þorkelsdóttir (Landnámabók, p. 57). Torfó’s grandfather Valþjófr was also a grandfather to Hörðr being Hörðr’s mother’s father.

The medieval audiences of the Family Sagas may have been able to filter out the biased information that the sagas provided concerning lineages as they seem to be written with current interests in mind. The adversaries of the outlaws who are focal characters in sagas are seldom represented favorably and the disgraceful nature of their unsuccessful attempts to catch the outlaws is emphasized. As noted earlier, honor was gained in the Saga World by taking it from another individual, and it may well have been the same for the saga writers: they could earn honor for themselves and for the interest groups behind the production of the saga by ridiculing their adversaries’ ancestors, thus capitalizing on the respected, sophisticated form of saga writing.

10.4 Conclusion

The biographies of saga characters were connected to the narrative traditions about their relatives, especially forefathers. It is also presumable that the social and political circumstances in the period of saga writing affected how the characters of the Saga Age and their forefathers associated with certain contemporary families or family groups were represented. The Family Sagas reflect the prevailing circumstances in Iceland during the period of saga writing but it was hardly avoidable that the interest groups behind the production of individual sagas had an impact on the way that the events belonging to the Saga World were selected and treated in narration, whether intentionally or unintentionally. It can be presumed that these interest groups were aware of the political significance that historiography can have. What is necessary to realize is that the Family Sagas were not free of provocative insights.

254 Hence connected to the outlaw Búi Andriðarson, see Kjalnesinga saga.
Meanings concerning outlawry that were generated in narration through the relations between a saga character’s vicissitudes and those of his recounted forefathers concern mainly those outlaws who were dedicated biographical sagas and in whose biography outlawry played a remarkable role. It is possible to identify thematic elements in the accounts of these saga characters’ forefathers that emphasize certain aspects in the saga characters or in their biographies and hence qualify their outlawry. Lineage builds a bridge between the worlds of the Legendary Sagas and the Family Sagas and brings them closer to each other as narrative genres. Acknowledged lineage stresses continuity from the heroic Taleworld to the more realistic, homely world of the Saga Age. It is more difficult to find thematic connections between the Family Sagas and depictions of the subsequent generations. Grettir Ásmundarson appears to have been a character of the Saga World who was strongly linked to outlawry, associated even with narratives about outlawry in those sources that depict the time close to the period of saga writing.

However, the effect of the lineage upon narration is difficult to show on the basis of the available sources. In medieval Iceland, the knowledge about family lines and different relations between them was probably much more extensive than becomes evident in the preserved literary sources. Similar sensitivity concerning family relations is impossible to reach on the basis of available texts because the texts that describe these relations cannot be considered unbiased. Nevertheless, lineage as a frame of reference is important to take into account especially when studying those outlaws whose lineage is accounted in any detail or who were connected to any historical family lines or family groups that may have had an impact on how the outlaw was depicted in a saga.

The fact that most of the saga outlaws are not attributed direct descendants, even when the outlaws function as a main character of a saga, is interesting as such because of the general tendency in the Family Sagas to place emphasis on lineage and genealogies. It is possible that most outlaws simply did not have descendants: as told in the Family Sagas, outlaws were often sentenced in the period of their lives when they did not yet have children (see chapter 8.3.4), and starting a family in outlawry must have been very difficult if not completely impossible. However, the historical traditions behind the saga narratives seldom seem to be aware of children attributed to them. This lack of offspring reinforces the image of the saga outlaws as narrative characters whose significance was created primarily in their relations to the other actors in the Saga World and who could be elevated to be semi-mythical heroes or villains of the whole community from the point of view of the period when the sagas were written.
The references to certain families that lived during the period of saga writing were not, however, necessarily directly related to the lineages of the narrative characters of the Family Sagas. For example, family lines were often connected to certain locations. The first settlers claimed certain lands and these lands were further divided into smaller areas upon which farms were built. Chieftains had influence over a certain territory. The family who managed a certain piece of land in the Saga Age could have changed by the period of saga writing, but the area could still have been associated with this historical family in the period of saga writing. When a given family is discussed in a saga, for instance favorably in connection with a certain outlaw, it is possible that a reference is actually made to a family that lived on the spot at the time when the saga was written. This approach will not be explored more deeply in this connection, but conceptions about the spatial construction of the Saga World will be generally discussed in the following chapter.
11 The Landscape

Like lineage, landscape was another visible and concrete linkage between the Saga Age and the present of the saga audience and brought the narratives of the past into dialogue with the perceived surroundings. The Family Sagas pay a lot of attention to geographical details with descriptions about exact locations of events, the routes by which characters moved from one area to another and how they experienced the terrain. Many of the Family Sagas correspond to reality in such minute geographical details that the accuracy in geographical description has been considered a presupposition, and has been among criteria for identifying the location in which the writing of a saga has taken place. Even those geographical descriptions that can be shown to be inaccurate manifest importance attributed to topographical insight in the narrative genre. The Saga World was connected to the surrounding real world through the landscape. The landscape was structured as a space: the meanings given to the landscape were spatial meanings.

Narratives about outlawry in the Family Sagas were situated in the landscape. The space that was available to the outlaw in the conceptions of the saga writers and their contemporary audiences was defined through negation. Outlawry principally meant banishment from a given district, from Iceland, or from the places where there were any people at all, depending on the degree of the sentence. Hence, the space that remained available to an outlaw was either outside the inhabited area or within that area but out of reach of the people that had an interest in having the sentence concluded with the outlaw’s death. If the outlaw left, the available space in Iceland consisted of areas beyond the inhabited areas, the meeting places and the central travel routes. This space was wilderness, to which the term for outlawry, skóggangr (“forest-going”), already refers. The division of the society into the public and the private field are also reflected in the spatial conceptions connected to outlawry as expressed in the saga literature because people’s social status was partially defined by the space they occupied. In short, spatial and social conceptions were interlinked. In this chapter I will discuss what kind of space appears to have remained to the outlaws, what kind of places served as settings for narratives about outlawry and to which extent and in which connections outlaws were associated with conceptions, beliefs and traditions about the wilderness.

Richard van Leeuwen argued that in the medieval Arabic narratives of the Thousand and One Nights, “[…] places are never something meaningful in themselves; their significance is determined by their function as the object of journeys, or their relation to the situation of the
heroes” (Leeuwen 2007, 23). These could be termed *generic places* as opposed to *specific places* that have significance and meanings beyond the narrative environment in which they appear. The landscape in the Family Sagas is usually connected to actual, often still identifiable, locations, even if the depiction itself is inaccurate or the location of individual places remains unspecific. The Family Sagas were hardly ever written at the actual locations of the events they recounted. The writer had to rely on his mental image of the landscape which was based on his personal experience, on knowledge that he had received from the historical tradition he wrote upon and on other possible sources. In narration, the mental landscape had to be fit with the narrative, which meant that the actual landscape and the one represented in saga narrative did not necessarily correspond in full even if the narrator was familiar with the actual landscape.

The same actual locations could be sites of numerous stories and consequent meanings that were immanently present in each narrative that had settings in them. The landscape was visible everywhere and in the open landscape of Iceland, distinct landmarks could be seen from afar. Visible landmarks were readily available mnemonic devices for narration that was connected to them. The mental landscape that is represented in the Family Sagas is the result of interplay between imitation of, and conforming to, specific places and resorting to generic places that consisted of spatial features predetermined by the narrative.

**11.1 Places Where Outlaws Were Met**

The places to which outlaws sought access in the Family Sagas reflect the medieval conceptions about the space that was available to the outlaws in the Saga World. Often these places are either located in the wilderness, or are on the verge of it. As depicted in the previous chapter, outlaws could find shelter with those people who generally represented the private field. However, if the privacy of the space of this field was threatened, for instance, by the intrusion of outsiders, outlaws had to withdraw back towards the wilderness.

The places that were most inhabitable in the heaths and the uninhabited interior were conceivable as dwelling places of outlaws. For example, *caves* were dwellings that could be accessed by outlaws and by other travellers on the heaths. In spite of their applicability as shelters from bad weather, they were not man-made, whence they were easily associated with anthropomorphic beings that occupied the wilderness, manifested especially in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Grettis saga*.
Caves are connected to outlawry in numerous sagas. *Droplaugarsona saga* (Ch. 14) tells that after the outlawed Grímr Droplaugarson’s hideout camp at a mountain ledge, named after him as Grímsbyggó, was spotted by his pursuers, he moved to a cave close to the farm of his relative Ingjaldr. This cave was called *Grimshellir* (“Grímr’s Cave”) since that time. Þormóðr Bersason’s hideout cave in Greenland (*Fóstbræðra saga*, Ch. 23) was called *Þormóðarhellir* (“Þormóðr’s Cave”), but in spite of the impression of tight ties to the actual landscape, the name-giving implies, the cave seems to have been located according to the needs of narration and not according to local knowledge. *Bjarnar saga Hitdaelakappa* offers a brief account of the stay of the famous outlaw Grettir Ásmundarson in the area: “Above Vellir there is *Grettisbæli* (“Grettir’s Lair”) and Grettir stayed there in a rift over the winter that he stayed with Björn who lived then on Vellir. They floated down the stream together and were considered equally strong” (Ch. 19). There is an account similar in content in *Grettis saga* (Ch. 58) although *Grettis saga* narrates it in a somewhat extended way. Grettir was such a famous outlaw that his outlawry was not even necessary to articulate in *Bjarnar saga Hitdaelakappa*, and the significance of the brief mention was evidently supposed to be clear to the audience. *Vatnsdæla saga* (Ch. 44) tells the story of Þorkell krafla hiding from his pursuers in the cave that was later called *Krofluhellir* (“Krafla’s Cave”) after losing his inviolability due to a killing he had committed. In *Kjalnesinga saga* (Ch. 4) it is told that the outlawed Búi Andríðarson’s foster mother Esja led him up to the mountain, over a river, and along a narrow path to “the peaks that are called Laugargnípur. There was a beautiful cave in front of them. It was a good room. There was beneath it a beautiful pool. Inside the cave there was a bed as well as drink and

---

255 *Fóstbræðra saga*, Ch. 23: “Nú flytja þeir Þormóð til Eiríksfjarðar ok fylgja honum í helli þann, er nú er kalladur Þormóðarhellir. Sá hellir er í sævarhöfðrumum þóru megin fjóðarins en Stokkanes. Hamrar eru upp ok niðr frá hellinum, ok hvártveggja íllt at fara.” In the same saga, Ch. 23, Þormóðr asks Lúsa-Oddi to go to Stokkanes by the evening. Oddi replies: “Eigi er auðveldig at komask yfir fjóðinn, þar þarf skip at hafa; en þó má vera, at ek koma þessu til leiðar, ef ek vil, at koma á Stokkanes í kveld.” Þormóðr reaches Lóngunes before evening.

256 The noun *bæli* (“den, lair”) appears in *Landnámabók* in names of farmsteads but it is used in eddic poetry as a noun for a dragon’s lair (*drekaþæli*) = snake’s lair (*ormsþæli*) (Cleasby-Vigfússon 1957, 91) and as such, a lair of a dangerous and repugnant mythical being. It is also interesting to note that the noun *grettir* (“grinner”) was used as a euphemism for a snake in skaldic poetry.

257 “Ofan frá Völlum er Grettisbæli, ok var Grettir þar í raufinni þann vetur, er hann var með Birni, en hann bjó þá á Völlum. Þeir logðusk ofan eptir ánni ok váru kallaðir jafnþæktir menn.”
clothes." This is where Búi stayed for a while. Gíslí Súrsson’s final hideout was a cave in Geirþjófsfjörður (Gísla saga, Ch. 22).

According to Harðar saga (Ch. 33), the bandit Þorgeirr gyrðilskeggi and his band hid in a cave in Hellisfjörður. In that area, inside a cave called Surtshellir, have been found the remains of a dwelling from the tenth century that has been suggested to have functioned as a post for outlaws (see Ólafsson et al. 2004; Ólafsson 2006). These findings indicate that caves could provide useful shelter to those in need in early medieval Iceland (and later). In volcanically active areas, these caves even provided warmth if the cave was formed in relatively recently solidified lava. The memories of historical outlaws’ hideouts in caves strengthened the association between caves and outlaws. Natural caves are repeatedly connected to outlaws in the Family Sagas.

Another direction for outlaws to move away from the inhabited areas was to go towards the sea. First of all, the sea provided potential routes to foreign countries where their outlawry sentence had no significance. Nonetheless, without the necessary equipment such as a sea-worthy vessel and a crew to man it, outlaws often managed only to access islands and islets that lay in the vicinity of Iceland. These were relatively close to the local habitat but seldom visited. An outlaw’s ability to swim, which was demonstrated above to be a central quality of the traditional outlaw, is connected to the tendency to depict outlaws in places that were beyond a body of water. The ability to swim meant the ability to cross these bodies of water, in flight or for other reasons, across a river or to an island. Water was an element that united domains but it was also a separating element. Water provided a way for a desperate or capable man to escape when daring and luck was required. It also provided him with a way to demonstrate his superior capabilities.

As an illustrative example, Hörðr Grímkelsson inhabited the island of Geirshólmi with his band of outlaws for a long time, and this island was conquered only through treason (Harðar saga, Ch. 24–38). The island is so central to the saga that the saga has also been named Hólmerja saga (“The Saga of the Island-Dwellers”) or Harðar saga ok hólmerja (“The Saga of Hörðr and the Island-Dwellers”). According to the saga, two hundred outlaws lived on the island. This crew could hardly manage to stay on the small island without extraneous support, but the idea of the island occupied by a large troop was already familiar to people in the

---

258 “[…] til gnipu þeirar, er heittir Laugargnipa; þar varð fyrrir þeim hellir fagr. Var þat Gott herbergi. þar var undir niðri fogn jarðlaug. Í hellinum vár víst ok drykkr ok klaði.”

259 A narrative about a band of outlaws hiding in Surtshellir and destroyed by a troop of local farmers is also given in the nineteenth century saga Hellismanna saga, apparently largely based on local lore.
time of saga writing from recent events in the thirteenth century, as Halldór Laxness (1950, 224–225) has pointed out. Indeed, *Íslendinga saga* tells the story of how Sturla Sighvatsson moved a storehouse from Akranes to Geirshólm in 1238 to store his booty, and he posted a troop there to protect it (*Sturlunga saga*, pp. 392–393). Sturla Sighvatsson’s opponent, Gissur Þorvaldsson, was warned that they intended to raid the entire district. Farmers persuaded Gissur to get a ship and to attack the island. Gissur answered that it would not be easy to conquer the island because there were so many men, and suggested the farmers protect themselves as best they could (*Sturlunga saga*, pp. 405–407).

Gísli Súrsson spent a long time on the island of Hergilsey (*Gísla saga*, Ch. 24–26). He could stay there for a whole year in spite of the curse put upon him that prevented anyone from helping him. This was because, according to the saga, the sorcerer had not understood to include the islands outside Iceland’s mainland in the curse’s sphere of influence (Ch. 26). Finally, Gísli was also forced to escape from Hergilsey. The Hergilsey episode is in a central position in the saga plot.

During the last phase of his outlaw career, Grettir Ásmundarson hid on the island of Drangey where his enemies were not able to assault him due to the steep cliffs that surrounded it. Only through witchcraft and through the irresponsibility of a servant were Grettir’s enemies able to get onto the island and kill him. The section that has a setting on the island is remarkably long in *Grettis saga* (Ch. 70–83) even though it is uncertain whether or not the peculiarly formed island was connected to Grettir in authentic historical traditions in the first place (Þórðarson 1936, 57–60).

Another example consists of the minor islets that serve as temporary hideouts for Gunnarr Þiðrandabani and Þormóðr Bersason. According to *Gunnars þátr Þiðrandabana* (Ch. 5), Gunnarr’s helper, Sveinki, suggests that he swim to a skerry in order to hide from his pursuers. Gunnarr swims the three kilometers in full armor, which is considered in the saga to be an exceptional feat: “It would be a long swim even if conducted uninjured,” and Gunnarr had actually been wounded earlier. On the skerry, Gunnarr covers himself with seaweed to keep warm. Gunnarr’s host meets him there afterwards and offers him help, which seems a peculiar way to describe the situation, since it seems obvious from the preceding scene that they agreed upon help earlier. It seems as if the previous scene, in which Sveinki hid Gunnarr three times at his

---

260 “The island does not lie in front of Bakkaland but rather in front of Hafnarland on the other side of the fjord” (Jóhannesson 1950, 206, Note 3).

261 “[…] er þat mikít sund, ef þú værir heill ok ósárr […]”

252
farm, and the scene on the skerry do not follow each other very fluently. Sending Gunnarr to the skerry is only motivated if we believe that it was considered reasonable to fear the return of the pursuers who had already left. The saga writer seems to have done his best to combine two separate scenes that include distinct hiding motifs, both of which represent stereotyped narrative elements of outlawry. Indeed, this “skerry scene” is very close to two scenes connected to Þormóðr’s adventures in Greenland (Fóstbræðra saga, Ch. 23, 24) in the narrative elements that are applied in narration. In Fljótsdæla saga (Ch. 18), the feat of swimming described above is replaced by Gunnarr’s swim across Njarðvík in flight from his pursuers. He is said to have been wounded in his arm by a javelin thrown by Grímr Droplaugarson. In Fljótsdæla saga, the length of the swim is concretized by comparing it to the length “from Naustdálr over to Vindgjá,” basing this on accounts of “knowledgable men;” thus the audience was not supposed to be familiar with the setting of the account, nor seems the writer to have been.

An example of an outlaw as a minor character, whose fate was connected to an island, is the tragedy of the outlaw Grímr (Reykðæla saga, Ch. 21). He was executed by tying him stark naked to a pole on an island in Lake Mývatn (“Mosquito lake”) where he was eaten alive by the mosquitoes.

The functions of farming extended into the mountains where sheep and cattle were grazed higher up during the summer. Farms also had shepherd sheds (sel) in the mountain pastures. However, it was not permitted to build sheds on common land in Iceland: “eigi skal sel gðr í afrét” (Grágáls, 330). Instead, the huts had to be built within the domains of the farms. On the edge of the owned land, these huts represented the physical limits of a farm. This is portrayed in a scene in Laxdæla saga (Ch. 48), in which Kjartan Ólafsson forbids his companions to follow him beyond the shed that belonged to his farm: “Þórolfr the thief shall not ridicule me for not daring ride my ways alone.” Within the geography of Iceland, these sheds served as markers of the edge of habitation.

The farmers’ influence and interests extended rather far from the immediate vicinity of the farmstead, but the range where the huts were built was likewise a space where the dwellers of the interior met people. An example of this occurs in Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss (Ch. 11–12), where the troll woman Helga comes to take her half-brother Gestur as her

262 Compare with Gisli Súrsson who was wounded in the calf by a thrown spear while diving into water in his flight in Gísla saga, Ch. 27.
263 “[…] frá Naustadæli og yfir til Vindgjár.”
264 “[…] skal eigi þórolfr, þjófrinn, at því hlæja, at ek þora eigi at ríða leið mína fümennr.”
foster son from the *sel* in which he was born. She also returns him to his mother at this *sel* twelve years later.

As remote buildings, the *sel* were spatially located favorably for the needs of the outlaws, and there are numerous outlawry-connected passages in the Family Sagas that take place in the vicinity of *sel*. Grettir stayed in a *sel* in Vatnsfjarðardalr when he was caught by the local farmers (*Grettis saga*, Ch. 52), and he hid from his pursuers in a *sel* together with another man in the East (Ch. 63). Another example is found in *Laxdæla saga* (Ch. 61), according to which the farmer Helgi Harðbeinsson, who is in the habit of providing shelter to outlaws, is met at a cowshed in the company of two outlaws. In *Vatnsdæla saga* (Ch. 41), the progenitor of *Vatnsdælir*, Ingólfr, fights his memorable last battle as an old man against a band of outlaws who are hiding in a *sel*. Still another example is found in *Laxdæla saga*. This saga tells how the courageous lady named Auðr sets off from a *sel* to take revenge upon her former husband Þórðr, in a “crime of passion scene” applied in numerous outlaw biographies (*Laxdæla saga*, Ch. 35). In this case, however, the motif of stabbing in bed and the *sel* as a location, together with the arguable association of outlawry with the female sex, are the elements that allow discussing the scene in terms of outlawry. (Ahola 2009b, esp. 25–26.) *Vápnfirðinga saga* (Ch. 16) contains an account of Bjarni eluding his pursuers from a *sel* in a manner that represents a common motif connected to outlaws, by luring them to follow a horse that does not however carry him. Bjarni does this by tying a block of wood on the saddle and placing his cloak over it. As the examples above show, the sheds (*sel*) regularly appear in the Family Sagas as dwellings of outlaws. Sheds are even mentioned separately in connection with outlaws in the law. There is a passage in *Grágás* that deals with liability in the case that a shed is damaged while outlaws are being killed in it (*Grágás*, 278).

In addition to the shepherd huts, also *remote farms*, which were located higher up in the mountains, functioned as shelters for outlaws as becomes evident in numerous instances in the Family Sagas. In addition to Helgi Harðbeinsson’s farm, which has been mentioned above, there is another example of this in *Fóstbreðra saga* (Ch. 23). According to this saga, an old couple received the outlawed Þormóðr Bersason into their house in the heights in Greenland, “at the bottom of Eiríksfjörður, up beneath the glaciers.”265 This farm was remote enough to suit harbouring an outlaw.

---

265 “[…] í Eiríksfjarðarbotni uppi undir jökulnum.”
At farms, a regular hiding-place for outlaws is in a cellar (jarðhús) that is located on the edge of a farmstead. An example that is not necessarily so representative but which demonstrates the mystery associated with cellars is found in Reykdæla saga (Ch. 4). This scene recounts how a farmhand named Þorleifr finds out that his master, Hánefr, is boiling stolen sheep inside a hidden cellar. The scene is rather trollish and tale-like in its imagery and as such, it makes a clear connection between an inhabitable natural cave and a cellar:

It is to be told that Þorleifr melrakki became aware that Hánefr disappeared often from his bed in the night, and he wanted to enquire what was happening. He goes out and follows him. And he falls on a hill, and when he stood up, there was blood on his hand. He wonders where he was injured, as he sees that he has blood on him, but could not find out […] Now he goes into the cellar and feels his way. He finds there sheepskins and a grey-dotted sheep head which was easily recognizable. He takes it with him and closes the door behind him. Then he smelled smoke, and soon he saw a fire, and there was a kettle above the fire, and there was a man by it, whom he recognizes as Hánefr, his host. Now he approaches the fire and reproaches Hánefr for doing such things in the night.266

Also separate buildings connected to the farmstead could serve as hideouts for the outlaws. According to Gunnars þáttir Þjórandabana (Ch. 5), after being outlawed, Gunnarr stays at Helgi Ásbjarnarson not in the house but in the outbuilding (útibúr). Fljótsdæla saga (Ch. 17–18) offers the account that Gunnarr stays in the outbuilding both at Ketill and at Helgi Ásbjarnarson. Fósbraðra saga (Ch. 24) recounts that Skufr and Bjarni accommodated the outlawed Þormóðr Bersason in Greenland in their búri (stokkabúri in Flateyjarbók), which refers to a storehouse or a pantry.

---

266 “Þat er at segja at Þorleifr melrakki varð var við at Hánefr hvarf margoft úr hvílu sinni um nætr ok þar kom at hann forvitnaðist hverju gegna mundi. Fer hann nú út ok leitar hans. Ok í einni brekku fellr hann ok er hann stóð upp er blöð á hendi honum. Ok nú hyggr hann at hvar hann væri skeindr er hann sá at hann var blöðigr ok varð hann eigi þess var […] Nú fer hann í jarðhúsðið ok preifast þar fyrrir. Hann hittir þar gerur ok sauðarhöfuð gráðildót fann hann þar eitt ok var þat mjög auðkennt. Þat tekur hann á brott ok byrgir aftur eptir sér þann veg sem aður var. Síðan kenndi hann reykjarþef ok því næst sá hann eld ok var ketill yfir eldnum ok var þar maðr hjú ok kennir hann Hánefr hísþóna sinn ok gengur nú fram at eldimum og løtur illa at Hánefr er hann er at sílíkum um nætr.”
11.1.1 Outlaws and the Land

Settlement and land acquisition in Iceland have a prominent role in many of the Family Sagas, and they inspired the compilation of the grand work *Landnámabók* (“The Book of Settlements”). *Landnámabók* accounts the primary settlers of Iceland. However, not only written works such as *Landnámabók* reflect the respect that the Icelanders had for the first settlers. The landscape itself was a testimony to the vicissitudes of the first settlers. Many events connected to the settlement were commemorated in place-names. Land ownership was a remarkable social factor, as becomes evident in Kirsten Hastrup’s (1990, esp. 80) discussion. A person’s positioning in social networks was largely done on the basis of his relation to land possessions. An outlaw lost all of his possessions, including land. However, the connection between land and individual was so strong that he was conceived as a master, *húsbóndi*, of the piece of land he happened to occupy. This is manifested in the fact that in the saga accounts, an outlaw is typically superior to his pursuers in the landscape that surrounded the place he had claimed for himself.

Just like the first settlers and the events connected to them gave names to significant landmarks in the areas they settled, so too did outlaws as a sort of settlers of the otherwise uninhabited landscape. Respected outlaws, generally those that appear as focal characters in the Family Sagas, gave their names to many land formations in the interior. These place-names derive both from sagas and from later traditions. “Hospitable” natural formations, such as caves and hot springs, were especially suitable for this. For example, *Droplaugarsona saga* (Ch. 14) tells that the ledge of a mountain on which Grímur Droplaugarson stayed in a tent for a while in his outlawry has been called *Grímsbyggð* (“Grímur’s Dwelling”) since that time.

These place-names reinforce the significance of outlaws as personifications of a fantasy of being at home in the uninhabited, in the wilderness – or these place-names may reflect a tendency to conceptualize functionally utilizable formations of nature through an association with the representatives of a group that was extremely dependent on them. The naming of places after outlaws turned these outlaws into pioneers and associated them with the first settlers.

---

267 In largely the same way, genealogies and mythical histories were interwoven and served for supporting land claims and rights to the land in the Cook islands of the South Pacific. See Siikala 2000, 220–221.
268 A tent was also the dwelling place of Gunnarr *Piðrandabani* according to *Fljótsdalea saga*, Ch. 18.
Another group of place-names are given on the basis of the fall of marginal characters, whence less respected characters such as slaves could also be remembered.

There have naturally prevailed traditions connected to specific spots in the landscape that are not recounted in the saga literature. For example, there is a number of place-names dedicated to Bárðr in the heaths of Snæfellsnes, even more than those mentioned in Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss. Bárðr was a fjallvætt, a semi-mythical settler in Snæfellsnes, who became a sort of mountain-spirit. He was strongly associated with outlawry as a character that did not dwell among humans but instead wandered continuously across the heaths of Snæfellsnes. There are many place-names connected to him, such as Bárðarlaug and Bárðarhellir, which are not however mentioned in Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss (Vilmundarson 1991, lxxxv). Ólafur Lárusson (1944, 177) suggested that these place-names were given after the time of saga writing because otherwise the place name-oriented writer would have given a note to them. However, the spots in the landscape that were associated with the Saga World through place-names retained the memory of the Saga Age and were concrete links between the Saga World and contemporary reality. Through the narration connected to place names, these spots of land indicated especially clearly the space which was reserved for outlaws in the Saga World.

It is notable that outlaws hid in the limits of habitable space. These limits were not absolute or concrete but instead correlated with the social fields that were in the focus of narration in the Family Sagas. On the basis of the places that are repeatedly connected to narratives about outlawry in the Family Sagas, it is possible to sketch the space that was reserved for outlaws in the Saga World. The spatial edges of the public field were the edges of habitation: caves and remote sheds or farms. The spatial edges of the private field were the edges of the areas that were in the control of the reference group of the outlaw: buildings or spots of land located at the margins of the farm.

11.2 The Space Available for the Outlaws

According to van Leeuwen, spatial features have two levels: formal and symbolic. The symbolic level of space is a result of a metaphorical interpretation of the formal qualities of a space (Van Leeuwen 2007, 13–14). In contrast, a place is given formal spatial qualities by its applicability to a given use or action: space is the conceptual level of a place (see de Certeau 2002, 117). Space is a set of conceptions that can
be attributed to a place that fulfils the requirements that these conceptions set. Petja Aarnipuu has discussed the evolution of a space as a process that is the result of activity in a place (Aarnipuu 2007, 28).

Because spatial conceptions always depend upon the availability of corresponding places, these places both predetermine and strengthen the spatial conceptions (Malpas 1999). An example of this conceptualization is the place today referred to as Þingvellir (“Assembly Plains”). It is a spot in the Icelandic landscape that has certain formal spatial features. In this connection, suffice it to mention its relatively central and politically neutral location close to the lands of the oldest families that enjoyed great societal authority as well as the land formation that was favorable both for different kinds of meetings and for temporary accommodation for large groups, including pastures for horses and fresh water. Thanks to these formal spatial features, Þingvellir was adopted as the venue for the General Assembly to meet. This function defined the place in the Saga World. The symbolic level of this spot as a collective and politically neutral venue for the actualization of the people’s unity and the law is evident both in the medieval texts and in the values connected to it still today. Conversely, this spot of landscape was turned into a place by attaching such meanings to it.

In Iceland, the landscape is open everywhere and landmarks can be seen from afar. Stories connected to landmarks easily remained active traditions because these landmarks constantly reminded people of them. The Family Sagas reflected and utilized spatial meanings that were connected to the landscape but they simultaneously renewed these meanings as narratives that pointed out individual spots in the landscape. The conceptions about social relations and about the spatial structure of the Saga World were interlinked because the space within Iceland was definitely limited and still observable in the period of saga writing. In the Family Sagas, space is socially defined. The space that remained for the outlaws was at the margins of the social space and the places in which outlaws regularly appear in the Family Sagas were manifestations of this space.

Concrete geographical locations receive extensive attention in the Family Sagas. In many cultures, the significance of places is established in narration (Siikala & Siikala 2005, 112–130; Basso 1988; Casey 1996; Fernandez 2003). Already a mere place name may metonymically imply a whole narrative, or a place name could be leaned upon in arguing the correspondence of the narrative to reality (see esp. Basso 1988). Saga narratives were connected to surrounding reality through links to the actual landscape, specific places, and the landscape also directed narration. Because narration is fundamentally separated from physical
reality, the landscape described and represented in saga narration was a mental landscape that was construed in relation to the saga writer’s conceptions and the requirements of his craft in narration. When this mental landscape did not refer to actual locations, it became freer to moderate to the flow of narration. This means that those spots of the mental landscape that served merely as settings for the narrative and did not represent any actual, observable spots could be formed as generic places. These generic places reflected those general qualities of a place that were required by the narrative. Places are the concrete actualizations of space. The general common qualities of the places were associated with a certain phenomenon, hence they indicate the spatial qualities associated with that phenomenon.

Eleazar Meletinsky pointed out the bipartite division of the mythological realm into the familiar (‘Midgard’) and the foreign (‘Utgard’) (Meletinsky 1973, 46–47). Aaron Gurevich noted the same spatial categorization in mythology and additionally pointed out that this spatial division not only concerned the myths: “The contrast made between Míøgarðr and Útgarðr finds a parallel in the distinction made in Scandinavian law between two categories of land – ‘within the enclosure’ (innangarðs) and ‘outside the enclosure’ (útangarðs)” (Gurevich 1985, 47). Lars Lönnroth (1976, 57–58) noted that the spatial categorization that is expressed in the Family Sagas appears as concentric circles that advance outwards from a subjective center, the farm unit, to other farms, local assembly, General Assembly, etc. These circles would not have appeared as circles if drawn on a map, though. They were conceptualizations of the experienced world. Therefore, the marvels similar that one met abroad could be met in Iceland as well: “These marvels all belong, in a sense, and regardless of their geographical location, to that outer circle at the periphery of the saga world” (Lönnroth 1976, 58).

Kirsten Hastrup argued that the distinction between these mythical spatial categories, Míøgarðr and Útgarðr and their conceptual counterparts innangarðs and útangarðs, functioned through different layers of medieval Icelandic culture as “general models for social (and cosmological) conception” (Hastrup 1985, 146). She considered this division fundamental to the spatial conception of medieval Icelanders: “This model so fitted Icelandic social and spatial realities that each level of reality affirmed the others to an astonishing degree” (ibid., 148). However, this binary division leaves it unclear that the boundaries between the “inside” and the “outside” were by no means strict. Beyond the fenced farm enclosure were pastures and hey fields that were tightly attached to the farm. Beyond them were higher pastures in the heaths,
and they were also privately owned. There was even another “fence” between the farm and the higher pastures in the form of cairns that were sometimes erected to guide shepherds from the heaths back to the farm (Aldred 2008). Also the fishing waters and hunting grounds on the heaths had possessors – and only the most hostile and unfertile mountainous areas were beyond ownership. Roads and paths crossed even those areas, hence limiting the completely untouched wilderness even further.

The bipartite division discussed above was largely based on the mythological writings of Snorri Sturluson. Margaret Clunies Ross (1994, 51–52, 252) concentrated on other sources and approached the question of spatial categorization in mythology from the point of view of social analysis. She emphasized that the inhabitants of Ásgarðr and Jötunheimar are not fundamentally different – their ancestors belong to the same groups and they are attributed with similar social systems – but instead, they “are defined as other and hostile by the gods who are their own biological kin as part of a strategy to keep the giants in a subordinate social position” (Clunies Ross 1994, 66). Clunies Ross described the resulting cosmological model as a “series of territories belonging to different classes of beings arranged like a series of concentric half-circles” (Clunies Ross 1994, 51), thus ending up in a model largely identical with that of Lönnroth. Movement from a spatial sphere or circle to another is marked by a journey in the narratives.

However, the circles were neither uniform nor consistent throughout the texts. The narrative environment and the functions of the places in the narratives define the meanings attributed to them. An clear dichotomy of opposites in the sense of structural anthropology is not perfectly suitable when a larger corpus of saga texts and respective representations of space is studied. This is because the principle of such a dualist spatial division may exist but it cannot be consistent throughout the material. Indeed, Hastrup predominantly leaned on Grettis saga in her argumentation about the outsidersness of outlaws. Some other sagas support this argument as well, but when studying a larger corpus of saga texts, the space of outlaws becomes a more complicated question. Actually, it seems that the socially constructed space of the Saga World is constructed through the relations between the groups that occupy that space. In law, the space for outlaws was defined through negation. The law prohibited the outlaw all help and this limited the space that was available to him. Help was crucial in order to survive and the suitability of the space for outlaws included the possibility to maintain contacts with people and to receive the necessary help. Nevertheless, it had to be
possible to provide this help in a way that kept the helper relatively safe from legal consequences.

The outlaws who did not get an immediate means of leaving Iceland, which was the case of most of the outlaws who were interesting for saga narration, were forced to withdraw from the sight of their pursuers. The terminology for outlawry itself – terms such as útlegð ("lying out") or the unusual fjera víð útgardða ("to drive to the outskirts") (Víga-Glúms saga, Ch. 9) – indicated banishment to the outskirts of the inhabited areas, as did the term skóggangr ("forest-going"), because Iceland hardly ever had enough forests to provide secure hideouts and the term probably referred to the uninhabited areas in general (Hastrup 1985, 139) (see chapter 5.3).

Lesser outlawry, which required moving out of Iceland for a given time, was usually undergone as an exile in Norway, according to the Family Sagas. In spite of the distance, Norway was culturally close to Iceland. Furthermore, putting the sentence into effect depended on the availability of transportation. There were regular trade connections between Iceland and Norway, and these connections determined the usual direction of exile. The availability of transportation was the reason that even those men who were burdened with charges of full outlawry and who managed to leave Iceland also usually ended up in Norway. The prohibitions of accommodating and helping an outlaw did not concern the public in Norway even though the right of an Icelander to take revenge on an outlaw in Norway seems to have been acknowledged by the Norwegian regime. In addition, Greenland, Denmark and the British Isles appear regularly as places for the Icelandic outlaws to have sought refuge. For example, to escape conflicts in both Norway and Iceland, Eiríkr rauði travelled to Greenland, which appears in some sagas as another alternative refuge. Þórgímr trolli travelled to Greenland after killing Þorgeirr Hávarsson, but he actually lived there and he was not outlawed for killing Þorgeirr, an outlaw himself, even though he later faced the same fate as a tragic outlaw, the victim of revenge (Fóstbræðra saga, Ch. 22). Króka-Refr’s first refuge was in Greenland (Króka-Refs saga, Ch. 6). Þorgeirr Hávarsson’s occasional companion, the dubious figure Veglágr (Fóstbræðra saga, Ch. 13) escaped charges of thievery by going to the British Isles where he gained notoriety as a master thief. However, according to the testimony of the Family Sagas, the establishment of a new life abroad normally took place either in Norway or in Denmark.
In contrast, the outlaws of the King of Norway could find refuge either in Iceland, if they were Icelanders and were not outlawed there, or in Denmark. For example, Þorleifr jarlaskáld found refuge first in Denmark, from where he travelled back to Iceland, whereas Króka-Refr remained in Denmark.

District outlawry (héraðsskeit) meant banishment from the district in which the sentence was given. This sentence was not given a definition in the law texts. To judge from the practices of héraðsskeit in saga literature, the “district” appears to have been a flexible term and probably determined by the range of activities of the summoner, as the main purpose of the sentence seems to have been to repress conflicts by keeping the enemies apart. The concept “district outlawry” reflects the relative separateness of the districts of Iceland from each other. This enabled outlaws to seek protection in other districts because outlawry that was imposed on a person in one district did not necessarily have a drastic affect on his reception in others. For example, Reykdæla saga (Ch. 20) tells that Þórir Ketilsson was sentenced to outlawry for a killing “in the South” (sunnan um land) but in spite of this, two chieftains in the North received him and even succeeded in getting him the right to move around in the district. The separateness of districts is evident also in Bolla þátr Bollasonar because Bolli’s success in “another quarter” is claimed to be the central source of his reputation. This separateness of districts becomes especially evident in Hrafnkels saga Freysgøða. According to this saga, Hrafnkell Freysgøði manages to rebuild a successful life even though he is sentenced to district outlawry and banished not farther than to the neighboring district.

On the one hand, outlaws needed to stay beyond the reach of their pursuers and this required that they avoid common routes and regularly visited locations or otherwise stayed out of sight. On the other hand, they were largely dependent on the same infrastructures of livelihood as other people, and relied on connections to the cultivated land that was able to provide this. In the circumstances of Iceland, the edges of cultivated land consisted mainly of sheep pastures and fishing lakes that were often far from farms and therefore less frequently visited. In addition, in order to be addressed in the saga literature, they were to remain in the social networks that, after all, comprised the principal subject matter of the Family Sagas (Ahola 2011).

Both fears and hopes were projected upon the interior. Iceland’s interior was extremely hostile in its harsh natural conditions and posed a real threat to those who traversed it, but it also beheld natural resources

---

269 Egill in Egils saga; Hrappr in Njáls saga; and many of the pioneering settlers of Iceland.
such as rich fishing lakes and pastures, and much of the communication in Iceland had to be done across the interior. As much of the interior was unknown, its potential for both good and bad was equally great. Fantasies of both hostile and hospitable powerful beings were given a concrete location in the interior, which was sufficiently unknown to have fantastic conceptions projected upon it. This all must have resulted in a fearful attitude towards the interior, readily personifiable in terms of outlaws. The space reserved for outlaws posited them on the verge of the interior where they potentially confronted those people who dared to approach the limits of habitation.

Expelled from the society, outlaws joined and were associated with supernatural beings that were believed to have thronged in the vast interior (Hastrup 1985, 143, see esp. note 4). A similar association was made between the Saami and the giants, both inhabitants of the Norwegian mountains in contemporary conceptions (Hermann Pálsson 1997; Mundal 2000). By identifying the law with society, Kirsten Hastrup argues that outlawry can be discussed in terms of expulsion from society into the ‘wild’: into the categorically ‘other’ that “[...] was all over the physical space, yet it formed a distinct ‘space’, inhabited by distinct categories of non-social beings” (Hastrup 1985, 144). Those who managed to survive were seen as men who were at home in the wilderness. They were not however part of the wilderness but instead, qualities of the beings that belonged to the wilderness were associated with them. Because outlaws typically stayed on the verge of the wilderness, at the limits of habitable space and travel routes, outlaws could be a real threat to travelers and those who moved in these areas for other reasons, such as herding. If an outlaw could not get any support in accordance with the principle of the sentence, he was forced to obtain necessities with force. Traditions and beliefs concerning mysterious outlaws moving about the unknown interior prevailed all the way up to the time when the interior was finally explored and fully mapped in the early twentieth century – without a trace of outlaws.

Outlawry as a concept seems to have entailed exceptional skills in the wilderness beyond the inhabited area and consequently, associations with non-human beings whose home was, after all, the wilderness. Familiarity with the terrain and the general expertise with the wilderness that was attributed to men who were capable of surviving there gave those men the upper hand that made it credible that they could overcome even superior enemies in that environment. Especially illustrative of this expertise are descriptions in saga accounts of the ability of outlaws such as Gísli Súrsson (Gísla saga, Chs. 20, 27) and Hrappr Órgumleiðason (Njáls saga, Ch. 88) to disappear into the woods without a trace.
11.3 Conclusion

From the point of view of society, the space of the Saga World is dividable into inside and outside, culture and nature, as Kirsten Hastrup (1986) argued on the basis of different forms of expressing spatial conceptions. For society, the outside was the space for outlaws, occupied by forces and beings that were alien and potentially threatening to civilisation. However, the space was divided differently from the point of view of outlawry. For an outlaw, the socially defined space was organized into the hospitable and hostile social fields and into the socially neutral wilderness. The borders between these spheres were not solid, and especially the social fields were further defined by different social factors. Cultural or cultivated constructions in the uninhabited interior, such as the shephards’ sheds (sel) that often appear as settings in narratives about outlawry, exemplify that the limits between “nature and wild” were not as strict as Kirsten Hastrup suggests.

The distance from the core of the Icelandic Saga World society is conceived in the Family Sagas in terms of temporal, spatial and social or cultural distance. The genre of the Family Sagas, defined largely by the temporal and social or cultural setting of the narratives, determined the requirement of familiarity or plausibility in the narrated accounts. In contrast, increasing spatial distance from Iceland enabled yielding in plausibility and that images and conceptions were discussed in a similar manner with more fantastic forms of narration. This consequently meant that in medieval Icelandic literature, the unnatural or extraordinary beings and happenings were located most likely in a distant past (as manifested in the mode of the Legendary Sagas and other myths), in distant or rather less familiar places, or among foreigners who were considered culturally alien. A covering category from the point of view of reception could be called familiarity: the farther away the settings were from everyday or homelike experience, the less they were marked by social factors and the more likely it was that events that would take place in those settings followed rules that differed from those in the everyday settings. These rules relied on conventional conceptions and typologies as the narratives were detached from individual experience.

270 E.g. in Norway, according to the Family Sagas, one met berserks who were rather unknown in Iceland; further to the East, one ran into magic and other wonders rarely met in Norway; and in America one could meet curiosities such as people with only one leg, and other wonders usually associated with remote locations in medieval European culture (Friedman 2005, Kline 2005).
Outlaws beheld the potential to associations with the fantastic and the mythic through their spatial qualification but the actualizations of these mythic or fantastic images or conceptions in the Family Sagas also depended upon the focus of the saga and the role that the outlaw occupied within the narrative, as will be discussed in chapters 13 and 14.
Part III

Outlawry
and
Other Branches
of
Medieval Icelandic Writing
The diverse appearances of outlawry in the Family Sagas, which were
discussed in chapter 6, attest to the heteroglot conceptions that medieval
Icelanders harbored about outlawry in the Saga World. The form in which
outlawry appears in a text gives the meaning to outlawry intertextually
when the connection is recognized. Concerning intertextuality, William
Irwin has pointed out that “the term intertextuality was coined by Julia
Kristeva in 1966, and since that time has come to have almost as many
meanings as users” (Irwin 2004: 227). With the term intertextuality, I
refer here to the verifiable semantic connections between concrete texts in
a philologically oriented approach. An essential difference between this
approach to intertextuality and traditional referentiality is that it addresses
texts instead of ideas that are articulated in the texts. Intertextual
meaning-making is, however, only verifiable when an actual connection
between two texts can be demonstrated to have existed, and this is
difficult to assess. Gísli Sigurðsson observed that “the idea of literary
relations among the sagas should be treated with a degree of scepticism
and individual cases accepted as proven only where there are strong
supporting arguments” (Sigurðsson G. 2004, 124). Sigurðsson suggests
that the connections between traditional or oral-derived texts, such as the
Family Sagas, are rather to be explained through references to a common
tradition behind the parallels. Therefore, traditional referentiality is a
more suitable term, as Slavica Ranković (2007, 110–112) has suggested.
By traditional referentiality, I allude to the meanings that reside in
applications that occur in the actual use of a tradition-based idea (See
such as a saga narrative in which outlawry or an outlaw plays a part, add
to the heteroglossia of the outlawry in the Saga World. Put more
succinctly, the tradition-based idea is ultimately heteroglot.

Medieval Icelanders’ conceptions about outlawry in the Saga World
were connected to the concurrent experiences and conceptions about their
surrounding reality. Whereas conceptions about outlawry in the Saga
World were expressed and renewed in the accounts in the Family Sagas,
the basic elements or the signifying factors of outlawry were presumably
also expressed in other branches of the concurrent literature within the
framework of their expressive conventions and premises. In a community
whose members are familiar with the conventional expressions of
different traditional genres, the expressions that are used in different
genres create referential links between these genres. Lotte Tarkka (2005)
has demonstrated in connection with Karelian oral traditions that the
referent genres themselves influence each other’s interpretation through
these links. Therefore, research into how the basic elements of outlawry
are expressed in the texts of other genres provides further information on the semantic scope of outlawry in the Family Sagas.

In order to find commensurability between the accounts in texts of different genres, outlawry has to be defined in more general terms than in the Family Sagas. In these sagas, outlawry is defined rather strictly as a temporally and spatially limited juridical status. The basic elements of outlawry of the Saga World are divided here on the basis of the generic interests of the Family Sagas. As discussed above, these include narrative-based elements, social elements and spatial elements. The themes and motifs recurring in the narratives about outlawry in the Family Sagas indicate that the concept of outlawry centered on an individual who was marginalized through banishment or rejection, which eventually led to his solitariness.

The biographical point of view in saga narration foregrounds the impact that outlawry has on the individual. The Family Sagas are formed out of intersecting biographies, no matter how fragmented or imaginary these biographies are. The sympathy addressed to an individual or the position adopted by the narrator in relation to the narrative character becomes a significant factor. The legal principle of outlawry behind the infliction of outlawry was to separate the individual from the group with which he had clashed through banishment or rejection. This concerned all the different forms of outlawry. Banishment meant marginalizing the individual and severing that person from the support and shelter provided by society. This predisposed him to violence, which was effected by spatial marginalization beyond the habitation or to its outer reaches.

The outlaws were intermediate characters in more senses than one: they hovered between the different social fields and groups, especially in those Family Sagas where they occupy the roles of assassins and force the conflict between two groups into crisis. However, they also were in between the human world and the non-human world. The conceptions about the alien sphere that was located beyond everyday experience were readily projected upon these intermediate characters. Their position in between these spheres was marked by characteristics that were associated with the sphere beyond. Additionally, the exclusion from society meant, at least in principle, separation from other people and consequently contributed to the individual’s solitariness. Indeed, outlaws often appear as solitary characters in the Family Sagas in spite of the fact that they maintained a regular contact to people or were even sheltered by someone. Nevertheless, the solitariness of an outlaw was a presumption.

The basic elements of outlawry in the Family Sagas, which are connected to characters in the texts of other genres, uncover connotative
meanings that outlawry in the Saga World had. The referential connections between these texts both realize the extensions of the traditional idea and produce new significations through the attachment of traditional ideas to new connections and valuations. In the following, the referential connections between texts will be discussed in terms of traditional referentiality. Instead of detailed referential analysis, the emphasis will be given to the general information that the readings of different types of texts can provide concerning the reception of outlawry in the Family Sagas. The different sources of this type of information are categorized here as different frames of reference. The frames of reference that will be discussed in the following chapters are not in a hierarchical or chronological order, nor are their mutual relations discussed in any depth. It is difficult to determine any hierarchy among them because an individual narrative passage could call for different frames of reference in different narrative environments. Furthermore, several frames of reference could be simultaneously or alternatively relevant for a narrative passage in a saga. Finally, the significance of a frame of reference for a passage in a saga does not necessarily depend on the centrality of the frame of reference for the narrative environment but instead, a frame of reference could become relevant even for extratextual reasons that connected the narrative to the surrounding reality of the audience, for instance because of associations that the wording created for the audience.

Christianity and Christian teachings, which will be discussed first, provided a relevant and immediate frame of reference in medieval Iceland. The Bible was a commonly accepted, institutionally supported and regularly reaffirmed work of reference to all possible texts. Lay people learned clerical text interpretation from public sermons. This type of interpretation did not actually differ too radically from the thinking that was required in the use of poetic devices in vernacular skaldic poetry, especially in the use of periphrases such as kennings. The saga writers often had a clerical education, which affected the way they interpreted traditional history as receivers, as well as the way that they put these histories into writing. It is obvious that tradition-based texts required predominantly tradition-based frames of reference but still, Christianity provided a fundamental system of values and world order and clerical learning served as a foundation in the process of saga writing even if the vernacular traditional history provided the principal subject matter.

Following this, I will discuss the mythological frame of reference. Even though the pre-Christian mythology did not have a ritualistic or practical significance (at least on a collective level) in Iceland during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, myths continued to be told and
referred to in several narrative genres, especially in skaldic poetry. The mythological narrative tradition was so influential for narration in general that it is possible to recognize themes, motifs and characterizations in the Family Sagas that have parallels in the mythological texts. The mythological texts have been preserved in writing from the period during which the Family Sagas were also put into writing. Mythological texts reflect a special Taleworld. This Taleworld will be approached through the certain spatial order and certain categories of narrative actors that are associable with, and as such referentially representative of, the outlawry in the Saga World.

After mythology, I will discuss heroic traditions. The complexity of the concepts hero and heroism are paid special attention. Heroic traditions were influential for saga writing especially as central models for biographical narratives. Heroic biographies treated the lives of men who were conceived as being exemplary or otherwise remarkable. The recognizable similarities and divergences between this model and a saga biography pointed to the saga audience whether or not the subject of the narrative was conceivable as a heroic character and if he was, as what type of a heroic character. This chapter will discuss the ways in which the relation of an outlaw biography to a typical heroic biography affected the conception of the outlaw character.

Finally, I will discuss historical texts that were produced concurrently with the Family Sagas. The Kings’ Sagas include several royal equivalents of outlaw biographies. These examples, which represent the three categories of an outlaw biography, demonstrate that the traditional histories dealing with the biographies of monarchs contained elements similar to those found in the biographies of outlaws in the Family Sagas. Another example of historical texts are the Contemporary Sagas, or the sagas that tell about the events in Iceland that occurred during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The narratives about outlaws in the Contemporary Sagas differ from those in the Family Sagas, probably mostly because of their differing scope of interest and the relatively short span of time between the events recounted and the writing of the texts. However, these narratives contain certain similarities. These similarities are examples of narrative conventions that affected the narration about outlaws even if the Taleworld was no longer the Saga World but belonged to a more recent past.
The Icelandic culture in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was a Christian culture. Iceland had been converted to Christianity in the year 1000, and the position of the Church gradually strengthened after that. In Iceland, literature was produced in clerical surroundings or in the immediate vicinity of a clerical environment. Literary education and training likewise took place within the sphere of the Church. Consequently, the secular writings only formed a small proportion of the whole of literary production. The central role of Christian culture had a twofold effect on the literary expression of traditional narration in the saga literature. The first was that the clerical training affected narration itself. The second was that the interpretation of the consequent narrative (especially in the literary form) was interpreted in reception at least partly through the lens of clerical doctrines. In this chapter, I will discuss how outlawry was conceived within the frame of reference of Christian texts, teachings and traditions. The point of departure is in the figurative interpretation of texts that enabled the interpretation of even traditional texts as metaphorical Christian expressions. Even the outlawry in the Family Sagas was interpretable in these terms. The saga writers who were closely connected to the Church and the cloisters had the premises to make such interpretations already on receiving traditional historical narratives and in reformulating them into written saga texts. I will provide examples of the connections between the narratives about outlawry and Christian teachings. These examples are meant to be representative of the type of connections that the sagas indicate as relevant. However, it is necessary to emphasize that the tradition-based texts, such as the Family Sagas, were primarily produced and received in relation with tradition-based frames of reference. The Christian frame of reference was only secondary but nevertheless sufficiently significant to necessitate separate discussion here.

Christian textual interpretation, divided into the literary and the figurative senses of text, not only concerned the rhetoric of the clergy, but also fundamentally affected the way that people in Iceland understood history, man, and the surrounding world. Concerning German medieval literature, Friedrich Ohly pointed out that “there are limits to the value of modern, secularising semantics for the interpretation of [German 770–1150 A.D.] literature because of its restriction to the literal meanings of words” (Ohly 2005, 26). This is equally true of the Family Sagas, even though as traditional oral-derived texts, their primary frame of reference was within the indigenous tradition.
According to the Christian interpretation, figural meaning covers the concrete event and is not relevant only for the rhetoric of the clergy. The potential for a figural meaning of things was also a fundamental way to understand history, the human race, and the surrounding world. Erich Auerbach (1973) emphasizes the great divide between the two narrative traditions in Western Europe, the classical and the biblical. Auerbach argues that whereas the Roman and Greek classical literature was rather two-dimensional, the Christian sense of reality expressed a struggle between the sensed phenomena and the metaphorical meaning. Figural interpretation means that a text is perceived to have not only a literal meaning but also a possible figural meaning. Consequently, the verbal expression of an event or of a person is not only a signifier of the event or person in question, but instead, it is also a symbolic or metaphoric allusion to other things. These things were generally involved with biblical teachings. (Auerbach 1973, 48–49, 156–162.) Furthermore, Auerbach argues that not only texts but even reality itself was interpreted in the Christian tradition in a figural way:

An occurrence on earth signifies not only itself but at the same time another, which it predicts or confirms, without prejudice to the power of its concrete reality here and now. The connection between occurrences is not regarded as primarily a chronological or causal development but as a oneness within the divine plan, of which all occurrences are parts and reflections. (Auerbach 1973, 555.)

The Family Sagas were written in the manner of a straight-forward epic with the focus of narration on specific events. However, the Christian tradition prevailed in the time of their writing and this affected the writings and interpretations. Lars Lönnroth, in his attempt to trace the influence of European literary culture on the saga narratives, states that the impact that the clerics had on the contents of saga narratives was extremely limited (Lönnroth 1964, 4–5) even though they put the sagas into writing. It seems that the clerics took advantage of the opportunity to add some Christian remarks to the texts but the rarity of such remarks stands testimony to the restrictiveness of the saga form. Often these remarks are made as if in passing and play a secondary role. Sometimes they are commentaries from outside the narrative: commentaries on certain characters’ behavior or nature. Most often the Christian tendencies are hidden within the text. For example, a tendency to offer lofty descriptions of noble Christian warriors and kings, or to attribute Leifr heppinn’s “lucky” name not only to his having rescued men from a shipwreck (a feat considered to bring luck to the rescuer) but also to his work in introducing Christianity to Greenland (Eiriks saga rauða, Ch. 5).
These often seem like conscious additions to the primary text. In addition, the heathen rites and their settings are often described in a disapproving way, as violent and bloody (e.g. Eyrbyggja saga, Ch. 4), superstitious (e.g. Hrafinkels saga, Ch. 3) or simply (and also most often) in a confusing way (e.g. Harðar saga, Ch. 19). However, there are practices and beliefs of heathen type described in the Family Sagas that do not seem to count as disapproved. For instance, foreseeing the future in the Family Sagas rather functions as a plot developer than as a condemned heathen practice or reminiscence (Ahola 2009a).

Medieval Icelanders became familiar with Christian text interpretation through sermons and preaching. The function of the sermons was predominately to translate the Christian culture into lay categories of thought and linguistic forms. The sermons were among the “earliest monuments of vernacular literary production” (Hall 2000, 663–664) in Scandinavia, and the oldest extant sermon manuscript (AM 237a folio) dates back to around 1150. Exegesis played a significant role in medieval Danish sermons (Riising 1969) and this was the case in Iceland as well. The exempla, which were moral anecdotes of secular origin, were included in sermons and preaching in Europe from the thirteenth century on, spread by didactic and rhetorical literature consisting of treatises known as artes praedicandi (Muessig 2002, 45). They were also most probably familiar to Icelandic clerics. For example, a translation of Gregory-the-Great’s Dialogues has been preserved as a copy from as early as the thirteenth century (Óskarsdóttir 2005, 341). Gregory’s Dialogues consists of a series of narratives on the success of exemplary monks’ endeavours to resist worldly temptations.

The saga writers had a predominantly Christian standpoint, also concerning the historical narratives that they worked with. The saga writers were often, if not most often, church officials. The technology and ability to write was found within clerical surroundings: even if the writer was a layman, he most probably was taught and guided in a monastic surrounding. In other words, the literate people were familiar with the biblical and clerical use of words through reading the Bible, receiving teaching in theology and attending to and preaching sermons. Christianity in general played a significant role in people’s lives in the Middle Ages, and the world was experienced through the medium of religion (Gurevich 1985, 4). Therefore, this mode is fundamentally important for understanding a medieval text (see Rowe 2005, 58–59). The contemporary audience could occasionally recognize clerical expression and comprehension in a saga narrative, and such recognition invited the text’s interpretation in the corresponding mode.
It can be presumed that the historical narrative tradition and its generic features resisted Christian interpretation and recomposition in the act of writing because this tradition originated in a different sphere of discourse. However, in spite of being rooted in the heathen period, the Family Sagas were produced in a Christian culture (Hallberg 1962, 12–34). The Family Sagas represent balancing between the vernacular and Christian worldviews and modes of expression. Eugéne Vinaver (1971, 17–18) emphasized the common intellectual origin of the European romance and of the exegetic tradition. According to Vinaver, both reflect the teaching that was provided by the great cathedral schools of France in the twelfth century:

It certainly instilled in the pupil’s mind the habit of bringing out the significance of whatever he found not fully explained in his *auctores* – a habit of mind which in a writer could easily become a habit of conception. And so it came about that when a ‘literate’ writer set himself the task of making a traditional or a classical story into a romance, nothing seemed more important to him than the process of elucidating his material. (Vinaver 1971, 20–21.)

Figural interpretation may have had even a profound impact on saga narratives. Torfi Tulinius, discussing the fictional dimension of the Legendary Sagas, suggested that the principle of figural interpretation functioned as a model for saga composition (Tulinius 2002, 90). This idea is interesting because figural interpretation has undoubtedly had an impact on the final literary form of the saga literature. This is because exegesis had a strong position in the adoption of writing and literary culture in general. It can be presumed that the people who had received clerical education held the conviction not to reject this mode of interpretation in spite of its possible irrelevance within the historical tradition itself, and even more likely, they were not capable of fully rejecting it in any case.

12.1 Sermons as Popular Text Criticism

Medieval Icelanders were familiar with Christian textual interpretation because they had been constantly exposed to it since the turn of the millennium. Sermons that they heard in Church masses were based on exegesis (Hall 2000, 668; De Lubac 2000, 27–29). Theology and exegesis were virtually interchangeable until the thirteenth century (Riising 1969, 107; Smalley 1952, 368). The early age of the earliest preserved sermon
manuscripts indicates the important role the Church had in promoting vernacular literature (Hall 2000, 663–664). The approximately 150 extant sermons in 29 manuscripts from medieval Iceland have been dated to the late twelfth through the thirteenth century. This period coincides with the “classical” period of the Icelandic saga literature.

Institutionally, the affiliations of Icelandic exegesis were almost wholly with Benedictine and Augustinian foundations since these orders dominated in the Norwegian and Icelandic churches until well into the thirteenth century (see Nyberg 2004). The preserved sermons translate, or interpret, texts such as Gregory’s Dialogues, saints’ vitae, and even Old Norse sagas (Hall 2000, 668). Sermons were preached regularly and often, which becomes evident from the discontent of bishop Páll Jónsson of Skálholt (1195–1211). The bishop complained about the excessive preaching in Iceland where lower frequency would result in a stronger impact (Paasche 1935, 11; Hall 2000, 689). Preachers were also encouraged to use popular stories in popular sermons. They would often carry more weight with the congregation than any polished, subtle phrasing (Smalley 1952, 253–254). The vernacular tradition, such as proverbs, could be used for purposes of Christian teaching as exemplum vulgare, examples in popular tradition. Beryl Smalley (1952, 256) provides an example of such use. According to Smalley, the proverb “Swimming is easy when someone holds your chin up” could be interpreted as referring to the chin-holder as the devil and meaning that a pious life was not supposed to be easy. Smalley also notes that popular writings were accepted to serve the same purpose: “Some of the exempla told by Langton and the Chanter found their way into thirteenth-century sermons and into the ‘example books’ compiled as aids to preachers” (Smalley 1952, 257). In other words, the Church did not recommend its officials to avoid vernacular narrative tradition but rather, recommended this tradition to be used in the Christian guidance of the lay population.

12.2 Exegesis and Allegorical Thinking

Originally, the inconsistency between the Old and the New Testament led to the development of exegesis in theology. The text of the Old Testament was seen to represent two senses: the literal or historical sense and the figurative sense. The figurative sense manifested in the accounts in the Old Testament that were explained to prefigure the events that are described in the New Testament. This allegorical relationship between the Old and the New Testament is called allegory or typology. For instance, the story of Jonah in the Old Testament, which was famous in the Middle

275
Ages, was interpreted as a typology of the death and resurrection of Christ (De Lubac 2000, 90–92). Furthermore, there are four types of typology in the Old Testament according to Origen, a third century theologian: the prophecies of the coming of Christ, the prophecies of the Church and her sacraments (e.g. the Red Sea signifying baptism), the prophecies of the Last Things and of the Kingdom of Heaven, and the figures of the relationship between God and the individual soul, exemplified in the history of the chosen people (Smalley 1952, 7).

St Augustine’s writings were very popular in the Middle Ages. Of St Augustine’s texts, especially On Christian Doctrine deals with exegesis. According to St Augustine, the Scriptures have a literal meaning and additionally a symbolic meaning. This symbolic meaning could be divided into three types: allegorical, tropological and anagogical (Ohly 2005, 25). Thus, the same text could have several different simultaneous interpretations and meanings. Allegory was briefly introduced above. The term tropology stands for the morally edifying sense of words or tropes, or how the Scripture teaches an individual to behave correctly (according to the Christian moral), and anagogy for the figurative description of the Kingdom come. Hence, for instance, the earthly Jerusalem could be seen as an anagogy of the heavenly Jerusalem (De Lubac 2000, 180).

Any given text or event could be interpreted exegetically (De Lubac 2000, 86–89). As Ohly (2005, 25) has observed, typological thinking affected the perception and interpretation of history in the Middle Ages. This could not but also affect the saga writers. According to Torfi Tulinius, these writers compiled the historical narrative traditions into coherent narratives according to the typological principles they had learned, and their “[…] typological refashioning of the story-material could have been deliberate or unconscious” (Tulinius 2002, 91). The spiritual interpretation of a text, a historical tradition, and its impact on the written reforging of this tradition, making it into a written saga, naturally varied from case to case. Some traditions could for instance be more inspiring or more open to figurative interpretation than others and, after all, the Christian frame of reference was only one among the frames within which a text was conceived.

Allegories were created according to many obscure rules because the result was more important than the means. The authority of the Bible and Church doctrine were not to be compromised. The Bible was conceived as the word of God and could thus not be wrong. Anything “superstitious

---

271 Auerbach describes the development of the concept figura from secular (formation, form: Auerbach 1984, 45) into clerical significance (prophecy) and the interplay between these fields of signification. Lat. figura = Greek allegoria. In this context, the term allegoria stands for a deeper, submerged meaning of any kind.
and fabulous” in the Bible, which could not be easily explained using common sense, was to be interpreted as purely allegorical. The line between the real and the imaginary seems to have been obscured. For instance, the medieval writer Philo Judaeus admits that anything in the Scriptures may signify anything provided that this signifying obeys the rules of an intricate pseudo-science, the allegorical interpretation. The ‘rules’ for allegory derived mainly from number-symbolism and etymology. (Smalley 1952, 5.)

The medieval scholar received method and material from St Jerome (literal and spiritual exegesis) whereas St Augustine supplied the purpose for his work, which was to support Church doctrine (Smalley 1952, 23). For example, St Augustine pointed out that “[…] if agents are praised but their actions do not agree with the practices of the good men […] one should take up the figurative meaning into the understanding” (Augustine 2008, 84: *On Christian Teaching* III, Ch. 22). St Gregory mainly followed St Augustine concerning the principles of exegesis (De Lubac 2000, 114–115) and hence, these principles can be considered the principle of allegorical interpretation within Icelandic clerical surroundings. Anne Riising has expressed the dependence of the exegetic interpretation upon Church doctrine as it appeared in Denmark as follows:

The concretizing retelling of the stories in the Bible has greatly helped to make the presentation lively and present to the audience. However, at the same time it also shows that textual interpretation was not based solely on the Scripture but depended strongly on the ecclesiastical tradition. (Riising 1969, 106.)

Church doctrine was not used as guidance only for the interpretation of the Bible but also for the interpretation of vernacular texts for the Church’s ends. There is an illustrative extract in St Augustine’s *On Christian Teaching*:

All the branches of pagan learning contain not only false and superstitious fantasies and burdensome studies that involve unnecessary effort, which each one of us must loathe and avoid as under Christ’s guidance we abandon the company of pagans, but also studies for liberated minds which are more appropriate to the service of the truth, and some very useful

---

272 “Den konkretiserende genfortælling af bibelhistorien har i høj grad bidraget til at gøre fremstillingen levende og nærværende for tilhørerne. Men samtidig viser den også, at selv den bogstavelige tolkning langt fra byggede på skriften alene, men var stærkt afhængig af den kirkelige tradition.”
moral instruction, as well as the various truths about monotheism to be found in their writers […] must be removed by Christians […] and applied to their true function, that of preaching the gospel. (Augustine 2008, 65: *On Christian Teaching* II, Ch. 40.)

Eventually, the allegorical method was applied in Europe to texts such as those of Homer, Virgil, Ovid, and even to texts in vernacular languages. In other words, the meaning of these texts was seen to potentially hold a Christian spiritual sense. It is quite probable that this was the case in Iceland as well. Even if the heathen ancestors were not the most obvious embassadors of Christianity, narratives about them were circulated in the oral tradition. When these narratives were put into writing, it would be unlikely that the clerical training possessed in the individual possessing the ability to write did not affect the eventual outcome.

12.3 Outlawry in the Christian Frame of Reference

The sympathy that an outlaw received could be expressed by images and motifs that were religiously motivated. Outlawry could be interpreted in the Family Sagas through allegory and tropology. Allegorical interpretations could be made either directly in relation to the New Testament, or through recognizable parallels in the Old Testament. In the following, I will provide a few examples of possible allegorical readings that signified narratives about outlawry in the Family Sagas.

In principle, the Church was heavily opposed to outlawry. Full outlawry in medieval Iceland barred an individual from the society, and also excluded him from the congregation and the realm of the Church. Even in death, outlaws were outcasts: they could not be buried in a churchyard. This put them on par with the unbaptized, those who committed suicide, and generally with the people whom the bishop saw fit to put under a ban (*Grágás*, 9–10). In addition, the terminology for outlawry already referred allusively to sin. The most common term for outlawry, *sekt* and its derivatives, is used in the meaning of “sin” in Christian texts, as Konrad Maurer (1910, 155) noted. In law and the mechanisms of feuding, outlawry was primarily a collectively binding approval of revenge, but the threat of excommunication added to its deterrent effect as a form of punishment. Outlawry was a threat to one’s life. Moreover, through excommunication, it was also a threat to a person’s eternal soul.
The outlawry of the heroes of the Outlaw Sagas seems to be comprehended in a Christian sense. The outlawry of otherwise outstanding men could be explained in the Family Sagas through a twist of fate that manifested itself for instance in a futile belief in superstitious omens. An example of this is Gunnarr af Hlíðarendi who refused to evade an outlawry sentence after his horse tripped on the way to a departing ship (Njáls saga, Ch. 75). Alternatively, the twisted fate could be attributed to the workings of the Devil and his associates. For example, the involvement of evil spirits is given as a reason why Grettir Ásmundarson is outlawed in spite of his guiltlessness. Also Hörðr Grímkelsson’s fate seems to have had an evident Christian tone. According to Harðar saga, Hörðr’s mother had a prophetic dream before the birth of her daughter Þorbjörg. In this dream, there was a tree that was full of blooming flowers. Quite contrary to this, before Hörðr’s birth, she had seen a tree with only few flowers in a dream (Harðar saga, Ch. 6–7). The version of the saga in Eggertsbók interprets the many flowers in the limbs of Þorbjörg’s tree as an omen of the adoption of “a better belief” (i.e. Christianity) by her descendants. In this case, the few flowers in Hörðr’s tree would suggest a rather un-Christian fate, although in the saga, the lack of flowers is interpreted as a symbol of the lack of affection from his relatives.

The prophecy concerning Þórdís in this passage associates her with sainthood. The motif of such an ominous dream is rare in the Family Sagas but quite common in the Bishops’ Sagas. In the saints’ lives, the motif is connected to holy men. The purpose of the motif was to emphasize a saint’s sanctity, to show how he or she had been chosen by God at birth or during early childhood, or even before birth. (McCreesh 2005, 252.) The contrasting prophecy made of Hörðr emphasizes the awaiting misery of his fate and simultaneously enhances the contrast between outlawry and sainthood. However, this interpretation of the saga is replaced in the version in AM 564 4to by the interpretation of the flowers as representing the number of descendants, in which case the lack of flowers in Hörðr’s tree would prefigure the scarcity of his offspring. A

273 Compare St Augustine’s literal warning against such superstitions (Augustine 2008, 48: On Christian Teaching II, Ch. 31). Fate was associated with grace, but superstitions were something else; fate was a concept acknowledged by the Church but its traditional manifestations were labelled as superstitions.

274 Glámr, who foretold outlawry to Grettir (Grettis saga, Ch. 35), and the boy in the Norwegian church who spoiled Grettir’s ordeal (Ch. 39), are both designated in the saga by the term öðreinn andi, “unclean spirit.” The term öðreinn andi may also refer to a dead person that has been sent after someone for ill purposes (Hastrup 1990, 259), which meaning is also implied in Ch. 39: “öðreinn andi sendr til óheilla Grettí”. Furthermore, Glámr bore an appearance of atavistic heathendom while he was still alive.
lack of descendants is a common element associated with the saga outlaws as discussed in chapter 10.3.

The evil forces seem to be especially strongly associated with one Icelander who was sentenced to outlawry in Norway, namely Hrappr Örgumleiðason. His career, as accounted in Njáls saga (Ch. 87–88), involves a series of offenses against the prevailing Christian norms. Indeed, this career practically reflects the cardinal sins.

These cardinal sins are listed in the Bible (Proverbs 6: 16–19) and especially in the accounts by John Cassian (Collatio V, 1; V, 16) and Pope Gregory I (Job 31, 45), which both were circulated in medieval Europe up to the early thirteenth century (Vincent-Cassy 2000, 1511–1512). Alcuin’s De virtutibus et vitiiis (“On Virtues and Vices”) was translated into Old Norse sometime before 1200, and this work has been preserved in Iceland in three fragments from the fifteenth century (Óskarsdóttir 2005, 347–349). De virtutibus et vitiiis is a moral treatise that was written for a Breton nobleman in the ninth century. It contains (Ch. 26–34) a catalogue of eight principal vices that was based on the works of Gregory I and Cassian. These vices are: pride, gluttony, lust, avarice, anger, sloth, sorrow, and vainglory (Wallach 1955, 188).

Let us return to Hrappr. Njáls saga recounts that right before Hrappr is slain in a battle, his hand is cut off and he utters a peculiar expression of relief: “Here you have accomplished a great work of necessity because this hand has caused harm and death to many men” (Njáls saga, Ch. 92). Hrappr’s statement expresses remorse and relief as if the hand that was cut off had been beyond his control and his deeds usurped by an external agent. Such an evil agent would, in a medieval Christian context, be labeled as the Devil. In another story, Hænsna-Þórir was said to have been killed after illegally urging his companions to burn Blund-Ketill Geirsson in his house (Hænsna-Þóris saga, Ch. 15). Hænsna-Þórir’s deeds that were connected to these events represent one cardinal sin after another (greed; wrath; envy; gluttony and pride). In summary, both Hrappr and Hænsna-Þórir were condemnable in the light of Christian morality. Because of this, it was possible to consider their outlawry and death in the narratives as justifiable consequences of their former deeds.

---

275 “Hér hefir þu mikít nauðsynjaverk unnið því at þessi hønd hefir mør gum manni mein gert og bana.”

276 Þórir was killed when he attempted to prevent the court session, in which he would have been outlawed, from taking place. He did this by attacking Hersteinn who ran the case against him. In contrast, according to Íslendingabók (Ch. 5), Þórir had been outlawed before he was slain. Both of these sources imply that Þórir was strongly associated with outlawry as a consequence of his notorious deed.
In Gísla saga, there is a motif that is interpretable in terms of an allegory of the battle of God and Devil over mens’ souls, manifested in the Bible especially in the story about Jesus being tested in the wilderness (Matthew 4: 1–11). Ralph Allen (1936) and later George Dasent (2008) claimed that the two female figures, one good and the other evil, who appear to the outlawed Gíslason his dreams in Gísla saga (Ch. 22, 24), allegorically represent the pagan and Christian religions that fight over Gíslason’s soul. However, this is only one interpretation. Taylor Culbert (1959, 160–161) makes a psychological interpretation, suggesting a dichotomy between representative images of misery and normal life. Both interpretations are possible, and in the minds of typologically tuned saga writers and the corresponding share of their audience, these two things were hardly separable. Karen Bek-Pedersen points out that the dream ladies are represented in a basically similar manner to the traditional female sprites called disir (sg. dis) that are represented in Þjóðanda þáttr ok Þórhalls, where they are represented as symbolic images of the old and the new faith. However, Bek-Pedersen interprets the dark and light dream ladies as reflecting the positive and negative potential held by the disir and the norns and as divided personifications of this dual potential. (Bek-Pedersen 2011, 46–48.)

As a traditional concept gæfa, “luck”, which described a personal quality involved in one’s inevitable fate, had its parallel in the Christian concept of grace. Lars Lönnroth noted that, “In the oldest legendary sagas, gæfa seems to be almost identical with ‘Divine Grace’, and this meaning is probably more original” (Lönnroth 1965, 22). Hence, the type or amount of gæfa that was attributed to individual outlaw characters (see chapter 6) alluded not only to the type of fate attested to the outlaw character but also to the value he had in the eyes of God.

One sign of a person’s sainthood was the incorruptibility of his body after death. The Saints’ Lives include descriptions of the saints’ bodies after death and this is also a motif in many saga biographies. For example, the exhumed bones of Egill Skalla-Grimsson (Egils saga, Ch. 89) and Grettir Ásmundarson (Grettis saga, Ch. 84) were described as being exceptionally large, hence serving as evidence for the authenticity of the saga accounts concerning the extraordinary physical feats these characters were recounted to have performed. Furthermore, the bones of Gíslason’s sister, Þórdís, are described as “black, as though burned” in Eyrbyggja saga (Ch. 65), which stood in stark contrast to the shining bodies of the saints that are described in the hagiographies (see Wilson 1983, 10). It is impossible to say what was conceived as the reason for the appearance of her bones. The appearance could be explained as a symbolic image of being burning in hell or suffering in purgatory or it
could be explainable by some kind of a vernacular tradition. However, if sainthood and its markers reflected the ultimate grace of the God, the burned bones seem to have indicated something quite the opposite. Þórdís is depicted in *Eyrbyggja saga* primarily as the mother of the great chieftain, Snorri *godi*, who is the main character in the saga. There is no judgment included in the accounts that describe her involvement in the killing of Gísli Súrsson in *Eyrbyggja saga* whereas such judgment could be conveniently reinforced by the evidence of afterlife punishment. The burned bones imply, however, that Þórdís’s role as the *primus motor* behind the killing of her brother, the famous outlaw hero, was acknowledged as being tragic by the writer of *Eyrbyggja saga*. This would be in accordance with the narrative in *Gísla saga*.

These examples illustrate that the Christian frame of reference was available for the audience to interpret instances in the narratives about outlawry whether or not the saga writers intentionally referred to that frame. In the following, I will separate some thematic aspects in the narrative tradition concerning outlawry in the Saga World and discuss them in terms of the Christian frame of reference.

12.3.1 Christian Values and the Wilderness

The Family Sagas suggest that the uninhabited interior of Iceland was associated with un-Christian forces. For example, *Þorvalds þáttur víðförla* tells how bishop Friðrekr used prayers and holy water to banish a heathen spirit from its dwelling inside a rock. The spirit complained to Þorvaldr’s father, who had worshipped it, saying that the bishop had sent it “far away into the wilderness and out-lying places” (*auðn og útlegð*). This establishes the wilderness as the refuge of heathen creatures and forces as opposed to the Christian society. The same dichotomy, although less precisely articulated, is sensed in *Bergbúa þátr*. In this short story, two men seek shelter from a storm and retreat into a cave. They hear a frightening voice inside the cave. This voice belongs to a creature that dwells there. In a lengthy poem from the darkness, the creature laments his fate of being forgotten by people after the coming of Christianity. Quite clearly, this creature of the wilderness is opposed to the Church in the narrative.

Another example is in *Þorvalds þáttur víðförla*. The farm called Haukagil was located in a remote valley near the Arnarvatnsheiði heath, an area associated with otherworldly creatures and outlaws (Ahola 2011). According to the saga, Haukagil received its name after an incident at a wedding where two berserks, both named Haukr, launched an attack on
the people who were gathered to celebrate. Bishop Friðrekr killed the berserks with sacred fire. The dead berserks were buried in a glen (gil) and the place was called Haukagil (“The Glen of the Haukrs”) thereafter. (Porvalds þátr viðförla, Ch. 4.) The berserks were said to be heathen men – but the location of the farm on the border of the heath associates them in addition with the non-Christian creatures of the interior, or trolls (see chapter 14.3). The writer carefully identifies his sources for this passage. This is probably because one requirement for sainthood was that there were witnesses to the miracles that were associated with the saint-to-be. In this case, the convention of identifying witnesses entered the narrative about the deeds of a clerical authority.

Still another example of an evil heathen outlaw is Önundr in Hallfreðar saga (Ch. 7). Önundr is an outlaw character that functions as a secondary character in the saga. He is the mythically charged solitary dweller of a Swedish forest that attacks the saga’s main character, Hallfreðr, who is traveling in Sweden. Hallfreðr is able to repel him only by appealing to hvíta-krist (“The White Christ”). The saga as a whole focuses predominantly upon Hallfreðr’s conversion to Christianity and his relation to King Óláfr Tryggvason, which may explain why Hallfreðr so readily appeals to Christ. This appeal indirectly attributes Hallfreðr’s opponent Önundr with non-Christian essence. In the narrative surrounding, this essence is negative and serves to elevate Hallfreðr as a hero.

However, the heathenism of an outlaw could be tolerated if he had earned collective respect for deeds that the Christians could approve and especially if he was associable with a reference group that was respected by Christian Icelanders. For example, the first settler of Greenland, Eiríkr rauði, was outlawed in Iceland and he then immigrated to Greenland. It is told that he died as a heathen, “before Christianity reached Greenland” (Greinlendinga saga, Ch. 4), whereas his son Leifr is described as a pious Christian. Eiríkr’s heathenism is described as being due to the circumstances and his son’s piety seems to have compensated for it. Indeed, Eiríkr was acknowledged as being the founder of the Greenlandic settlement that became renowned as a highly pious society during the following centuries.

Associating outlawry with forces that threatened the Church and the Christians was based on spatial conceptions connected to outlawry (see chapter 11.2) and on the semantic link between sin and breaking the law.

277 Comparable with narratives about threatening bandits that lived in Scandinavian forests (e.g. in the introductory section of Vatnsdeela saga) who occasionally are similarly unreliable (e.g. Ans saga bogsveigis, Ch. 5) as the unreliable outlaw helpers in Iceland.
Furthermore, the associations of outlaws with the otherworld connects them to forces of the darkness in narrative roles that correspond to the meanings attached to those forces, generally in the same cases in which the outlaws exhibit trollish qualities. These trollish qualities will be discussed more thoroughly in chapters 14.3 and 14.4. However, in addition to the negatively charged terminology, narrative images and motifs, outlawry was also interpretable as an attribute that valued the individual in a positive sense, as will be discussed in the following section.

### 12.4 Virtuous Outlaws

For the Christian Icelanders of the Middle Ages, showing proper respect towards their heathen ancestors could be difficult. This respect needed to be justified because, as Augustine taught, it behooved good Christians to “separate themselves in spirit from the wretched company of pagans” (Augustine 2008, 65). Lars Lönnroth points out in his important article The Noble Heathen (1969) that the saga characters, who lived in the pre-Christian period and were consequently heathens, could receive justifiable approval in the eyes of the medieval Christian Icelanders by being depicted as self-relying men who did not worship pagan gods but rather relied only on themselves. This is because turning one’s back on the heathen gods was possible to interpret as turning towards the Christian God.

As has been pointed out in chapter 8.2.2, a saga’s main character’s sentence to outlawry is typically explained in the Family Sagas as being questionable in some way. In those cases where there was a discrepancy between justice and the sentence, the eventual death of the outlaw could be interpreted as a kind of martyrdom, or as death in the name of the true faith.\(^\text{278}\) This requires that “holding to the true faith” is understood in the non-Christian context of the Saga World as “holding to values that are accepted by a higher authority.” A conflict between these values and a secular authority (the law) enabled a juxtaposition which was conceivable as being parallel to that involved in the Christian narratives about martyrdom.

The values of honor and loyalty towards one’s family constituted the core of the values in the Saga World. These values are fundamental throughout Icelandic saga literature and heroic narratives. The ability to

\(^{278}\) For more concerning the narratives of martyrdom in medieval Europe, see e.g. Hahn 2001, 59–65, 84–89; Heffernan 1992, 216–221.
hold to these values in one’s actions is treated in the Family Sagas as a virtue. The loss of one’s life for the sake of holding to these values was therefore parallel to martyrdom. For example, Gísli Súrsson’s actions in Gísla saga, which were largely based on these values, caused a conflict when they did not match the interests of his brother and sister. Gísli’s sister had him outlawed and his brother refused to extend any help to him. The saga emphasizes Gísli’s courage and nobility of mind throughout the course of his outlawry. Another outlaw who embodied warrior values was Grettir Ásmundarson. The stabilized society did not however tolerate these values and they eventually led to his outlawry.

The innocence of the outlaw hero is a central theme in the biographies of Gísli Súrsson and Grettir Ásmundarson. Because of this theme, their survival can be conceived as a fight against injustice and they die as martyrs for justice. Furthermore, both of these outlaws are eventually killed by men who are morally inferior to them. Gísli was killed by the followers of the cowardly Eysteinn, Grettir by Órbjörn öngull, who resorted to witchcraft. This fact emphasizes the martyr-like nature of the hero’s death. There are nonetheless no direct commentaries in the saga texts that would confirm this interpretation of outlawry in terms of martyrdom. Therefore, the argument supporting the view of outlaws as martyrs rests on the observation that in medieval Iceland, the elevation of a victim in a saga narrative had a close conceptual parallel in the fates of Jesus and of the martyrs. In addition, the narratives about martyrs occupied a significant role in the European literary culture at the time.

Direct moral evaluations in Christian terms are not involved in the saga accounts of outlawry even though outlaws were found to be guilty of violating the law. During the period that the sagas were written, outlaws were strongly associated with the sphere outside the realm of Christianity. This sphere bore associations with heathenism. However, the opposite was true in the pre-Christian Iceland. A person who did not follow the prevailing religious customs (pagan worship) was closer to the Christian God than his contemporaries who did. Through this reasoning, the outlaw was to be judged by his deeds, not by his condemnation, could readily be considered to be a “noble heathen.”

In the Family Sagas, refraining from heathen practices functions as an act that exposes one to suffering. This suffering, in its martyr-like dimensions, turned refraining from heathen practices into an act that gained acknowledgement as being almost Christian. For example, Gísli Súrsson converted to Christianity, and he ceased his heathen practices, just as the woman in his dream had persuaded him to do. Nevertheless, Gísli suffered from having regular nightmares until his painful death. Another example is Gestr in Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss, who converted to
Christianity. Gestr’s father Bárðr, who was a spirit-like creature of belief himself, considered this abandonment of the old faith as being so grave that he avenged it on Gestr with a painful death. As yet another example, Hrafnkell Freysgoði abandoned his previous object of worship, the god Freyr, when he was expelled to héraðsøkt (Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða, Ch. 5). This meant that he turned to a better life from a Christian angle, as Hermann Pálsson (1988) has suggested. Hrafnkell was stated to only have believed in himself after abandoning the heathen god. However, Hrafnkell did not suffer from this conversion but rather, his following vicissitudes are a series of victories. Víga-Glúms saga reflects the conception that the heathen gods were also intolerant towards outlaws. Chapter 19 of this saga tells us that Víga-Glúmr’s son, Vigfúss, who was sentenced to full outlawry, is not allowed to stay at Uppsalir because there is a temple for Freyr, and “Freyr did not accept outlaws.” Later in the same saga (Ch. 26), Víga-Glúmr dreams that Freyr has turned against him. Soon he is sentenced to district outlawry. As an old and powerless man, Glúmr eventually died as a Christian. *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* and *Víga-Glúms saga*, both of which have settings in eastern Iceland, clearly juxtapose outlawry and the god Freyr. However, whereas for Hrafnkell, the abandonment of the heathen god was followed by success in life, for Víga-Glúmr, the conversion to Christianity coincided with the anticlimax to his warrior career.

Búi Kjallaksson in *Kjalnesinga saga* was a Christian because of his Irish roots and consequently not a Norse pagan. This is the reason he was sentenced to outlawry, and thus, he became a martyr (although outlawry in his case did not lead to death). Later, Búi killed a rival of his who was worshipping the heathen god Þórr in a pagan temple, and after killing him, Búi burned down the whole temple. Búi appears repeatedly in the saga as a solitary man with only a sling as a weapon in defense against an overpowering enemy. His appearance is comparable to King David in his youth as he is depicted in the Bible. It is interesting, however, that Búi’s foster mother, Esja, is attributed to resorting to witchcraft and that Búi is saved by this witchcraft several times. Witchcraft was perhaps here accepted as an Irish ethnic feature or as a stereotyped narrative function of foster mothers.

Iceland had been converted to Christianity at the time of Grettir Ásmundarson, and even if *Grettis saga* basically remains silent on religious matters, priests were part of the Saga World in which Grettir lived. In an episode in *Grettis saga* (Ch. 64–66), as Grettir lowered himself into a trolls’ cave in order to find some people who had supposedly been abducted by the trolls, he asked a priest for help. While Grettir fought the trolls, the priest fled in a fright. However, Grettir found
the remains of the missing persons, a pile of bones, and managed to bring back the bones on his own. He left the bones at the church door for the priest to bury in the churchyard. He also carved a note on a wooden cylinder for the priest and threw it into the church, without entering the church himself.

During many of the episodes in *Grettis saga*, Grettir fights supernatural beings that were demonized in the Christian discourse. In the scene described above, Grettir co-operated with the priest. As a representative of the Church, the priest was supposed to be a “specialist” in matters of the supernatural, in the same sense as BishopFriðrekn in *Þorkels þaattr viðförla* as was previously discussed. The priest’s faith (in Grettir) failed and he fled, which placed him in a ridiculous light in the saga discourse, much like priests and other people of high social position were depicted in folk tales across Europe in later centuries. The saga specifically states that Grettir did not enter the church. This seems a deliberate statement that underscores Grettir’s separateness from the Church – with two alternative explanations. The first is that Grettir was thus depicted as being fundamentally exterior to the Church as a man for whom fighting trolls and other demonic beings was second nature. The second is that he was depicted as respecting the excommunication that followed his outlawry and that he therefore refrained from entering the church premises.

Grettir is repeatedly portrayed as a man of ill fortune in *Grettis saga* whereas his half-brother Þorsteinn drómundr and his wife Spes are labelled as the “most fortunate of people” after they give up their worldly lives and retreat to a monastery. In *Grettis saga*, luck is strongly associated with and even connected to Christian devotion. Þorsteinn drómundr is the focal character of the entire third part of this saga and consequently, part of his Christian virtuosity inevitably spills upon Grettir whose virtuosity is acknowledged but cannot be directly labelled in Christian terms.

Numerous passages in *Grettis saga* seem to have been open to allegorical interpretation. Grettir’s solitary wandering around Iceland and his long stays in the desert call for a comparison with the fate of the people of Israel who were doomed to wander in the desert for forty years. These stories were familiar to Icelanders from the translations of the historical texts of the Old Testament that are collectively called *Stjórn*. *Stjórn* consists of three individual texts written in the fourteenth century: The first (I) consists of Jewish history up to Exodus 18; the second (II) is a shortened translation of the rest of the Pentateuch; and the third (III) is the translation of Jewish history from Joshua to the Exile (Kirby 1980, 51–54).
An especially representative passage that invites allegorical reading is in Chapter 61 of *Grettis saga*. This sequence recounts how Grettir finds a fertile and hospitable valley for a refuge. This valley, named Þórísdalr, is described in the saga as follows: “He saw there beautiful hills that grew grass and brushwood. There were springs, and it seemed to him that the subterranean heat had the result that the glacier did not cover the valley.”279 This description of the fertile valley in the desert resembles the description in *Stjórn II* of the Promised Land when the Israelites arrive there: “So beautiful are your tent-booths, Jacob, and your tents, Israel. Like forested valleys and grassy meadows that are being watered by rivers. God placed these tent-booths like cedars with plenty of water.”280 Through this allegory, Þórísdalr appears to Grettir as a promised land and this simultaneously constructs an analogue between Grettir and the Israelites who are personified in their common ancestor and name-giver, Jacob. This association is further strengthened in the scene in *Grettis saga* in which Grettir wrestles with a troll by a river (Ch. 65) as this scene calls for comparison with Jacob’s wrestling with the Angel in the Bible (Genesis 32). The association of Grettir with the Israelites and the individual who personifies them, Jacob, connects Grettir’s fate as a homeless wanderer to the history of the Jews and finds there a strong resonance.

The Contemporary Saga *Hrafnís saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* resembles a Saint’s Life by its tendencies (Bragason 1988, 271–272) and interprets Hrafn’s actions according to Christian virtues, making him into a Christian ideal. In contrast, the compiler of *Sturlunga saga* stripped Hrafn’s story of all praise and spiritual material, leaving the conflict-centered core as it is, and thus turning Hrafn into a chieftain who was not endowed with sufficient qualities for the task (Bragason 1988, 288–289). This example demonstrates how far a saga compiler could influence his work, or what effect his chosen mode had on the content: the molding of a narrative according to a chosen genre or mode affected the very meaning of the story. Can we then presuppose that the chosen mode provided the primary frame of reference and that the other frames of reference remained more latent in the reception? The actual reception remains speculation. The saga audience may well have thought, for example, that *Hrafnís saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* was an effort to spiritualize and thus elevate an anti-hero, a poor chieftain, and that the account in *Sturlunga saga* was in fact more truthful. It is necessary to bear in mind

279 “[…] hann sá þá fagrar hlíðar grasi vaxnar ok smákJör; þar váru hverar, ok þótti honum sem jarðhitir myndi valda, er eigi luðuskuð saman jóklarnir yfir dalnum.”

280 “Suo fagrar tialldbudir þinar Jacob ok tiolld þin Israel. sem daler skogafuller [sem grasgardar vit ar uokuader. þær tialldbudir festi drottinn suo sem cedri vit morg votn sett.” (Unger 1862, 337; see the Bible, Numbers 24:5–6; Unger 1877, 81.).
that medieval Iceland was a multi-voiced, heterogeneous society with many histories and not one, hegemonic history. Therefore, both these narratives may well have been simultaneously considered to be equally truthful expressions of the same contents, although expressed in differing modes.

12.4.1 Hagiographies

The Christian literary tradition was an incentive to saga writing. Literacy arrived in Iceland through the Church after the conversion of Iceland to Christianity around the year 1000 AD. The early writings in Icelandic were created for the purposes of the Church – homilies were among the first. Sagas of the Norwegian kings, some of which could rely on first-hand information, as well as sagas of the saints were still to precede the Family Sagas. Christian biographies constituted a major share of the medieval literary scene. They consisted of the lives of saints (vitae) and martyr deaths (passiones). It is good to bear in mind that there are more than twice the number of extant manuscripts that contain accounts of saints’ lives than there are manuscripts containing Family Sagas and Contemporary Sagas put together (Cormack 2005, 29).

Biographies in the Family Sagas and the Saints’ Lives had strong formal parallelism that led to associability. According to Gabriel Turville-Petre (1975, 142–143; see also the discussion in Bekker-Nielsen & Carlé 1994), the Latin hagiographical literature taught the saga writers how to form their narrative. Jónas Kristjánsson notes that, “everything suggests that the native sagas had their roots in two kinds of narrative: oral reports of events in the comparatively recent past, and written accounts of saints and associated church literature” (Kristjánsson J. 1988, 149). Hagiographies served as a model for written accounts but nevertheless, the vernacular narrative tradition was sufficiently strong to be applied in the translations of hagiographies and other continental texts (Clover 1982a).

Saints’ lives were popular for their entertainment value. This entertaining element was preserved and developed to ensure that people felt an interest in the stories (Cormack 1994, 35–37). The historical part of the Old Testament was translated into Icelandic first in Stjórn I as discussed above. According to Kirby (1980, 130–131), this was a result of the preference for historical narratives over Christian polemics in Iceland as in medieval Europe, if judged by the popularity in their being translated and quoted in other works. Hagiographies were at the center of what Icelanders wanted to write and read (Foote 1994, 74). Narratives
were not the worst kind of entertainment in the eyes of the Church, either. Therefore, secular narratives were also accepted and even appreciated by the Church. (Cormack 1994, 37–40.)

Portraying the focal character of the narrative in a favorable light was of equal importance to the biographies of the heroes and of the saints. The didactic aim of hagiography, as implied in the texts, was to praise their object and through him or her, to praise God (Cormack 1994, 27). The conventional praise of saga heroes did not always aim at praising God but occasionally, the saga writers used the opportunity to do so. An example is found in the Flateyjarbók version of Fóstbræðra saga (Ch. 2) in a passage which praises the famous outlaw hero Þorgeirr Hávarsson’s bravery, stating that Þorgeirr’s heart was “hardened by the highest blacksmith,” presumably referring to the Christian God.

A narrow escape from someone pursuing the outlaw was not only a core motif of the outlaw narratives in the Family Sagas but also a current miraculous motif related to the holy men. For example, the second version of Þorláks saga (Þorláks biskups saga, hin yngri), the saga of Iceland’s first indigenous saint, includes a commentary stating that the earlier version did not sufficiently emphasize Þorlákr’s struggle against the enemies of the church. An addition to the saga, Oddaverja þáttir, deals primarily with the encounters between Þorlákr and chieftains and with his miraculous escapes from their hands. (Cormack 2005, 34–35.) The close escapes of the outlaws do not make them holy, but they evoke association with the saintly narratives even if the miraculous agent involved in their escapes is not God per se.

The accounts of outlaws’ narrow escapes in the Family Sagas are diverse and they occasionally contain markers that imply association with unseen and higher forces. For instance, the motif of an outlaw hiding right under the eyes of his pursuers is common (Jóhannesson 1950, lxxxix; Liestøl 1930, 78; Sigurðsson 2004, 226). The success in such risky escapes is often attributed to either the cleverness of the outlaw’s helper or to witchcraft. In another story, Króka-Refr repels the attempt to burn down his fortress by activating a water sprinkler system he has built in it (Króka-Refs saga, Ch. 10). The attackers, who have never seen anything like it, perceive it as a wonder and retreat. As Kendra Willson (2006) notes, “Króka-Refr’s saga suggests that technology and ingenuity are the source of solutions which enable the unfettered hero to elude his assailants, who naively interpret his technical prowess as magic.” The attackers accuse Refr of witchcraft (fjölkyngi), but this tendency to attribute incomprehensible matters to supernatural forces is rejected in the

281 “[...] hert af hinum hæsta hófuðsmiði ði ðllum hvatlík.”
saga by King Haraldur Sigurðsson as he assigns a natural explanation for the event even though he has never even seen the fortress. He is able to reveal the reality behind the conjuring and the ridiculous superstition because, as a representative of the higher forces (i.e., God), he possesses greater wisdom than others. It is thus indicated that God could see through deception. Króka-Refr’s cunning does not quite reach the levels of the divine, but it suffices to save him by its miracle-like manifestation.

The tragic biographies of outlaws had an especially strong connection to saints’ lives. These both focus on special individuals and their suffering and the suffering of the outlaws could in certain cases be interpreted in terms of martyrdom, as was discussed above. For instance, the eremit mystics who stayed in the desert with the sole company of the God are easily associated with the outlaws who were forced to shiver in the hostile wilderness. The problem in this parallel is that the outlaws were sentenced for a crime and did not retreat voluntarily into solitude. However, as long as their guilt was externalized to an honor code, fate or a curse, the individual remained pure and innocent. In other words, if the heroism of an outlaw was firmly grounded in the contemporary conceptions, or the goal of a saga writer, despite possible alternative opinions, a Christian writer would likely attempt to render this heroism comprehensible in Christian terms. This would probably require conceiving the subject innocent of the serious crime, sin, that necessarily lurks behind the sentence of outlawry.

The Family Sagas and the hagiographies are not far-fetched objects of comparison. Historical and hagiographical writings were not contradictory in medieval European literature (Cormack 1994, 32). The narrative strategies of representing secular and sacred heroes intermingled for instance in continental Europe and Britain. The specialty of saints and heroes was articulated in narration by similar means. Heroes like Galahad or Perceval were depicted as almost saintly figures. (Cormack 1994, 29; see also Finlay 1986.) The first Icelandic Saints’ Sagas were narratives that would be understood by their audience, who had no formal education and who would spread the narratives by word of mouth (Cormack 2005, 30). It was justifiable for a pious saga writer even to work on secular material that praised pagan characters if he could consider these characters as allegories for Christian heroes. These associations were strengthened by a familiarity with Christian biographies. Even though the saga biographies had their origins in traditional narration, the saints’ lives had an effect on how they were recorded in writing and how they were interpreted. For example, an undeserved (or unjust) sentence and a heroic, dignified death of the heroic outlaw were interpretable allegorically as
saintly martyrdom by a pious auditor of the text, even without explication in the text or its commentary.

Margaret Clunies Ross (1978), for instance, pointed out that the biography of Egill Skalla-Grimsson, as accounted in *Egils saga*, coincides with hagiographies with regards to the remarkable deeds in childhood, conversion, miracles, death, discovery of his body (*inventio*) and removal of his remains (*translatio*). (See also Tulinius 2002, 276–277.) These constituent elements of a biography are recognizable in the central outlaw biographies as well and especially in the Outlaw Sagas. This may not be a coincidence, since the hagiographies are closely connected to the patterns of heroic biographies in general. These patterns will be further discussed in chapter 14.2.

12.4.2 Saintly Kings

The relations between outlaws and the representatives of different social categories as well as certain individuals contribute to the outlaws’ portraits, as was discussed in chapter 9.1. This holds true at least to the same degree concerning the relations between outlaws and saintly figures such as certain kings of Norway. These kings are also discussed in chapter 15.1.

The Norwegian King Óláfr Tryggvason was not a saint, but he was the chief actor in Iceland’s conversion to Christianity. Indeed, this aspect is strongly present in the narratives pertaining to him in the medieval Icelandic texts (Andersson 2008). For example, his position as a champion of Christianity is figuratively given in *Norna-Gests þátrr*. The title character of that story is a representative of the heathen tradition. He has grown weak and merely waits to pass away, and Óláfr Tryggvason provides him with the opportunity to do this. The narrative is easy to interpret allegorically as Óláfr Tryggvason being a representative of the victorious, rising Christian religion. Another example of Óláfr Tryggvason being depicted as an adversary of heathenism is in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (Ch. 64). In this passage, an old guest entertains the king by narrating a legend about King Ógvaldr. The guest wants to provide the king’s cook with some meat but King Óláfr prevents anyone from eating the offered meat. The old man turns out to be Óðinn himself, and the whole scene he had arranged is condemned as a piece of devilish heathendom (see Holtsmark 1965, 11). In both these narratives, King Óláfr Tryggvason appears as a ruler who not only remains outside the sphere of heathen creatures and beliefs, but even takes a position above it. The righteousness that stems from the combination of stable belief and
authority radiates from the whole demeanor of this Christian king as he is represented in the Icelandic saga literature.

However, King Óláfr Haraldsson is the only actual saint that outlaws in the Family Sagas meet. When evaluating the entire period of the Scandinavian Middle Ages, St Óláfr emerges as by far the most popular saint, as Thelma Jexlev (1988, 188) has pointed out. Óláfr Haraldsson spent his youth raiding as a viking, but before he took the throne at the age of twenty-one, he was baptised in England. As king, he began the conversion of Norway to Christianity. His predecessor King Óláfr Tryggvason had already inducted Christianity as the “official” state religion in Norway, but in practice, Christianity had not taken root. Óláfr Haraldsson succeeded where Óláfr Tryggvason had failed. (Bagge 1992a; Iversen 2000, 402–403.) Óláfr Haraldsson’s stern methods of ruling led to his expulsion in 1028, whence he fled to Novgorod. He attempted to return to Norway in 1030 but had to face the opposition of the ruling nobility, and he eventually died in the battle of Stiklastaðir the same year. The new ruler, Danish King Knut, did not elevate the nobility who had killed Óláfr to its former power. As a consequence, the nobility elevated the memory of the expelled Norwegian king and brought Óláfr’s son, Magnús, from Russia to rule over them. As a tribute to his accomplishments, Óláfr Haraldsson was canonized very soon after his death, already in 1031.

Different texts describe Óláfr Haraldsson in different ways. On the one hand, the liturgical texts in prayers, lessons, and chants, with many biblical allusions, place St Óláfr among the Old Testament leaders of people, such as Moses or Jacob, and also allude to texts used for the dedication of a new holy place. Likewise, many of the common liturgical texts present King Óláfr as one of the martyr kings, as a brave champion of Christ. On the other hand, the songs of the skalds and the Kings’ Sagas place him among the old viking heroes. These different texts seem to express different ideals in presenting the hero. The respectful attitude towards King Óláfr Haraldsson evident in the Family Sagas is well expressed in Bjarnar saga Hítdælakappa (Ch. 9), according to which Björn respected King Óláfr to the degree that he would never remove the leg thongs given to him by the king. He even wore them to his grave, and the saga tells that when Björn’s grave was later opened, these thongs were found undecayed. In other words, Saint Óláfr’s holiness radiated upon Iceland in the form of Björn’s thongs. According to the saga, these thongs became a religious relic that was used as a ritual artifact, worn at mass (messufatalindi).

When the saintly king can see potential in an outlaw in a Family Saga, the valor of the outlaw is proven, but simultaneously, it is evidence of the
king’s sharp-sightedness. This is because without exception, these outlaws turn out to be worthy of the king’s confidence. Even without being a saint, a king was conceivable as an earthly analogue to God in heaven, which gave the king associative qualities such as omniscience. In other words, a king personified divine powers. The statement in the opening chapter of Fóstbreðra saga (Ch. 1), “those were most approved by God who stood highest in the king’s regard,” reflects the conception of God’s grace being bestowed on kingship (even with the apparent irony included in the statement). Another example is in Hrafn’s þattr Guðrúnarsonar (Ch. 3), according to which King Magnús Óláfsson was willing to have Hrafn Guðrúnarson slain for killing one of the king’s men. However, he refrained from this after being advised in a dream by his father, the already canonized Óláfr Haraldsson. This judgment proved right, as Hrafn gained great respect at the king’s court afterwards. The idea of King Magnús’ great respect towards his father is also explicitly expressed in Þorgríms þatt Hallasonar.

However, not all outlaw heroes were on indisputably good terms with King Óláfr Haraldsson. For instance, Grettir Ásmundarson had an ambiguous familial relationship with King Óláfr. King Óláfr was a relative of Grettir’s through his paternal lineage from four generations earlier (Thorsson Ö. 1996, 312). Recently, Gísli Sigurðsson has even stated that, ”It is not out of question to read the family histories [of Grettir and Óláfr Haraldsson] together. The former deals with the fate of those who emigrated to Iceland whereas the latter the fate of those who stayed in Norway.” (Sigurðsson G. 2013, 231–232.) Through this analogy, the biographies of Grettir and King Óláfr would be interpretable in relation to a shared family fate (see chapter 10.1).

 However, the former relations between the family of Grettir and King Óláfr Haraldsson was not unambiguous. According to Grettis saga (Ch. 39), Grettir appeals to his kinship to the King when he wants to join King Óláfr Haraldsson’s forces, in spite of a killing he has accidentally committed. However, through his maternal lineage, Grettir’s family was associated with King Óláfr’s enemies. According to Óláfs saga helga in Heimskringla (Jónsson F. 1911, 371–372), Grettir’s maternal uncle Jökull was a captain of Jarl Haakon, the rival of King Óláfr. King Óláfr had Jökull executed as an enemy of the crown. According to the story, Jökull recited fearless, strong poetry at his moment of death. Grettis saga (Ch. 17) tells that Grettir’s first sword was a family heirloom from his maternal side, called Jökulsnaút (“Jökull’s Gift”) and even though the name of the sword refers to Grettir’s forefather told about in Vatnsdæla

---

282 “[…] ok váru þeir allir mest virðir af guði, er konungi líkaði bezt við.”
saga, his uncle bore the same name, and the sword was a concrete link between them. Grettir’s uncle Jökull also appears in Grettis saga to warn Grettir from fighting the ghost Glámr, who turned out to become the cause of Grettir’s tragedy (Grettis saga, Ch. 34). This attempt to help further strengthens the bond between Grettir and his uncle Jökull and lays a foundation for enmity between Grettir and King Óláfr.

The outlawed Þorgeirr Hávarsson was more successful in his meeting with King Óláfr, and the king expressed his respect towards the uncompromising warrior, even though he could see that Þorgeirr was “burdened with ill fortune” (eigi gaefumaðr: Fóstbraðra saga, Ch. 8). After Þorgeirr had later been killed, the king acknowledged Þormóðr Bersason as his friend and gave Þormóðr permission to travel to Greenland in order to avenge Þorgeirr’s death (Fóstbraðra saga, Ch. 18, 20).

As for his efforts in Greenland, Þormóðr receives mysterious help from the king several times. For example, during a fierce fight with one of his victims:

Þormóðr feels that he is being overcome by Falgeirr. He felt like being in a hard plight, weaponless and wounded, and then his thoughts turned to where King Óláfr was, and he appealed to his fortune, that there would be enough for him. Then the axe fell off Falgeirr’s hand down into the sea [...] (Fóstbraðra saga, Ch. 23.)

In Chapter 24 of this saga, Þormóðr hides from pursuit on a skerry under algae. Þormóðr’s pursuers, aware of his presence on the skerry but unable to find him, hurl insults at Þormóðr in order to provoke him to reveal himself for the sake of his honor. Þormóðr wants to reply to the insults but he feels that someone is holding a hand over his mouth (sem tekit veiri yfir munn honum) and he remains unnoticed. An indication of the hand’s owner is given when it is told that after this incident, Þormóðr is too exhausted to swim to the shore and lays down on the skerry. A man called Grímr then dreams that King Óláfr asks him to rescue Þormóðr from the skerry, which he does. (Fóstbraðra saga, Ch. 24.) These occurrences reveal that King Óláfr was conceived of as having a special place in his heart for certain Icelandic outlaws, such as Þormóðr.

283 “Þormóðr finnr þat, at hann verðr aflvani fyrir Falgeiri; þykkið hann þá vera miðlungr staddr, slypr maðr ok sárr miðk, rennir þá hugnum þangat, er var Óláfr konungr, ok vætti hans hamingju, at honum myndi duga. Fell þá ðoxin or hendi Falgeiri niðr fyrir hamrana ofan á sjóinn [...]”
The solitary ascetism in the wilderness, which was forced upon outlaws according to the principle of the law, had its religious equivalent in the Christian eremites who withdrew from the world to seek experiential traces of God within their minds and souls. The medieval mystics found their model of conduct in the “desert theology” of the Old Testament, which describes how God had his people wander in the desert for forty years (Numbers 13: 3). This passage has its parallel in the New Testament where Jesus fasts in the desert for forty days (Matthew 4, Mark 1, Luke 4). St Augustine’s *Confessions* provided medieval clerics with allegorical interpretations for these texts (Low 2003).

The idea of the ascetic spirituality of the first eremite mystics, who are referred to as the Desert Fathers, was an inner journey towards spiritual renewal through suffering and deprivation. The Desert Fathers were Christian eremites who withdrew to the Egyptian desert in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D., following the example of Jesus and John the Baptist who also are told to have fasted in the desert. The Desert Fathers were known in Iceland at least through the *Vitae patrum* [Lives of the Fathers], a collection of stories about the Desert Fathers. This title is listed in the inventories of several churches and religious houses in Iceland (Óskarsdóttir 2005, 341).

In the Benedictine order, the eremites formed a highly admired class of monks who were learned enough to be able to “fight against the devil” in a “single combat in the desert” (Benedict 2004, 51). The eremites must have been familiar in Iceland at least as an idea. This is because institutionally, the clerical affiliations in Iceland were almost entirely based on the Benedictine and Augustinian orders. These orders were dominant in the Norwegian and Icelandic churches until well into the thirteenth century (Hall 2000, 667).

Solitariness, despite its actual form of manifestation or the reasons behind it, was associated with mystic spiritualism in medieval literature. For example, *The Wanderer* is an Old English poem from the tenth century that recounts an exiled, solitary warrior’s ponderings about his past as a warrior at a rich court and his mourning for his present state. Anthony Low observed that, “the culture to which the poet [of *The Wanderer*] belongs, as recent Old English scholars have recognised, is a synthesis of the heroic and the Christian.” Solitariness is depicted in the poem as an unwilled consequence of earthly circumstances and only becomes elevated in Christian interpretation: “the lesson that the poet draws from the wanderer’s enforced isolation is that an exile can put his trust nowhere in this world, but only in God.” (Low 2003, 12.)
solitary stay of the old warrior in the desert brought him closer to God in a manner that resembles eremite mystics.

The remoteness from society, which was forced upon outlaws in the Saga World, was a consequence of a juridical sentence that followed the breaking of the law, but this remoteness simultaneously meant being closer to God. The mystery related to the outlaws in the Family Sagas stemmed partly from the same source as the mystery that surrounded the idea of eremite mysticism. Within this frame of interpretation, the inability to remain alone in the desert is likened to a refusal to approach God. From the medieval point of view, this implies a drastic consequence for Glámr’s curse upon Grettir Æmundarson in Grettis saga (Ch. 35): the curse deprived Grettir of the ability to stay alone in the desert. Hence, it not only forced him to move into the dangerous public field of society but also prevented him from profiting spiritually from his imposed solitariness. This curse makes Grettir’s tragedy even more profound and emphasizes the lack of Divine Grace in the connotations of Grettir’s ógæfa (“lack of fortune”). Halldór Laxness has quite aptly described Grettis saga as “a passion saga of the only real Icelandic Christ, who is half man and half spirit, of a folk Christ who bears all our sorrows and sins” (1950, 86–87). (It is good to bear in mind that the mode in Laxness’ text is predominantly ironic, as usual).

A central element in the Franciscan and Dominican monastic rules was commitment to poverty, following the example of the twelve apostles in the Bible (Matt. 10:9). According to St Francis, any poor person would benefit of the spiritual advantages that ensued from poverty and outlaws whose property had been forfeit were included among the poor. The only property they could potentially possess was immaterial by nature. Within the traditional “old” values, this immaterial property was honor, whereas in the Christian spiritual sense it was piety. The maintenance of honor and of piety are principal virtues but in two different worlds. In general, the earthly characteristics of the saga outlaws, such as the tendencies to violence and sexuality, mark a gap between them and the spiritual eremites. However, the ability to remain virtuous in poverty was a common denominator for both outlaws and eremites as respected characters.

As an example, the deaths of Grettir Æmundarson and Gíslí Súrsson resulted in their becoming martyr-like characters. Before death, they

---

284 “[...] pišlarsa hins eina sanna íslenska krists, sem er mæður og vættrur til helminga, þjóðkristisins, sem ber alla vora sorg og sekt.” Grettir’s and Þormóðr’s sexuality separated them from the desert fathers’ ideas of purgatory and retained distance between these groups, thus connecting them to general heroic ideals of virile manliness. Sexuality was in drastic contradiction with eremite ideals, thus causing an even comical effect.
suffered and saw visions, and they earned recognition only afterwards. In other words, they atoned for their deeds by dying after extensive suffering. Grettir and Gísli were the two most significant outlaw characters who embodied the idea of an outlaw expelled alone into the wilderness. Outlawry as a penalty hardly had religious incentives but the eremite orders readily provided a frame of reference within which outlawry, as separation from earthly temptations, could be seen in a positive light in spite of the fact that outlawry was a penalty for grave crimes. Hence, it is hardly a wonder that the two sagas (*Grettis saga* and *Gísla saga*) that focus on individual outlaws and attempt to elevate them as high as possible, utilize this associative power to the most.

12.5 Conclusion

In the period of saga writing, the Icelanders were aware of Christian textual criticism and of figural interpretation through popular sermons. Furthermore, the literary culture centered on churchly institutions. It can be presumed that both the formulation and reception of the saga texts took place within the frame of reference of the Bible and clerical teachings. The narratives about outlawry were open to Christian interpretation, and there are signs of forms of this interpretation already affecting the formulation of the narratives. The wilderness, into which the outlaws were spatially determined to withdraw, was a strong symbol in the Christian frame of reference—in good and in bad. It is however not easy or even always possible to determine the presupposed situational valuations. However, saints, saintly kings and eremites were positive figures in Christian evaluation. Their biographies and conventional characterization possess recognizable parallels both in connection with individual outlaw characters and with the stock character of the outlaw and hence, it can be assumed that the parallels were also recognizable for the saga writers and their audience. However, the Christian frame of reference was not the primary frame of reference for the Family Sagas that were based on secular vernacular traditions. The Christian frame of reference could be important for certain individuals among the saga writers and their audiences but it can be presumed that indigenous narrative traditions reflected frames of reference that were more valid for the Family Sagas in a general sense. In the following chapter, I will examine narratives in an indigenous tradition that represents ideas that are in a sense opposite to the ones that were examined in this chapter. Nevertheless, these narratives, namely mythological narratives, exhibit similarities with the narratives about outlaws in the Family Sagas.
13 Mythology

However antiquarian, distant or artificial the mythological world otherwise was for the Christian Icelanders in the period of saga writing, it worked as a frame of interpretation for saga literature. Myths were the narrative heritage of pre-Christian belief and hence, from the perspective of the period when the Family Sagas were written, they were one aspect of the Saga World.

Understanding skaldic poetry, which is a central element in many of the Family Sagas, required a certain level of knowledge about mythology. Furthermore, skaldic poetry was considered to be the best evidence of earlier history (O’Donoghue 2005, 10–11), and formed a type of frame of reference for the historical narration underlying many of the Family Sagas. It is therefore possible to say that saga writing was interlinked with the mythological tradition (see also Nordal 2001, 8). As culturally central narratives that were connected generally to the past, myths provided models of traditional narrative that also enhanced other types of narration, such as the saga literature. John Lindow, who has made a significant contribution to our understanding of the relationship between mythological texts and the saga literature, stated: “These narratives may be viewed together, as the products of a common worldview and aesthetic imagination” (Lindow 1985, 54). In a later article, Lindow also writes:

Since our field, unlike many others, possesses mythic materials, and these were demonstrably of great interest to the people who recorded and consumed them, myth – in many of the senses of the word – must be one of the modes that merit scrutiny (Lindow 1997b, 463).

This chapter will examine how myths can help us understand outlawry in the Family Sagas.

The mythological frame of reference was especially relevant in relation to the outlaw characters in the Family Sagas. The mythological world was situated outside the world inhabited by humans, and even though outlawry was a phenomenon of the natural world, the outlaws were banished from the human community. Conceptually, this brought

---

This discussion does not deal with reconstructions of an “original” past mythology or pagan religion. Mythological texts and rites were reinterpreted in a Christian framework and thus any applications of more or less fixed mythological texts would be made accordingly, leaving little of the paradigmatic “original” mythological ideas.
them closer to other kinds of beings, including those of the mythology. By definition, outlaws were solitary agents, which emphasized their individuality. Even though the gods in the mythological narratives often have acknowledged family ties to each other, they predominantly appear and act as individuals and their individual characteristics therefore become highlighted. As solitary individuals outside the human community, outlaws were mysterious individuals with an associated potential. Their potential and characteristics were conceived according to the available associative models, the mythological tradition. The significance of events accounted in the Family Sagas could be built up and certain characteristics of the involved characters emphasized by referential connections to the mythological tradition and to mythological characters that strongly embodied these characteristics.

The associations with mythology could be created either consciously or unconsciously. The mythological narratives and characters represented an old and presumably central narrative tradition that without a doubt affected all narration that was associable with it in any way. Here, I will not take a stand on the possible belief systems behind the myths but study the mythological cosmos and the beings that inhabited it as aspects of a mythological Taleworld. The myths will be approached as narratives that reflect the general features of this Taleworld. In this chapter, I will introduce briefly the mythological texts on the basis of which the mythological connections of outlawry will be discussed. This connection between mythological characters and the narratives about outlawry in the Family Sagas will be discussed on the basis of the previous discussion in chapters 9 and 11 concerning the social and spatial positioning of outlawry in the Saga World, which will serve here as a common measure for the two different narrative genres. The discussion will focus on the question of which mythology-related phenomena and qualities were associable with outlawry.

This chapter will begin with an outline of the primary literary sources of mythology. Next, the categories of mythic beings and the division of the space that is reserved to them will be introduced on the basis of the conceptions that are reflected in the mythological texts. As this chapter comprises only a portion of the whole book, only few examples will be provided. Next, the stereotyped characteristics of the outlaws in the Family Sagas will be discussed as related to their parallels with mythic beings. Discussion on narrative motifs about outlaws and outlawry, as related to mythic narratives, will follow. These last two sections are the basis for the conclusions that will be finally drawn.
13.1 Sources of Mythology

A major part of the myths in poetic and/or prose form were put into writing in the thirteenth century. Prior to that, it appears that the only documentations of myths were iconographic or (less certainly) brief references in runic inscriptions. An important text for the vernacular mythology is the so-called Prose Edda, the *ars poetica* purportedly composed by Snorri Sturluson in or shortly after 1220 (Clunies Ross 2005, 157). This work became called “Edda” in the medieval period. 286 This treatise on the art of skaldic poetry includes a long section called *Gylfaginning* (“The Deluding of Gylfi”) that provides an overview of “pagan” cosmogony, cosmology, mythological genealogy and the eschatology with extensive quotations of traditional poetry. Another section is called *Skáldskaparmál* (“The Language of Poetic Art”), in which allusive poetic language is explicated and a large number of mythological narratives are recounted, summarized and referred to in a remarkable number of quotations of skaldic poetry including many references to and depictions of mythological subjects. Snorri’s *Edda* as a whole is now conventionally referred to as the *Prose Edda* or *Snorra Edda* in contrast to the so-called *Poetic Edda*. This latter work is actually the manuscript GKS 2365 4to, also called the Codex Regius, compiled from earlier collections of poems around year 1270 (Lindblad 1954).

The mythological poems in the Codex Regius contain cosmogonic lore (*Völuspá*, *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Grímnismál*), didactic poetry mixed with narratives about Óðinn (*Hávamál*), and mythological adventures, 287 which are partly alluded to in cosmogonic poetry. When the Codex Regius was discovered in the seventeenth century, it was believed to have been the source for Snorri’s *Edda* and to have been compiled by one of Snorri’s ancestors. Although this compilation is now recognized as post-dating Snorri’s work, it had nevertheless already became known as another *Edda* and the broad category of traditional narrative poetry that it contains has since become referred to as ‘eddic’ poetry – especially including the five mythological poems that are found in other manuscripts. 288 (See Clunies Ross 2005, 6–28.)

---

286 The term appears as the title to Snorri Sturluson’s treatise in one manuscript; on the later use for the collection of mythological poems in the Codex Regius manuscript (GKS 2365 4to), see below. The original meaning of the term is obscure and it does not necessarily have anything to do with mythology. For further discussion see Faulkes 1977; Lindow 1985, 74–75.

287 *Skírnismál*, *Hárbarðsljóð*, *Lokasenna*, *Hymiskviða*, *Þrymskviða*, *Alvíssmál*.

288 *Baldrs draumar*, *Rígsþula*, *Hyndluljóð*, *Grógaldr*, *Grottasöngr*. 
The precise reasons for documenting and compiling whole poems in the Poetic Edda and Snorri’s extensive presentation of mythological narratives in the Prose Edda remain uncertain. The significance of the mythologies as representations of an actual worldview had already diminished across the preceding two centuries in the course of the conversion to Christianity, which began in the year 1000. Nevertheless, the context of Snorri’s ars poetica and the discussion in Skáldskaparmál unambiguously relate this information to competence in composing and understanding poetry.

The extant myths are a literary phenomenon, as John Lindow (1985, 54) notes. Poetic attestations often appear to be rooted in oral culture but there was most probably variation within the mythological poetry in its oral delivery (see Frog 2011b), as there was in its literary transmission as well.\(^{289}\) It is not always clear to what degree this poetry may have been reshaped in its transition to the written mode of expression. Before engaging in any discussion of myth-related readings of the Family Sagas, it is also important to emphasize that these readings are based on a corpus of mythological texts which is small and selective and hence in itself admits several interpretations. References to pagan gods and practices in the Family Sagas indicate that the extant mythological texts only constitute a portion of the mythological tradition that prevailed in Writing Period Iceland. Moreover, it is not entirely clear how the category “mythology” was distinguished in medieval Iceland.\(^{290}\)

Together, the myths hardly constituted a concise belief system. Rather they seem to have been more or less independent narratives. They are even to some extent incommensurable: they are of different genres, of differing age, and mutually contradictory, as Anthony Faulkes (1977) has pointed out; furthermore, they vary in tone, point of view, and presentation (Lindow 1985, 29). On the other hand, the Prose Edda was an attempt to arrange extant myths in a systematic way. The mythological material is often clearly derived from poetic tradition (McKinnell 2005, 37).

\(^{289}\) For instance, Lindow 1985 (30–31) demonstrates how an omission of six stanzas of the poem Völuspá in its redaction in Hauksbók causes a significant change in the role of the god Baldr in the eschatology.

\(^{290}\) The distinction between “heroic” and “mythological” is relevant for the present study because they are discussed here as two distinct Taleworlds. For consideration of the validity of this distinction it is good to bear in mind that half of the eddic poetry in the Codex Regius consists of heroic poetry. Generally, gods and heroes are not mixed together in the mythology. The separation of poems about gods from poems about heroes in the manuscript seems to support their conceptual separation in thirteenth century Iceland. McKinnell however challenges the strict division between these groups of poetry, pointing out that two poems that are grouped with poems about gods (Völundarkviða and Grímnismál) depict events in the human sphere and mytho-heroic time.
The *Prose Edda* is important primarily in two ways for the understanding of mythological references in saga literature. First, it provides access to the mythology as it was conceived by the learned in thirteenth century Iceland. Snorri Sturluson was not an outsider who recounted mythology but rather a member of the poetic culture, an insider, who appears to have intended to produce an accessible overview of the mythology. However, although Snorri appears to have been extremely competent in the vernacular mythology, it is necessary to bear in mind that his representations of that mythology inevitably had more or less conscious literary and ideological goals that reflect his learned background as a man who may even have received a priest’s education. As a consequence, even if a well-informed and versatile source, the *Prose Edda* is necessary to approach as a source for the mythology with great caution. Second, the *Prose Edda* was written before most of the Family Sagas. This makes it a relevant source for conceptions of mythology within the context of saga narration. (See Frog 2011c.)

The mythological texts that were produced in the thirteenth century only provide a selective and distorted image of mythological conceptions in the thirteenth century. However, these texts were recorded to promote the composition of texts that used mythology as a frame of reference – skaldic poetry and the narrative environment of that poetry, which was saga narration. To the degree that the poetry can be expected to have been intelligible to its audience, the wide-spread use of skaldic poetry within the saga literature indicates that the audience was expected to possess sufficient mythological knowledge in order to understand and see the relevance of the poems within their narrative surroundings and hence, to retain this poetry as a living part of the narrative tradition.

Even without the *Prose Edda*, it is clear that mythology served as a frame of reference to understanding skaldic poetry. Skaldic poetry (*lausavisur*) maintained myths as a relevant frame of reference within those saga texts where they were preserved. This kind of reading of myths as a frame of reference was also relevant to the saga authors, as has been illustrated in numerous studies of reference and allusion to myths in the saga texts.\(^{291}\) Mythology was a ready and present part of cultural competence. Especially when this frame of reference had already been activated by skaldic poems, there would be sensitivity in reception to engagements between saga texts and mythology. Margaret Clunies Ross observed,

\(^{291}\) Basic works in this approach, which will be referred to in the following discussion, include for example Haraldur Bessason 1977; Lindow 1989; Clunies Ross 1994 & 1998; Sigurðsson G. 1994a. See also Kaplan 2008; Frog 2010; 2011a.
Knowledge of the Old Norse mythic world and its workings was an expected cultural resource and point of reference for the original readers or audience of Old Icelandic literature and that without it one cannot fully understand the semiotics of these texts (Clunies Ross 1998, 12).

In short, mythology was an essential frame of reference to the saga texts.

13.2 Outlawry and Mythological Characters

There are significant connections between the mythological narratives and the saga narratives. These connections concern for instance themes, images, characterization and relations between characters or groups of characters. For example, the characteristics and roles of certain mythological characters resemble stereotypical characteristics and roles of outlaws in the Family Sagas, which invites comparison between them. Connections to mythology either add to the general mythic quality of a saga character (e.g. Hastrup 1990), indicating his potential, or qualify the narrative character or his actions with a reference to a mythological character or events in a myth. References to mythological beings in the saga literature are either the actual and obvious personifications of gods (such as gods and other mythical characters appearing in human form, for instance in Harðar saga, Ch. 15) or less apparent, indirect associations with mythological beings (such as berserks as representatives of Óðinn).

Conceptual similarities between mythological narratives and the Saga World manifest in “mythic elements” (Lindow 1997b) that as fundamental narrative structures affected the formation of the saga narratives. Hence it is possible to make a parallel for instance between the burning of Bergþórhvöll (Njáls saga) and Ragnarök: any major disaster in a saga narrative receives additional significations from the elemental disaster in the mythology. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen wrote that mythical elements appear in the Family Sagas in the form of “a reuse in a new, historical context” (1992, 735). In a similar vein, van Wezel notes that the myths continued functioning as “historical-literary topoi” after the phenomena to which they were originally related disappeared from cultural life (van Wezel 2000, 549). Haraldur Bessason, in his article Mythological Overlays (1977, esp. 275–276), treats allusions to eddic poetry in the Family Sagas as stylistic overlays in the use of the saga writers. His interpretations of the parallels go so deep that his term
overlay for the mythological images and narrative parallels in the saga literature seems like an understatement. For instance, he shows significant structural resemblances between *Haralds saga hárfagra* (one of the Kings’ Sagas) and *Skírnismál*, and he shows several correspondences between Egill Skalla-Grímsson’s vicissitudes recounted in *Egils saga* and the myth in the *Prose Edda* about how Óðinn, the god of poetry, came by the gift of poetry. Egill Skalla-Grímsson’s skills as a warrior and as a poet, besides the similarities in motifs between the narratives, directed the saga audience to the mythological tradition that provided a new point of view for understanding the events in the saga. (Bessason 1977, 282–289; see also Hansen 1981; Sigurðsson G. 1994.)

John Lindow (1997b) has pointed out mythic elements, themes that relate to myth, even in *Íslendingabók* that is a work which otherwise maintains distance to any matter that could be defined as un-factual as a dense historical text by the discourse and approach.

Margaret Clunies Ross (1994, esp. 231 ff.) discussed the significance of myths to the overall meaning in much of Old Norse poetry as targets of narrative allusions and also as a narrative substrate from which the poetry sprang. The title of her book, *Prolonged Echoes*, refers to the elements of the worldview that affected narration both in mythology and in the saga literature. This was possible because the world of the gods was part of the same metaphysical reality as the Saga World, which becomes especially evident in the correspondences in the social reality of these worlds. For example, Clunies Ross noted that the conflicts between the gods and the giants resemble the acts of quarrelling chieftains and their allies in thirteenth century Iceland to a remarkable degree (Clunies Ross 1998, 12). She has also noted that “there are similarities between the social hierarchy of the classes of supernatural beings in the Norse mythic world and that of Icelandic society in the Commonwealth Period” (Clunies Ross 2000a, 122).

The interest of the present discussion is in possible mythological models that served as referents in the representation and apprehension of outlawry and outlaws in the Family Sagas. The mythological poems and the *Prose Edda* create relatively coherent images of the identities of central mythological characters. These characters are actors in mythological narratives, and elements and motifs in these narratives are discussed through the characters. However the connection between a mythic character and the narrative elements and consecutive characteristics attached to it were not conclusive – the same characteristics and narrative elements were often attached to many characters. Additionally, a general reference to mythological texts in the Family Sagas had a value of its own. The value of such general reference
to mythology seems at least partly to have been independent of the particularity of the referent character.

13.3 Categories of Mythological Beings

The myths largely consist of encounters between members of two distinct groups: gods and giants, in spite the fact that myths account two sub-groups among the gods (æsir and vanir) and that giants vary significantly by their qualities from myth by myth. The group of æsir, which included some members whose origins were among vanir or the giants, is the group which is in the focus of mythological narratives. The fundamental collision of interests between the groups of the gods and the giants lead to confrontations as one becomes a threat to the other. The conduct of the two parties do not differ to the degree that they would justify the focal point of the narrator: neither group can be called fundamentally bad or good but the evaluation depends on the point of view and the focus. (Clunies Ross 1994.)

In a significant share of the myths, an individual member or a small group of members of either group encroach upon the territory of the other questing for valuables (goods, knowledge or women), and the tension of the narrative is created by, depending on the point of focus, the dynamics of the possession of the desired valuables and survival in or defense of the territory. On a large scale, the myths deal with the gods’ battle against irreversible fate, as the chief god Óðinn wanders in the giants’ land looking for wisdom and especially knowledge about the fate of the world and as the protecting god of thunder, Þórr, moves in the same territory slaying giants who are nevertheless fated to overcome and destroy the world. This noble yet vain struggle against fate resembles the struggle of the tragic outlaw heroes. The outlaw is fated to die, but his heroism in resistance is comparable to that of the gods as a struggle to avoid an inevitable end. The main difference between accounts in mythology and in the Family Sagas, comprehensible as a difference in the narrative mode, lies according to Margaret Clunies Ross in that,

the gods behave in ways that are more extreme and more flamboyant than are usual for humans – they test the metaphysical system to its utmost and thereby reveal the sources both of human fears and anxieties and of human desires and pleasures (Clunies Ross 2000a, 122).

On the other hand, extreme characteristics in a saga character likely invited reference to a divine character: “those humans whose behavior is
most extreme in saga literature are often tagged as god-like by a variety of myth-based signifiers” (Clunies Ross 2000a, 123).

The following discussion will introduce mythological characters whose position in the society as depicted by the mythological texts and whose being and actions as accounted in the mythological texts are associable with narratives about outlawry in the Family Sagas. First, the focal characters in the texts, the central gods will be introduced. Then I will move to marginal figures that did not belong to the group of gods. As members of the out-group, either essentially or as banished from among them, the position of these characters in the mythological world corresponds to the position of outlaws in the Saga World, whence it is presumable that their depictions in the mythological narratives exhibit points of association with outlawry in the Family Sagas.

13.3.1 The Space of Mythological Beings

As mentioned above, the mythological beings are divided roughly into two groups: the gods and the giants. The gods’ realm is labeled Ásgardr whereas the giants’ dwellings are referred to as Jötunheimar or Útgarðar. These two realms are separated by a space that is manifested in an image of a forest.

According to eschatological texts (e.g. Völuspá 44–58), the giants are destined to overcome the gods at the end of the world. According to Lokasenna (42), the giants ride through Myrkviðr (“Dark-woods”) to the battle. In Helgakviða Hundingsbana I (51), Myrkviðr functions indeed as a metaphor for a battle. Myrkviðr appears to have been a designation for a forest that separated the land of giants and the land of the gods and as such, worked as a metaphor for a border zone in a more general sense.292 Aaron Gurevich has pointed out that forests symbolized the border between two worlds in medieval continental Europe where the landscape between inhabited areas was covered by vast forests (Gurevich 1992, 151). This was largely true of Iceland as well – even though the forests did not necessary grow to be as stately as in the more favorable climate of continental Europe. As such, Myrkviðr, as a mythical bordering space between the land of giants and of gods, corresponds with the forests of the Saga World as a space where outlaws by their very designation were banished, the space between the inhabited world and the wilderness. Such conceptualization of a forest is also associable with the forest Járnviðr,

292 See e.g. Atlakviða (3, 5, 13) for Myrkviðr as a designation for a forest that lay between the area of the Germanic in-group of the poem and the realm of their enemies the Huns.
the home of mythical wolves, as will be discussed below. *Gylfaginning* (Ch. 49) recounts that after causing the death of Óðinn’s son Baldr, Loki escapes the wrath of the gods by fleeing to the mountains. The mountains were understood as a neutral, uninhabited area suitable for hiding in the mythological topography in the same sense as they were in the experienced surroundings of Iceland as expressed in the Family Sagas (see Lindow 1997c, 128–129) and as such, were directly associable with the image of a forest.

### 13.3.2 The Gods

Two gods are especially relevant as referents for outlawry and outlaws in the Family Sagas: the Thunder God Þórr and the god of war and poetry, Óðinn.

#### 13.3.2.1 The Violent God in the Wilderness

The thunder god Þórr is the central character in *Hymiskviða, Prymskviða, Alvíssmál* and *Harbarðsljóð*. He personifies physical strength. His main task within the Taleworld of the mythology is to protect the realm of the gods, Ásgarðr, against the hostilities of the giants. More generally, Þórr appears to have been associated with the establishment and maintenance of boundaries that defined inhabited spaces, overcoming beings from Útgarðar that intruded on the *innangardr*. The mythological texts imply that Þórr makes regular campaigns to the lands of the giants where his success is guaranteed by his strength and weapons. These weapons comprise a magically charged hammer, a belt and a pair of gloves. In other words, he advances into the uninhabited areas and confronts and expels otherworldly beings from the landscape of Útgarðar itself (e.g. *Hymiskviða* 35–36; *Lokasenna* intro, 60–64; *Prymskviða* 31–32). Within the narrative tradition from which the saga literature sprang, Þórr was the mythological exemplum of a solitary warrior who was continuously on sojourns on alien ground. This wandering was crucial to preserving Ásgarðr and hence, quite acceptable.

#### 13.3.2.2 The Wandering God

Óðinn, the god of war and poetry, is the main actor in *Hávamál, Vafþrúðnismál, Grímnismál, Baldur’s draumar* and *Harbarðsljóð*, the main interlocutor in *Völuspá* as well as the speaker and narrator in *Hávamál*. Óðinn appears as a demiurge in *Völuspá* 18. This does not prevent him
from appearing as a tricksterly character in Harbarðsljóð, which recounts the exchange of words between Óðinn, who has assumed the appearance of a ferryman, and his son Þórr. In this narrative, Óðinn ridicules Þórr by refusing to ferry him across a fjord and by uncovering his simpleness. Óðinn is also represented as a notorious womanizer in numerous texts (e.g. Hávamál 96–101, 108–110; Harbarðsljóð 16–18, 20, 30).

As the chief god as represented in the Prose Edda, Óðinn is a central referential mythological character. However, he has an active role as himself in only two of the Family Sagas (Lassen 2005, 92) whereas in numerous Legendary Sagas, he appears to the protagonist as a helper (Lassen 2005, 98–99). Óðinn is the primary referential deity for the main characters of the Skálds’ Sagas (skáldsögur) due to his primary functions as the god of war and poetry, which are the two central themes in this group of the biographical sagas (Clunies Ross 2000b, 45). Many of the main characters of the Skálds’ Sagas were outlaws and there appears to have been an interface in the stereotypical identities of a ‘skáld’ and an ‘outlaw’, as has been discussed in chapter 7.2.

13.3.3 The Banished Trickster Deity

Loki appears as a central character in Lokasenna, Prymskviða and Reginsmál as well as in numerous narratives in the Prose Edda. In the apocalyptic texts, he is depicted as a demonic figure that brings destruction upon the gods either himself (e.g. Völluspá 51, Baldrs draumar 14) or through his demonic offspring. Loki is counted among the æsir, the gods, in Gylfaginning even though he is also reported to be of giants’ kin. Loki is identified with negative properties, such as slandering, disgrace and deceit. Cunning intelligence is a central quality in Loki. (Gylfaginning 33.) Loki was banished from among the æsir primarily for the unforgivable deed of causing the death of the beloved god Baldr. As accounted in Lokasenna, Loki was banished another time for killing a servant of the sea god Ægir (see also Frog 2010, 42–43).

In other words, Loki was banished from among the in-group of the

---

293 However, as Kevin Wanner has pointed out, Óðinn does not fight himself but acts rather as a sage or chieftain of an army (Wanner 2009, 227–228) which would make Óðinn more directly a referential figure to chieftains and spiritual leaders.

294 Gylfaginning, Ch. 44, 46–50; Skáldskaparmál, Ch. 1, 4, 5, 7.

295 Völluspá 54–55; Vafþrúðnismál 52–53; Hyndluljóð 40–42; also Gylfaginning, Ch. 34.

296 For a survey of researchers emphasizing this quality in Loki, see Wanner 2009, 217 n. 22.

297 In the narrative, Loki returned to the hall of Ægir with the security guaranteed by the sanctity of the feast of the gods (de Vries 1933, 173–174: gríð), only to be forced to flee by Þórr who threatened to violate the sanctity of the hall.
mythological Taleworld for the same reason that most outlaws were sentenced in the Family Sagas, for a killing. This makes him an immediate mythological referent figure for the saga outlaws, whence also other characteristics and qualities of Loki are referentially associable with outlaws. Loki is an apparently annoying figure for the gods to have among them but, on the other hand, he is the primus motor behind a significant share of the events that are recounted in the mythological tradition. Without Loki, there would not have been that much to tell about.

In many mythological narratives, Loki is an exterior agent, an outsider among both the giants and the gods. He sparks off the smothered conflict between the two groups by making promises to giants on behalf of the gods or by causing the loss of the gods’ goods to the giants. Consequently, Loki is forced to help the gods in correcting the situation (e.g. Gylfaginning, Ch. 33, 42; Skáldskaparmál, Ch.1, 4, 5, 7; Þrymskviða). Loki is constantly in a subordinate position both to the gods and to the giants among whom he nevertheless survives and even gains an upper hand by other means than outright struggle. As a mythological character, Loki embodies externality and being pursued as well as being an object of hostility.

13.3.4 Destructive Wolves

In the Saga World, outlaws were associated with wolves. The designation vargr (“wolf”) as an abusive word for an outlaw has been discussed above in chapter 5.3. Scandinavian mythology represents numerous wolves, but wolves have never belonged to the Icelandic fauna. The ecological environment constructs the frame of reference within which the Taleworlds become understood. To the degree that wolves were remote from the social and ecological realities of Iceland, the identity and significance of wolves would be increasingly constructed through narrative and discourse. As a consequence, mythological wolves can be reasonably considered to have played a central role in constructing the significance of wolves in discourse, and more particularly to the significance of using “wolf” as a designation for an outlaw.

Fenrisúlfr (“The wolf Fenrir”), the primeval wolf, belonged to the offspring of Loki (Völuspá 40). Gylfaginning (Ch. 34) recounts that Fenrir is raised among the gods but grew into a threat. The gods receive prophecies that it would attack them at Ragnarök, the end of the world. The gods manage to lure Fenrir into fetters but only with the loss of the god Týr’s hand. Fenrir is tied up on the island of Lyngvi, which is, as the
end of the account says, a place sacred to the gods (see also *Lokasenna* 38–39). *Völuspá* (52) tells that Fenrir kills Óðinn at Ragnarök, *Vafþrúðnismál* (46–47) that it destroys the Sun. *Gylfaginning* tells that two wolves chase the sun and the moon. These wolves were born in Járnvið (“Iron-woods”) east of the world of humans, Miðgarðr. They were nurtured by an old giantess who gave birth to them and other wolf-shaped giants. Sköll (Skoll) is the name of the wolf that chases the Sun, whereas Hati (a son or Fenrir) chases the Moon. The latter is the most powerful of wolves, called Mánagarmr (“Moon dog”) who is capable of swallowing the moon (or other celestial body: *tungl*). (*Gylfaginning*, Ch. 12; *Grímnismál* 39. See also *Völuspá* 39–40.) In the Codex Regius, Fenrir only appears in the apocalyptic visions. However, Fenrir is discussed to a relatively large extent in other mythological texts, especially in *Gylfaginning*. The wolf seems to have held a central position in the mythological system, especially in the eyes of Snorri.

Even though the wolves represent the forces opposing the gods, whose leader was Óðinn, Óðinn’s relations to wolves are not conceived in the mythology as being exclusively hostile. *Gylfaginning* (Ch. 38) recounts that Óðinn has two wolves, Geri and Reki, who eat from his table. In kennings, wolves are commonly referred to as corpse-eaters. These references make the image of wolves eating from the table of the God of War reasonable (and would also explain why dogs would be somewhat too tame for the role).

Across these texts, the wolf appears as a mythic image exclusively associated with loss, death and destruction. Therefore, wolf as a metaphor or circumlocution for an outlaw makes a reference to destruction in mythic measure. In addition, identification as a wolf identifies the subject among the offspring of Loki, or among the descendants of his son, Fenrir, if only by allusion.

### 13.3.5 Beings Beyond the Gods’ Realm

The giants appear in mythological texts as the enemies and adversaries of the gods. Mythological texts seem to distinguish between different

---

298 It is also notable that Fenrir is used as a metonym for the apocalypse in the skaldic poem *Hákonarmál* 20.

299 Garmr is the name given to a hound that bellows outside Gnipahellir when Fenrir gets lose at Ragnarök (*Völuspá* 43, 47, 56: identical three stanzas); in *Gylfaginning* (51) it is said that Garmr is bound outside the cave and will break free at the same time as Fenrir. Garmr and Fenrir were closely associated if not the same figure. Cerberus of Greek mythology and the common image of a monster gulping people on the edge of Hell in medieval church decorations may have promoted its centrality.
types of giants. They are difficult to classify exclusively, but rather, they seem to reflect narrative-bound ways to express general otherness from the point of view of the æsir. Usually, giants are anthropomorphic like the gods, but not always. Judging by their roles in different narratives, the giants function as ancient primeval beings, elements of nature, demonic forces of chaos, and as neighbors of the æsir (both in good and bad).

The nominations for the giants seem to loosely follow these roles. The term jötunn is used, besides as a general noun for giants, especially to refer to giants as the neighbors of the æsir. In contrast, the term risi refers to the huge size of the giant, used of foreign and ancient giants (Kroesen 1996, 58), and the terms risi and bergrisi are only found in Grettasöngr in the mythological poetry. Only the form bergrisi appears in Gylfaginning, not risi. In contrast, the terms þurs and hrimþurs are connected to the primeval giants, the oldest creatures of the world. “Hrimþursar og bergrisar” is a formulaic nomination of the main threat to the æsir in Gylfaginning, hence counting them together as the primary forces of chaos.300 In the Poetic Edda, giants are almost always called with the designation jötunn, whereas in Prymskvíða, Þýrím is designated with the alliterating epithet þursa dróttinn (“lord of giants”). Bergbúi (“mountain-dweller”) is a term for a giant in Hýmiskvíða (2).301 The same designation is used in the saga text Bergbúa þáttur for the hideous being who is met in a mysterious cave in Saga Age Iceland.

Besides these outright evil and destructive giants, whom Þórr keeps hunting down with his hammer, some giants (Mimir, Valfrúðnir) possess knowledge, especially that about the origins of the world and its destruction, Ragnarök. This is the information which Øðinn pursues in the myths. The giant Ægir does not seem to be juxtaposed with the æsir very much, as he is reported to feast them in his hall (Lokasenna). Female giants can be horrifying, troll-like characters, but on the other hand, also subjects of the romantic desires of the æsir. An example of this is giant Gerðr, with whom god Freyr falls in love in Skírnismál. A giantess called Angrboða gave birth to Loki’s children Fenrisúlf, Jörmungandr and Hel, the three primary demonic beings that have a role in the extant myths, and who would destroy the most central gods at Ragnarök. Within a wider corpus of saga texts, the referents of these different designations for “giant” and similar beings are impossible to exhaustively distinguish from one another (Jakobsson 2008a, 189).

300 Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss posits risi and tröll to the opposite ends of the axis of good and evil, situating the risi as positive, as Ármann Jakobsson (2005) has noted.
301 Frog (2011b) suggests that the terms þurs and bergrúi were used as designations for giants in eddic poetry for the sake of alliteration.
In the mythological texts, the giants are the opponents of the gods. They form a distinct group that lives outside the realm of the gods in Jötunheimar. The mountains and forests in Scandinavia and the inland of Iceland were associated with the lands of the giants. (Kroesen 1996, 60.) The giants are beings of chaos. They may be beautiful, wise and good but they nevertheless represent chaos and potential danger (Kroesen 1996, 59). In short, the giants effectively embody both fears and hopes that are attributed to one’s neighbors in a general sense.

13.4 Mythology-Related Qualities of Outlaws

13.4.1 The Land-Cleanser

The *Land-Cleanser* destroys menaces that represent an out-group and threaten his in-group. In this respect, Grettir Ásmundarson is a special case among the outlaws in the Family Sagas when it comes to mythical characteristics (see e.g. Blaney 1982). The connections between Grettir’s character and myths were primarily created in accordance with conceptions about the land-cleansing, immensely powerful deity Þórr (Óskar Halldórrson 1977). Grettir’s associations with Þórr are mainly based on his strength, his journeys in the hostile interior of Iceland, and on the fact that he protects people against hostile forces of the interior. These associations are strong enough to be recognized even without explicit reference. Halldórr Laxness has suggested that the Grettir who was the subject of folk narratives and folk belief before he was made a hero in his saga, was “a successor and image of the terrifying Þórr of eddic poetry” (Laxness 1950, 220). This protective function is not associated with other outlaws in the Family Sagas.

An example of Grettir’s feats that it is possible to interpret as referring intertextually to Þórr is the individual motif in *Grettis saga* (Ch. 50) in which Grettir carries an ox on his shoulders from the shore to the farm of his host Þorgils. This image has a close equivalent in the scene in *Hymiskviða* in which Þórr carries a similarly astonishing load, a whale, on his shoulders from the shore to the farm of his host. The same poem also presents an ox as a tool for performing an astonishing feat (Þórr tears off its head for bait) and the motif of incredibly powerful rowing, which connect the poem to the scene in the saga even more firmly.
Unbounded sexuality and being a culture-hero cancel each other out on a societal level. Michael Carroll (1981), leaning partly on psychoanalysis, states that in the North American material, societal peace (culture) and uncontrolled sexuality, both (in Freudian terms) subconsciously desired, are simultaneously present in the trickster who is simultaneously a selfish buffoon and a culture hero. These two aspects of a trickster also are combined in Grettir Ásmundarson, who in Grettis saga is depicted both as a socially detached free sexual agent and as a protector of humans against non-human threats. Similarly, Loki is credited both with the invention of the fishing net in addition to unapproved sexual activities and other tricksterly conducts (e.g. Gylfaginning, Ch. 50; Lokasenna 23; Hyndluljóð). It is also worthwhile to notice that the sources indicate that Öðinn was notorious as a womanizer among the gods (e.g. Hávamál 96–101, 108–110; Harbarðsljóð 16–18, 20–30; Lokasenna 24). Öðinn’s romantic adventures are not discussed in a disapproving but rather in a boastful tone, as though he remained emotionally unaffected, and Öðinn even uses sexuality as a manipulative means to achieve his goals. Generally, however, sexual desire appears in the mythological narratives as a weakness for a divinity: either as a disabling state (as for Freyr in Skírnismál) or as a subject of jeering (as in numerous instances in Lokasenna).

Giants were generally depicted as, and supposed to be, sexually insatiable. Margaret Clunies Ross explains the rapid reproduction of giants on the basis of a generalisation that, “like socially dominant groups everywhere, the gods invoke the chaos-producing effects of uncontrolled reproduction on the part of the lowest-ranking social group as a rationale for restricting the latter’s sexual behaviour” (Clunies Ross 1994, 104). Giants’ unbound sexuality manifests in their desire for female gods (Clunies Ross 1994, 108–109).

The threatening sexuality of the outlaws was discussed in chapter 9.2 and it is especially exemplified in the Skálds’ Sagas’ branch of the saga outlaws (for instance Grettir Ásmundarson or Þormóðr Bersason). That the sexuality of the outlaws is conceived as a threat is based on a perspective from a superior social position and associated with the outlaw’s lack of sexual morality. This is grounded in the Family Sagas by the position of outlaws as outside of the normative restrictions that prevailed within the society. The position of Loki and the giants, from the point of view of the gods, is similar in the mythological Taleworld. Referentially, they reinforce and strengthen the conception that the outlaws’ sexuality was a threat to decent people.
13.4.3 The Public Threat

The narrative function of a character being a public threat is the role diametrically opposed to the function of the Land-Cleanser. The association between giants and outlawry evokes the giants’ essence as fundamental adversaries and enemies of the in-group, and hence evokes the elevation of the men who slay outlaws through their identification with Þórr. The giants are shown no mercy in mythological texts. They are instead destroyed whenever possible, by whatever means available. Likewise, valiant men in the Family Sagas attempt to seek and destroy bandit troops, who are told in sagas to have menaced Iceland, as well as outlaws who are considered to be a common threat to people. Only in the occasional instance in Eyrbyggja saga (Ch. 62), it sufficed to have the leaders of a band killed. In another example, found in Laxdæla saga (Ch. 57), Þorkell attempts to hunt down the outlaw Grímþ in a way that makes an allusion to the expeditions of the god Þórr among the giants (Ahola 2011, 43–44) and in Vatnsdeala saga (Ch. 28, 30), Jökull Ingimundarson performs land-cleansing as a protecting chieftain and slays thieves as a duty and a proof of capability of the chieftain’s position. These thieves are represented in the saga as if they were outlawed even though this is not explicitly stated. (For more examples, see chapter 6.1.5.)

13.4.4 The Unreliable Companion

The identity of an outlaw as an unreliable companion or employee, which is a common element of outlaw narratives (see chapter 8.2.3), has a mythic referent in which the role is assumed by a giant. Joseph Harris (1976b) pointed out the referential connection between the Masterbuilder Tale in Gylfaginning (Ch. 43) and in the Family Sagas. In this narrative tradition, a dangerous outsider is hired to perform construction work and he completes his duties faultlessly. However, he is then killed through some sort of trick (rather than in open combat) when it becomes apparent that he will have to be paid the high cost for his work. In Gylfaginning, the Masterbuilder is unambiguously a giant who enters into an arrangement with the gods. When this tradition is adapted and realized in the Saga World, the role corresponding to the mythic outsider is occupied by foreign berserks in Eyrbyggja saga (Ch. 25, 28) and in Heiðarvígs saga (Ch. 3–4) (Harris 1976b).

Outlaws occupy a similar role for example in Finnboga saga ramma (Ch. 39, 40) and Grettis saga (Ch. 55, 56), in which the specific
construction work is replaced by general tasks as a farmhand (building a fence, however, in *Finnboga saga ramma*) or as a fellow fugitive in a remote fishing hut (*Grettis saga*). The cost of the outsider’s labor becomes almost unexpectedly high in these cases as the hired stranger turns out to be an assassin attempting to kill his master. Eventually, he is killed in an unconventional combat involving a surprise element. In other words, the outsiderness and otherness of the Masterbuilder, which in the myth is personified by a giant, could be embodied in the Saga World in an outlaw. This mythological reference strengthened the perception of outlaws as the ultimate outsiders in the Saga World.

13.4.5 The Social Anomaly

Margaret Clunies Ross (1994, 262–263) has pointed out that Loki’s relationship to the giants and the gods indicates that the difference between these groups was social rather than natural. Loki is of giant kin but still an accepted member of the group of gods, the *æsir*. In other words, Loki is situated in between these two groups. Within the structural dichotomy introduced by Claude Levi-Strauss (1967a, 220–224), such a character is conceivable as a mediator, and “since his mediating function occupies a position halfway between two polar terms, he must retain something of that duality – namely an ambiguous and equivocal character” (ibid., 223).

In the Scandinavian mythological system, the mediating figure of Loki indeed appears to be an ambiguous character. As an anomaly, a detached character, Loki is beyond the norms of behaviour that prevail among the two groups between which he belongs. Because Loki is outside the normative systems of both his reference groups, and because these normative systems reflect those that prevailed among the people who narrated the myths, Loki’s deeds appear preposterous, horrific or hilarious. As Paul Radin noticed among the trickster traditions in North America (Radin 1956, 162–165), the astonishing deeds of a trickster can be understandable, approved or even admired when the hero’s position outside the normative order is realized. The evaluation of the deeds of a trickster, however unconventional they are, is done according to their outcome whereas a hero is evaluated according to the way he acts: a hero’s worth is determined by whether or not he follows the heroic code of behavior (see further below in chapter 14.1). Loki’s peculiar behavior is not exceptional for a trickster but rather an expectation.

The outlaws in the Family Sagas can be considered to be an anomaly in a similar sense. An outlaw was no longer a member of society but did
not quite belong to any other category either: he was not (yet) dead, nor could he be counted among other beings of non-society, like trolls, in spite of his spatial positioning on the verge of the space associated with them. This made the outlaw an ambiguous character in numerous ways that become evident in narratives about outlawry in the Family Sagas. Outlaws were detached from society and had no obligations towards it. This made them free to act in ways that were not appropriate to honorable men. The impact of an outlaw upon his adversaries was counted as an achievement without requiring taking into account the means or the manner in which it was accomplished. The desperate position of the outlaw against his pursuers required, and justified, unconventional defense tactics. To boldly face the attacking enemy was generally considered to be ideal behavior in the saga literature (Andersson 1989) but a solitary or overpowered individual was permitted to slip from this ideal without negative consequences to his honor. Kendra Willson’s comment concerning the outlaw Króka-Refr may serve here as an illustrative example: “Refr is at once an anti-hero and a superhero. He flees rather than embraces danger; he does not engage heroic posturing.” (Willson 2006, 1068.) In a desperate position, an outlaw did not lose his honor even by putting another man’s life at stake in order to survive himself (e.g. Gísla saga, Ch. 20; Fóstbraða saga, Ch. 23). The outlaw is expelled from society and as a pursued fugitive, he may need to resort to unconventional deeds, and both of these factors contributed to the outlaw’s abnormality.

Venetia Newall (1984, esp. 52) pointed out that the trickster figure Anansi in Caribbean folklore was created in a slave community where humiliating the suppressor was considered a heroic deed as such. Likewise, the subordinate position of Icelanders in Norway in relation to Norwegians on many levels of interaction created a hierarchical relation. Within that relationship, the means available for the Icelanders to maintain their dignity and honor at a moment that these were put at stake necessarily differed from those that were available for the Norwegians. Indeed, the Icelanders in Norway were mediators between the two peoples. In the Family Sagas, the Icelandic outlaws of the king of Norway often ended up in situations that required conduct that would have been unconventional in the Icelandic context but that were fully accepted when they were performed in Norway. As an example, Þorleifr jarlaskáld’s conduct in the hall of jarl Hákon (Þorleifsfáttr jarlaskálds) aimed solely at ridiculing the sovereign in revenge for his actions, which Þorleifr had interpreted as unjust.

Another example can be seen in Egils saga. The sequence that recounts Egill Skalla-Grimsson’s time as an outlaw functions in the saga
plot in grounding the bad terms between Egill and King Eiríkr: in this sequence, Egill ridicules the monarch who is bitterly offended. According to this sequence in *Egils saga* (Ch. 57), Egill kills King Eiríkr’s son and furthermore erects a *niðstong* (“pole of hatefulness”), a humiliating magical post with a horse head on top of it, and aims it at the king. Egill is consequently outlawed and pursued but he narrowly manages to escape. Egill’s rather harsh ridiculing of King Eiríkr in the saga is directly followed by a set of scenes familiar from outlaw narratives in other Family Sagas. In the co-text of the entire saga, the function of the sequence is to set in motion a conflict between Egill and King Eiríkr. The applied narrative elements serve this function and at the same time emphasize Egill’s righteousness and sovereignty, which adds to the humiliation of King Eiríkr. It is also notable that the conventional narrative elements of outlawry are applied in a narrative environment where Egill’s activities correspond to a trickster figure’s function as the one who humiliates and ridicules the sovereign. There are many less obvious examples as well (see chapter 6.4) but many of the narratives that represent the Travel Pattern may indeed reflect medieval Icelanders’ experience of social inferiority in Norway.

These extraordinary deeds, as well as the outlaws’ many different ways to elude a pursuer that were reviewed in chapter 7.3, not only serve to save the life of the outlaw in the narrative, but in addition, these motifs often provide the narrative with humor at the expense of the pursuer. This kind of humor elevates the outlaw with respect to his pursuer. Therefore, in such cases, it is reasonable to consider the outlaws not only as ill-fated individuals but also as heroes. However, they do not represent a mode of heroism that would originate in the socially charged Family Sagas but instead, they represent the mode of heroism that originates somewhere between a tragic heroic narrative and a trickster myth. Trickster myths are realized in the Scandinavian mythology especially by Loki. Extraordinary conduct being associated with the tricksterly side of Loki emphasizes the entertaining value of these events by evoking the corresponding mythological frame of reference.

13.4.6 The Clever Survivor

Whereas the thunder god Þórr is depicted in the mythological texts as taking advantage of his straightforward physical superiority, the other members of the divine community prefer or need to resort to their wits. For instance, the key traits of Loki according to Snorri’s description are that he is cunning, prone to trickery, resourceful, and duplicitous. Snorri
even makes an analogue between Odysseus and Loki in *Gylfaginning* (Ch. 55), with the implication that the Turks called Odysseus Loki because he was their enemy and that this designation ended up in Scandinavia. Snorri was clearly familiar with the stories of Odysseus (*Ulixes*) and aware that his cunningness, which is so much praised in the Homeric story, could be turned against the subject as well. Loki’s resourcefulness in the *Poetic Edda* is evident for instance in the poem *Þyrmaskvida*, in which Loki joins Þórr on his journey to recollect his hammer from the giant Þrymr, both Lokin and Þórr being disguised as women. Quite resourcefully, Loki manages to find explanations to the characteristic behavior of Þórr that would otherwise betray his disguise as the goddess Freyja. In a similar vein, in the poem *Reginsmál*, Loki demonstrates his cunning intelligence by catching a dwarf who is in the form of a fish and to collect from him the amount of gold that is necessary for a ransom. Loki also demonstrates his cunning intelligence in the many narratives included in the *Prose Edda*, in which he functions as a helper of the gods or as Þórr’s companion. Cunning intelligence, hidden agendas and manipulation comprise a major share of Loki’s identity.

Kevin Wanner notes that, “Loki and Óðinn share a set of abilities and traits that make them both paradigmatic instantiations of cunning intelligence” (Wanner 2009, 221). The *Prose Edda* depicts Óðinn predominantly as a dignified chief god, and Óðinn appears as a narrative actor with identifiable characteristics only in the narrative about how he acquired the mead of poetry (*Skáldskaparmál*, Ch. 2). In this narrative, Óðinn achieves his goal by first infiltrating into the vicinity of the mead’s possessor, Suttung, by getting hired by his brother, Baugi, with a fake name. As compensation for his labor, Óðinn demands a sip of Suttung’s mead. Baugi helps Óðinn find the mead inside a mountain, even though he makes a feeble attempt to stop Óðinn at the last moment. Inside the mountain, Óðinn seduces Suttung’s daughter, who is guarding the mead, and manages to escape with the mead. (This story is also reflected in stanzas 104–110 of *Hávamál*.) It is notable that, in this story, Óðinn assumes the role of the unreliable companion that does not fundamentally differ from that of for example of the Masterbuilder discussed above (see also chapter 8.2.3).

Óðinn’s cunning intelligence manifests in the *Poetic Edda* also for instance in *Vafþrúðnismál*. In this poem, Óðinn approaches the well-informed giant Vafþrúðnir in disguise in order to gain knowledge about the creation and destruction of the world (compare *Völuspá*, *Hávamál*, *Grímnismál*). Óðinn gets this information only by agreeing to a competition of wisdom with the giant. He wins their competition by
putting forward a question which only he can know the answer: what Óðinn whispered in the ear of his dead son Baldr. (Vafþröðnismál 8–9, 54.) These examples demonstrate that the cunning intelligence associated with Óðinn does not indeed differ much from that associated with Loki. They both use it in the myths to deceive and to manipulate others. This is the function of cunning intelligence associated with the outlaws who struggled to survive in the Family Sagas. The “wisdom” (viti) that is foregrounded as a formidable quality of the heroic outlaws Grettir Ásmundarson, Gísli Súrsson and Hörðr Grimkelsson, apparently refers to exactly this kind of cunning intelligence (see chapter 7.2). It enabled the outlaws to survive in outlawry for the period of time that they did.

John Lindow (1989) suggests that the central scene in Bandamanna saga, which appears as an exceptional parody among the Family Sagas, strategically imitates Lokasenna. In both texts, the focal character enters a ritual stage by trickery and the weaponry he uses against his opponents is verbal. Whereas in Lokasenna, Loki insults each of the gods present at the feast he has been rejected from, in Bandamanna saga, Ófeigr insults a group of chieftains one by one. Ófeigr does this as an apparently appropriate part of a court procedure in which he first defends his son’s claim to have Öspakr Glúmsson sentenced to full outlawry (by bribing the judges) and then defends himself against summons of bribery. Lindow sees in Ófeigr’s character the kind of cunning intelligence that is characteristic of Óðinn and Loki. Lindow is ready to “[…] suggest that the figures of Loki and Óðinn appealed to the narrator and audience of Bandamanna saga because of the deep seated psychological appeal of the trickster figure” (Lindow 1989, 256). William Pencak does not see it necessary to interpret this scene in light of the myth but instead, he interprets it legalistically as the climax of a successful legal process that is won by illegal means (1995, 103–106). However, the mythological frame of reference was nevertheless potentially present even in this case.

Another example of a potential reference to Lokasenna in the Family Sagas is found in a scene in Grettis saga (Ch. 72). In this scene, the outlawed Grettir Ásmundarson gatecrashes an assembly in Hegranes in order to participate in the entertainments (aðdrátt) that take place at the assembly site. He manages to get a guarantee of inviolability after which he humiliates those that are present, many of whom were in fact his enemies. He does this by being victorious in the wrestling contest and proving stronger than two of their strongest men together. This episode calls for comparison with Lokasenna (cf. Frog 2010, 272–277). The poem describes how Loki returns to the feast after being banished for killing the Sea God Ægir’s servant, only in order to rudely insult each and every one of the gods present. In both texts, the outlawed gatecrasher’s only motive
to intrude on the feast is to undermine the standing of the participants. The lengthy scene in *Grettis saga* is not crucial for the larger saga plot. Instead, it effectively makes a connection between Grettir and the figure of Loki.

Cunning intelligence is a significant element of Óðin’s character, and it is also reasonable to consider Loki as a potential mythological exemplar of this quality and associated identity. Loki is identified as responsible for a killing within the community of the gods, and he is pursued and punished like an outlaw for this crime. The mythological referents for cunning intelligence in connection with the outlaws in the Family Sagas in either the character of Óðinn or Loki may have depended upon the position of the outlaw character either as a sympathetic focal character or as a despised secondary character. However, it is not possible to put it that simply, as the examples connected to major outlaw heroes demonstrated.

**13.5 Mythology-Related Motifs**

**13.5.1 Hanging**

Even though hanging as a punishment was not included in Icelandic medieval law, the Family Sagas imply in four occurrences that it was used as a punishment for theft (Gade 1985), as discussed above in chapter 5.4. For instance, according to *Grettis saga* (Ch. 52), the men of Vatnsfjörðar attempted to hang Grettir on a gallows for stealing sheep, and only the interference of the influential lady Þorbjörg digra saved him. As such, hanging was a customary alternative to outlawry and worth considering in connection with the mythological frame of reference.

The motif of hanging appears to have been centrally connected to the identity of Óðinn. Óðinn is designated as the “god of the hanged” (*hanga Týr, hanga goð*; Egilsson & Jónsson F. 1931, 227; *Gylfgaeding*, Ch. 20), and the centrality of hanging in the myth of Óðinn is apparent also in the poem *Hávamál* (138), in which it is described how Óðinn sacrifices himself by hanging himself from the World Tree. *Gautreks saga* (Ch. 7), one of the Legendary Sagas, recounts how King Vikarr is sacrificed to Óðinn by being hanged and pierced with a spear. This passage suggests that in the period of saga writing, Icelanders harbored a conception that hanging was connected to Óðinn and Óðinn-related rituals.

There is a peculiar scene in *Hrafnkels saga* (Ch. 5) in which Hrafnkell Freysgoði and his men are hung from ankles before being released to
district outlawry. This has the potential for a strong association with the myth of Óðinn. Lars van Wezel noted: “Óðinn and Hrafnkell are hanged upside down, without the intention of being killed; both are severely wounded through piercing, and afterwards they experience a rebirth. A similarity in image can be established” (van Wezel 2001, 547). In van Wezel’s interpretation, this hanging makes a conscious reference to a ritual (2001, 551), hence explaining and grounding the following vicissitudes of Hrafnkell’s biography.

In conclusion, hanging, like outlawry, was considered to be a consequence of a legal offence in the Saga World. However, the rare occurrence of hanging in the Family Sagas does not indicate that it created a strong referential connection between outlawry and Óðinn, unless perhaps in the specific case of Hrafnkell Freysgoði.

13.5.2 Aid from Women

As discussed previously in chapter 9.2, the relations between outlaws and women are depicted in the Family Sagas as representing a particular solidarity. The following myth about the thunder god Þórr provides a point of reference for the motif in the Family Sagas of an outlaw deciding to seek protection from a woman and the woman wanting to help him.

Under normal circumstances, owing to his equipment, Þórr’s position is secured in hostile lands. However, in the narrative of Þórr’s journey to the giant Geirrøðr (Skáldskaparmál, Ch. 4; the skaldic poem Þórsdrápa), Þórr is forced to travel to the land of the giants, Jötunheimar, without his equipment. According to this story, the giantess named Gríðr, the mother of Viðarr the Silent, accommodates Þórr and his companion on the edge of this hostile land. She provides Þórr with equipment necessary for his adventure (iron gloves, a power belt, and a staff), similar in nature to the equipment he is missing (power belt and hammer). Even though Þórr is normally represented as being ultimately self-sufficient on his campaigns, it does not seem to have affected his manly reputation that he is in such a threatened position that he resorts to accepting help from a female character who on the top of is also a giant. This passage suggests that it was approvable for even the most powerful of both men and gods to resort to the help of the weaker sex when circumstances were dangerous enough. Even if the parallel is too general to demonstrate a conscious referential connection between the Saga World and the mythological Taleworld, the narrative about Þórr provides a mythic examplar of
circumstances under which relying on a member of the opposite sex for help would be acceptable for a man.\footnote{See also \textit{Hymiskviða}. Here Þórr hides with Týr from the giant Hymir, following the advice of Týr’s female relative.}

13.5.3 Use of a disguise

The recurrent, conventional motif of using a disguise that is associated with outlaws and outlawry in the Family Sagas is also commonly associated with the mythological characters Óðinn and Loki. Using a disguise is a central motif in narratives about Óðinn and Loki, where it is an element of their identities as clever survivors. However, its connection with Þórr is noteworthy as well. According to 	extit{Gylfaginning} (Ch. 48), Þórr disguises himself as a youth when visiting the giant Hymir to go fishing for Miðgarðsormr, and according to the mythological poem 	extit{Prymskviða}, Þórr travels to Jötunheimar disguised as a woman – although only after his objections have been silenced by Loki.

Especially in the Legendary Sagas, Óðinn is characterized as a lone and disguised wanderer among people of the world. This character is an established figure in the mytho-heroic Taleworld. Being a stranger in the small, strictly confined Icelandic society that the Family Sagas depict required concealing one’s identity either by disguise or by providing false information about one’s identity. The outlaws in the Family Sagas, who appear among people as strangers, can therefore be considered associated with Óðinn.

As discussed in chapter 7.3, one could be disguised by either pretending to be an insignificant and hopefully uninteresting person, or by appearing to be a known person yet being someone else in reality. The purposes of one’s disguise could be either to gain something by appearing as someone else, or to prevent something from happening. In the outlaw narratives, the use of a disguise created expectations concerning what was to happen. The potential of an outlaw was hidden beneath the disguise but created narrative tension when the audience was aware of his potential while all of the narrative actors other than the focal character remained unaware of it. This is precisely the effect of Óðinn’s disguises in mythological narratives as well as in the Legendary Sagas.

Óðinn appears repeatedly in disguise in the myths. He often appears as a harmless old man with a hat pulled down over his face and with a staff in hand. He uses disguise both in the mythological Taleworld (for example, while meeting Þórr in 	extit{Harbardsljóð} and when visiting the home
of Vafþrúðnir in *Vafþrúðnismál*), and also in the heroic Taleworld (Lassen 2005, 99). The appearance of Óðinn in *Harðar saga* (Ch. 15), in which the disguised god helps Hörðr by giving him advice on how to open a mound, reflects a similar conception of Óðinn’s appearance as found in the Legendary Sagas. In this saga, Óðinn’s identity is revealed to the audience only afterwards, and his role in this narrative is that of a helper.

In the mythological narratives, Óðinn hides his identity in an attempt to obtain knowledge from otherwise reluctant informants, the giants. The same reason for disguise is encountered in the narrative frame of *Gylfaginning*, although with the tables turned. In this narrative, King Gylfí attempts to obtain knowledge by visiting the gods in disguise. Óðinn, deceiving him with illusions (hence *Gylfaginning*, “The Deluding of Gylfí”), provides information about the gods. This motif is not exclusive to the mythological narratives. A focal character also appears among people in disguise in order to gain information in one narrative about outlawry in the Family Sagas. According to *Fóstbreðra saga*, Þormóðr Bersason meets the famous tramp Lúsa-Oddi (“Flea-Oddi”) while he is hiding in Greenland in outlawry. He buys the tramp’s outfit. Using this outfit as a disguise, Þormóðr obtains information about the whereabouts of the intended targets of his revenge. (*Fóstbreðra saga*, Ch. 23.) Another very similar scene, although not directly related to an outlaw character, occurs in *Flóamanna saga*. In this scene, which is set in Greenland as well, the main character of the saga, Þorgils, pretends to be the vagabond named Án inn heimski (“Án the stupid”) in order to gather information concerning the location of a band of bandits who terrorize the area. Þorgils’s harmless appearance as a tramp is reinforced by the identity of an iconic representative of the group. (*Flóamanna saga*, Ch. 26.) Obtaining information in disguise is a motif that connects narratives about Óðinn and those about the Icelandic outlaws but the connection can also be established with other saga characters in addition to outlaws.

Within the heroic Taleworld, Óðinn’s appearance as a disguised figure is associated with the manipulation of other characters and events, or it is

---

303 For example, *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* (Ch. 10) recounts how Óðinn takes the shape of a farmer named Gestumblindi who prays for his help. Óðinn then appears before King Heiðrek, with whom Gestumblindi wishes to settle. The king states that if Gestumblindi can tell him a riddle that he cannot answer, then they will be settled. The king can answer any question but the one to which only Óðinn himself can know the answer, the question familiar from *Vafþrúðnismál*, although in this case the king realizes Óðinn’s identity and attempts to kill him. Óðinn escapes in the shape of a falcon and prophesies a miserable death for the king.

304 According to Terry Gunnell, the masks in these narratives may reflect the same complexes of traditional rites as the masks that survived in Scandinavia up to modern times (Gunnell 2007, 281–285 & ff.)
related to actualizing and determining fates. This purpose of disguising oneself is also found among the saga outlaws. According to Grettis saga (Ch. 63), Grettir’s pursuers catch up with him while he is on Reykjaheiði heath in eastern Iceland “together with another man.” His comrade goes into hiding with their horses, whereas Grettir confronts his pursuers in an Odinic costume, with a hat pulled down over his face and with a staff in hand. He guides the pursuers to the marshes where they are mired for an entire day. After this, Grettir sends his comrade and their horses to the west, whereas Grettir himself heads north, thus attempting to have the pursuers follow the wrong man.

In another passage in Grettis saga (Ch. 54), Grettir meets a mysterious man who rides the heath with a hat pulled down over his face. Grettir attempts to rob him of all the goods that he determines are necessary for his survival. However, the man, who introduces himself as Loptr, proves to be a too strong opponent to Grettir. In fact, Grettir is unable to even grab the bridle out of his hands. The Odinic costume of this man combined with his name, which is one of Loki’s names, emphasizes his hidden potential and mythic essence. Later in the saga (Ch. 57), Loptr returns to help Grettir repel an attacking enemy and then he reintroduces himself as Hallmundr. Now, he is represented as a half-troll who lives in a cave on the heath. Hallmundr embodies associations with both mythic characters and outlaws, and on the basis of the saga alone, it is difficult to determine which Taleworld he actually belongs to.

Another example of the Odinic costume occurs in Króka-Refs saga (Ch. 20). According to the sequence, King Haraldr of Norway sends a man named Eiríkr and his men to slay the outlawed Refr who lives in Denmark. When they arrive in Jutland, they meet a man who has a white beard and wears an old cloak. This man volunteers to show them the way to Refr. He then leads Eiríkr and his men into an ambush and reveals himself to be Refr himself. It is important to note that Refr’s cloak and beard makes a direct association with the stereotyped costume of Óðinn.

13.5.4 Use of a False Name

The use of a false or assumed name often appears in conjunction with the motif of assuming a disguise, as has been discussed in chapter 7.3. The use of a false name is also connected to the use of a disguise in mythology. In addition, the names of the outlaws (both false and actual) in the Family Sagas often have referents among mythological characters. The majority of Icelandic personal names in the Family Sagas are derived from the names of gods (as they still are today). The use of these personal
names in the Family Sagas occasionally, although certainly not always, refer to these gods or to the narratives in which they are involved.

Of all Old Norse deities, Óðinn is attributed with the most names; in *Grímnismál*, it is the sheer number of his names, associated with the various narratives and deeds associated with them, that suffices to reveal his identity. The use of Óðinn’s names as false names in the Family Sagas connects the scene in question to Óðinn and to myths in which he appears with a false name. An example of this type of use of a false name by an outlaw is in *Króka-Refr saga* (Ch. 20), in which the outlawed Refr deceives and overcomes Eiríkr and his men in his Ódinic disguise (addressed above), and in which Refr introduces himself as Sigtryggr. Sigtryggr is a pseudonym of Óðinn, and in this case it compliments other Ódinic motifs that characterize Refr as an Ódinic figure, establishing associations with the god that are unambiguous. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that earlier in *Króka-Refr saga* (Ch. 16), Króka-Refr introduces himself to the king of Norway as Narfi. Refr had become an enemy of a king’s man in Greenland and hence also the enemy of the king himself, and therefore he was forced to give an assumed name when appearing before the king. According to *Gylfaginning*, Narfi is the name of Loki’s son with whose entrails Loki was bound to a rock as a punishment. Króka-Refr’s use of that name may be an attempt to make an association with Loki, the mythic outlaw character, or to create anticipations in the readers of a revenge to come: according to the mythological texts, at the end of the world, Loki will lead the giants’ attack upon the gods. However, definitive conclusions cannot be drawn because there is too little evidence.

Some names are associated with Óðinn through being Óðinn’s names. The stereotyped pseudonym in the Family Sagas, Gestr (“Guest”), which is also used by the saga outlaws, may be a reference to Óðinn, through the name by which he is referred to in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*: Gestumblindi, “blind guest.” Grímr (“Mask”) and Kolgrímr (“Coal-Mask”) are other names used by Óðinn that are repeatedly used in association with the outlaws who appear in the Family Sagas as stock characters. However, a brief statistical survey does not indicate a strong connection between the names of the obscure god of poetry and war and the outlaw characters in the Family Sagas. The number of Óðinn-related names of outlaw characters (Auðunn, Geirr, Gunnar, Hrafn, Hrafnkell, Hraprpr, Sigr, Próttólfr, etc.) is, as is typical for Icelandic names, clearly lower than the number of names derived from Þórr. Although I have not conducted a thorough reference survey of the different names that appear

---

305 For Óðinn’s names, see *Grímnismál* 45 ff; *Óðinsnöfn*; Falk (1924).
in the Family Sagas overall, that type of a survey would probably not establish Óðinn’s pseudonyms to be exceptionally common among the outlaws. It also appears that the stock names Gestr and Grímr may be connected to certain outlaws for reasons other than for an association with Óðinn. This is because the nominal meanings of these names can be connected more generally to disguise and to being a stranger. Even though an Óðinn-name could complement a character’s identification with the god in conjunction with additional motifs (which is consistent with Óðinn’s own disguises as well as other characters assuming Odinic disguises), outlaws cannot be said to be generally characterized by Odinic names.

13.5.5 Crossing Water

A common motif that is connected to outlaw narratives is crossing a body of water, especially a river, under exceptional circumstances, as discussed above in chapter 7.3. This motif has parallels in two rather different mythological scenes.

_Gylfaginning_ recounts that as the gods approach Loki, who is hiding from them in a cave in the mountains following his orchestration of the death of Óðinn’s son Baldr, Loki transforms himself into a salmon and hides in a river ( _Gylfaginning_, Ch. 50). Even though transformation was not a plausible means of hiding for outlaws in the Saga World, it is noteworthy that rivers appear frequently in connection with them. A conventional narrative element of outlawry is the motif of the outlaw crossing a dangerous body of water, often a river, in order to escape his pursuers. This narrative element is referentially connected to Loki, but there were also practical aspects involved in associating rivers with the escapes of outlaws. Running water formed a hindrance to the swift movement of large troops and hence effectively prevented a superior force’s attack on the outlaw. Moreover, a strong current also presented a risk that was more readily acceptable to an outlaw in a desperate position than to his pursuers.

A person’s ability to challenge a strong current also served as means to demonstrate his strength. According to _Grettis saga_ (Ch. 63), Grettir Ásmundarson carries a mother and her child over a flooding river that is filled with blocks of ice in order to give them a chance to attend Christmas mass. This scene resembles a sequence in _Skáldskaparmál_ (Ch. 4), the events of which are also described in the skaldic poem _Pórsdrápa_. This sequence recounts how Þórr laboriously crosses a flooding river on his way to visit the giant Geirrød, carrying Loki on his belt. The flood
turns out to be caused by a giantess, hence Þórr’s crossing of the river receives signification as another triumph over the misdeeds of powerful giants. The parallel scene in *Grettis saga* precedes a sequence in which Grettir kills two trolls (Ch. 65–66). Therefore, the scene effectively guides the reader’s expectations with a grounding reference to the image of Þórr. In other words, how Grettir killed the two trolls is given a referential equivalent in the narrative that follows the river-crossing sequence in *Skáldskáparmál* (Ch. 4), according to which Þórr kills first the giantess at the river and then the giant Geirrðr (and according to Þórsdrápa, also all other giants who were present).

Using a river as a way to elude pursuers is a common motif in the outlaw narratives and makes a rather strong association with Loki’s attempt to flee as it is recounted in *Gylfaginning*. In contrast, crossing a river as a feat in itself appears connected to only one outlaw character, Grettir Ásmundarson. Therefore, the relevant myth about Þórr seems only to have referential value in connection with Grettir, although the parallel is quite interesting as such.

13.6 Þorleifr *jarlaskáld* – A Case of Manifold Referentiality

A biographical narrative of an outlaw could refer to many different myths and mythological characters. *Þorleifs þátr jarlaskáld* presents an illustrative example.

In *Þorleifs þátr jarlaskáld*, Þorleifr’s return to Jarl Hákon as an outlaw invokes mythological references through a number of motifs. Þorleifr disguises himself as a *stafkarl* (as Óðinn in e.g. *Vafþrúnismál*). He is invited to the table where he consumes massive quantities of food, which he however only pretends to eat, throwing major share of it under the table in secrecy. He then recites an insulting poem about the Jarl (thus earning his added name), and the poem turns out to have magic power as it makes weapons and other material fly around the room. Eventually, Þorleifr destroys the Jarl’s hall with this poem. The destructive power of singing makes a direct association to Óðinn as the god of poetry, war and magic. The theme of penetrating a powerful enemy’s hall in disguise and destroying it corresponds to Frog’s description of the narrative behind *Prymskviða* and *Þorsteins þátr*

---

306 Another passage in the Family Sagas which could evoke association with this passage is Þórðr *hreða*’s heroic feat of saving people from drowning in a flooding, icy river by swimming (*Þórðar saga hreðu*, Ch. 2) but it differs from the myth to quite a degree.

307 The motif of massive eating as a divine feat appears in connection with Þórr in *Hymiskviða* and *Prymskviða* and Loki in *Gylfaginning*, 45–47.
bæjarmagns and its intertextual use in Bósa saga ok Herrauðs, where the objects in the hall also begin to move (Frog 2011a). This tradition connects the scene in Porleifs þáttr jarlaskálds and its focal character Þorleifr with god Þórr. Þorleifr’s extraordinary and powerful conduct as a stranger in the Jarl’s hall is grounded by references to mythological narratives that seem relevant in that they provide a meaningful frame of reference for an otherwise confusing scene.

In addition, another sequence in Porleifs þáttr jarlaskálds can be explained through a reference to mythology. According to this þáttr, Jarl Hákon, being furious to Þorleifr for the events described above, puts up a dummy that he brings to life through witchcraft and sends after Þorleifr. The confrontation between Þorleifr and the dummy results in their mutual destruction in a decisive battle. (Porleifs þáttr jarlaskálds, Ch. 8.) This sequence has a mythological parallel in the nearly complete mutual destruction of the gods and their adversaries in the mythic end of the world, Ragnarök. Þorleifr, who is the focal character of the þáttr and who is from Iceland, has a similar focal position in the narrative as the gods in the mythological descriptions of Ragnarök when the wooden magic-ridden contraption attacks him and when they both perish in the ensuing combat. Jarl Hákon must survive the conflict between himself and Þorleifr (as a historical fact), hence the mythological parallel remains incomplete. However, Þorleifr can gain an upper hand in the conflict posthumously by being associated with the focal in-group of the mythological Taleworld and by being referentially elevated to be equated with the gods (whereas the Jarl is simultaneously posited as being on the opposing side of giants and monsters).

The curious passages in Porleifs þáttr jarlaskálds discussed above are partially explainable through mythological references. It is neither possible to say whether this was the intention of the saga writer nor whether the contemporary audiences recognized the mythological references as relevant. Nevertheless, the obscurity of the two scenes calls for explanation from outside everyday experience, whence the mythological frame of reference becomes potentially relevant and may provide quite reasonable explanations.

308 In Prymskiða and in the folk tale correspondents of tale-type ATU 1148b, the protagonist loses the thunder-instrument, penetrates the thieving creature’s realm in a disguise (as a servant; as a bride in Prymskiða), regains the instrument and uses it to destroy the adversary (and the adversary’s realm). In Porleifs þáttr jarlaskálds, Þorleifr returns to the king in disguise and uses the opportunity to sing for revenge. The lack of a recollected instrument is the main difference between these narratives, but the similarities are notable enough to indicate the connection as relevant, particularly if Þorleifr’s performance engaged the metaphor of music as is explicitly the case in Bósa saga.
13.7 Conclusion

The myths represent another mode of traditional narrative that was oriented towards the Saga Age because the mythological narratives were connected to the beliefs of the Saga Age. This emphasized the difference between the Saga Age and the period of saga writing. In medieval Iceland, myths in their poetic and prose forms received interest and were told and retold as formidable pieces of narrative, while their ancient and sacral aura added to their attractiveness. As traditional references in narrative art, associations with mythology provided the narrated events with significance and also provided the narrative characters with depth.

In the Family Sagas, the mythological texts serve as a frame of reference primarily in three ways. First, the Family Sagas may refer to pagan rituals, practices and beliefs, the often dreadful consequences of which may be used to warn the audience against any intention towards the old native faith. Second, mythology provided the Family Sagas a narrative frame of reference that included a cognitive model to produce and conceive narrative. Third, the references to mythology in a narrative contributed to a general “mythic” atmosphere or a sense of importance that was associated with the events described in the saga text. Outlaws were mysterious and enthralling characters and, as such, they attracted mythic attributes. Fulvio Ferrari (2006, 212–213) has pointed out that for instance, in the ‘realistic’ Njáls saga, the most mythical character is an outlaw, the “enigmatic wood-cutter Tófi.”

Different deities could serve as referential identity models and sources of characterizing motifs for outlaws, both through the gods’ dominating characteristics and through the narratives in which the gods function as protagonists. The mythological characters’ dominating features are not clear-cut or exclusive, nor are the motifs in the myths each associated exclusively with a single mythological character, and this makes it difficult to determine any one mythological character as being a saga character’s mythological referent.

The thunder god Þórr is similar to Loki to the extent that social norms do not bind him – he can freely break an oath if it supports the case of the gods, as in Lokasenna in which he is willing to break the sanctity of the festive hall by threatening Loki with violence (Clunies Ross 1994, 263) or in the Masterbuilder Tale in which he slays the giant who built a fortification for the gods, contrary to the oath that the gods had made (Gylfaginning, Ch. 42). This however construes Þórr as the ultimate protective figure, which drastically differentiates him from Loki. The
protective function is relevant for outlaws in the Family Sagas only in one rather exceptional, although influential case: Grettir Ásmundarson.

Óðinn represents the mythic model of an anonymous character who is dressed in a humble cape to suggest an insignificant identity, yet who possesses immense potential. The image of Óðinn in this conventionalized capacity is activated in corresponding scenes in the narratives about outlawry in the Family Sagas. Cunning intelligence, the abilities to see the future and compose poetry as well as narratives about sexual adventures are not uncommon in connection with the outlaws. These motifs create referential connections to Óðinn. As an authority of the divine community, as Snorri depicts Óðinn in the Prose Edda, Óðinn does not serve very efficiently as a mythological referent for an outlaw who was banished from his society. Nevertheless, the treacherous and cunning characteristics of Óðinn were referentially invoked in numerous connections.

As discussed in chapter 8.3.1, in numerous Family Sagas, an outlaw may cause a smouldering conflict between two parties to blaze up, either by the actions he takes or by his mere presence among either of the conflicting parties. Such incitement of conflict would not be convincingly possible for anyone who is an acknowledged member of another family group because, in that case, his family would be involved in the conflict. In other words, he needs to be either a member of one of the groups or an outsider, an external agent. The role of the external agent in the Family Sagas is connected to the mythological Taleworld in two primary ways: either the myths represent referential models or the mythological Taleworld is the outsider’s place of origin. According to John Lindow, Óðinn appears in Hrafnkels saga as such a referential model for Þorkell who is the helper of Hrafnkell’s adversary Sámhr. Þorkell appears suddenly and unexpectedly when help is needed, wearing a cloak and a weapon in his hand, he acts persuasively and sows discontent among kinsmen. (Lindow 1989.) Torfí Tulinius notes that these referential features of Óðinn are especially visible in Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks: “Ódinn is the agent provocateur who knows how to manipulate the characters in order to unleash the passions that have been aroused by the social structure but are normally curbed by morality and by men’s general desire to live in peace” (Tulinius 2002, 113). The role of an external agent who comes from beyond the social field within which the action takes place has a mythological referent figure in Óðinn who is the divine external agent to interfere peoples’ lives in the mythic narratives.

Among the Æsir, Loki is the most apparent referent figure for the saga outlaws. Loki is banished from among his in-group and he is associated with numerous characteristics as well as narrative motifs that are
connected to outlaws in the Family Sagas. The full members of the divine community, such as Þórr and Óðinn, serve as referents to the outlaw characters only to a limited degree and primarily only in those narratives in which these gods are acting outside their own society, among giants or among humans. In the mythological texts, Loki is not quite a member of the in-group but neither has he a position in any out-group, just like the outlaws in the Family Sagas.

The outlaws were posited at the limit of society and of civilization, and therefore outlawry is also connected to conceptions concerning mythic beings that belong outside Ásgarðr, the area of the gods. The associative link between outlaws and giants exists in their contrariness to the focal in-groups in their respective Taleworlds and in the consequent threat they pose to those in-groups. The association between outlaws and giants is further strengthened by their relatively closer connection to nature than that of the dominant groups in the respective Taleworlds: the giants were primeval beings associated with the uncultivated and wild mountains in the mythology, and the space that remained for outlaws according to the Family Sagas, as has been discussed, consisted likewise of the uncultivated and untamed proportions of Iceland.

Myths construct the meaningfulness of identity representations, motifs and stock scenes by providing a referent through which these are defined. The gods may function as mythic correspondences to the outlaws in those occasions when the gods are depicted in a moment of solitary helplessness in the face of an overpowering enemy and in a hostile territory. There are several such occasions in the adventurous myths with numerous gods as the protagonists. The correspondences between the narratives about such situations imply that the myths functioned as a frame of reference for narrating similar situations in the saga discourse. In other words, the mythological Taleworld was not considered fundamentally different from the Saga World.

Loki provided a mythic model for the conduct of an individual who was at odds with his own society whereas the giants functioned as referential figures who, in the mythological frame of reference, represented ultimate otherness that justified and elevated the merciless conduct against outlaws in the saga discourse. Loki’s character embodies the approved and even admired cunning intelligence that is associated with outlaws in the Family Sagas. The cunning intelligence of Loki, and

\[309\]

In the discussions of the conference Gods and Goddesses on the Edge: Myth and Liminality in the North (12.–13.11.2010, University of Iceland, Reykjavik) it was pointed out on numerous occasions that beings that belong to the boundary between the focal group and the “Other” are generally marked with qualities and properties that are especially characteristic of and significant to beings of the Other.
also of Óðinn, provided a mythological exemplum for the personal qualities and tactics that are required in defending oneself against an overpowering force, even if these qualities and tactics possessed little potential for obtaining honor within the social framework of the Saga World.

The social position of an outlaw between an in-group and an out-group in a saga narrative meant that the way that he is depicted depended upon the depicted social setting and the focalization of the narrative at hand. As discussed in chapters 8.2 and 8.3, the way that an outlaw is depicted in a saga narrative depends on his role in it. This depiction is connected to the corresponding referential models in the mythological Taleworld. The referential models for an outlaw from among the different groups of mythic beings largely correspond to the position of the outlaw either as a focal character, secondary character or subsidiary character in the saga narrative. This also means that different mythological referent groups could be evoked in connection with a single outlaw character. For example, Grettir Ásmundarson is the sovereign main character of his biographical saga, and as such, generally associated with the æsir. However, in many scenes of Grettis saga, he could be conceived in terms of an monstrous being (and hence a troll) as Richard Harris (1973) has shown (for further discussion, see chapter 14.3).
The outlaw was an exceptional character in being banished from civilization. Since he was exiled for the rest of his life, he was naturally compared with other non-human beings that also resided outside of human civilization. Understandably, those outlaws who were able to survive in harsh conditions were thought to be superior to their fellow humans. However, the heroism of outlaws was described in the same conventional manner as that of any other saga characters.

The mythical heroes of the past were conceived of as being mortals. Even Ari Þorgilsson, the writer of Íslendingabók, who is acknowledged for his analytical and critical approach to history, drew his lineage from the earliest Scandinavian kings who are also known as gods in the mythological texts (Íslendingabók, 27–28; see also Jónsson F. 1911, 4–10; Lindow 2002, 110–112). However, as attested in the famous wedding scene of Reykjahólar in Sturlunga saga, heroes were most likely easier to identify with than the gods (see chapter 2.2 for information about the wedding).

The Family Sagas describe the roots of the Icelanders, the great settlers and their descendants and the early formation of specific habitats that existed when the Icelandic Commonwealth was taking shape. As Jan de Vries observes:

The saga cannot be compared with the heroic epic, though there are points of similarity […] Yet it does not escape a certain tendency to the heroic. Its figures, at least the main characters, however much they are drawn as human beings, are no ordinary people, but the great figures of a great past. They have more or less become types. (de Vries 1963, 98.)

Although de Vries rejects viewing sagas as “epics”, Family Sagas as well as especially Legendary Sagas and Kings’ Sagas nevertheless come quite close to the definition of epic proposed by Lauri Honko (1998, 28): “Epics are great narratives about exemplars, originally performed by specialised singers as superstories which excel in length, power of expression and significance of content over other narratives and function as source of identity representations in the traditional community or group receiving the epic.” Honko identifies the specialists in the genre as “singers” according to the types of oral genres that he emphasizes, but the sagas as preserved otherwise do appear to represent a (written) genre intended for performance associated with (literate) tradition specialists (see further chapter 4) who were potentially quite concerned with providing sources of identity representations linked with ideologies and aims of group solidarity (see also chapter 12). Placed in dialogue with this definition of epic, the tradition communities or groups for whom Legendary Sagas and Kings’ Sagas could qualify as epics would be potentially quite large and diversified. In contrast, the communities or groups for whom the Family Sagas would qualify as epics may have been more limited to Icelanders or even to networks of Icelandic kingroups.
Almost all of the saga characters are attributed positive characteristics. Indeed, only the anti-heroes at the lowest social level are depicted in exclusively negative terms. However, certain characters are elevated as being above others and are depicted in an exemplary manner. For example, the outlaws’ residence on the edge of human sphere of habitation potentially attributed them with the exceptionality that is required of a hero.

Since outlaws’ societal ties were cut, they are treated as individuals in the Family Sagas. Even though the social networks of outlaws are portrayed in their biographies (especially in Gísla saga), the majority of the outlaws in the Family Sagas are presented as rootless characters. In principle, the actions of outlaws only had consequences for themselves and not for their families. Whereas the social networks of an ordinary man would bear the consequences of his actions together with him, the families and allies of an outlaw were free to choose their degree of involvement in his fate, as discussed in chapter 9.4.4. This setting emphasizes the nature of the outlaw as an individual in contrast to the actors in those saga narratives that concentrate on feuds between large groups of people, mostly families or alliances. The idea of an individual being worthy of a biographical saga is referentially connected to heroic narratives because these narratives focus on the celebration of an individual’s feats. Hence, the elevated individual who resided outside society was associated with the legendary heroes. Furthermore, the heroes depicted in the Icelandic narrative tradition were warrior heroes. The conventions of the heroic traditions behind saga narration were also applied to describe the focal characters in the Family Sagas.

This chapter discusses how this heroic frame of reference affected the representation of outlaws in a positive light, where this was required by their focal role in the narrative. However, the outlaws are not always portrayed as protagonists. Sometimes, they are assigned minor roles or they are portrayed as antagonists, and this portrayal was also influenced by the heroic traditions. In section 14.3, I will discuss this representation of an outlaw as the adversary of the hero. The heroic traditions may explain how a disrupter of social order, an outlaw, could receive sympathy in a literary genre that predominantly reflected and supported the ideology of the ruling social strata and the ideal of social stability.

14.1 The Concept of the Hero

The term “hero” signifies a narrative character that is distinguished from his reference group by his superior qualities (Chadwick 1986, 95),
which are manifested through his accomplishments. It is necessary to emphasize that a hero is exclusively a narrative character – the hero is flawless, unlike a living person. The fact that no man is perfect is awkwardly present in any observable individual and prevents him from becoming a superior character in the true sense of the term.

As W. M. S. Russell (1984, 112–117) has observed, the concept of a hero has a long history. For the Hellenes, heroes were known for both their bravery and skill and they were recognized as being more daring than others in society. In short, heroism consisted basically of abilities (arête) without moral connotations or requirements of the way these abilities were used. Homer called warriors of the upper class heroes, a term which connoted protection. In later usage, the word hero has referred to the first and best of people, but in the Homeric sense: it did not mean a person without a fault. For instance, Homer describes the behaviour of Achilles as being questionable early in his career whereas Achilles assumed conduct suitable for a hero only later. However, a warrior had to have feats that benefited the society or its members, positive feats, to be called a hero. Following this principle, heroism came to signify men who helped their country and protected it against ancient horrors and other supernatural threats. Cicero was the first to use the Latinized term hero in approximately the same sense as it is currently used: for a “person who suffers in order to do good to people” (Russell 1984, 127). In time, the character of the ideal warrior transformed into that type of hero that is familiar from medieval romances (Blacker 1984, vii).

A hero uses his abilities to protect his community against overwhelming threats. Nonetheless, the same abilities, in the possession of an individual, can simultaneously pose a potential threat to the community. Conquering an overwhelming adversary requires the ability to respond to the threat that this adversary poses, and a hero therefore always possesses similar qualities as his adversary. A hero protects his community, but in order to be able to achieve this, he cannot be a full member of that community. In other words, a hero is situated somewhere between his community and the adversary of that community. A hero is not necessarily a warrior. Instead, the cultural surroundings and the historical situation affect the qualities of the exemplary heroic figure. For example, Daithi O’Hogain has argued that the heroic figure and characteristics attached to him have to correspond with the worldview of the majority of the community so that the tradition can continue. People do not elevate a character to a heroic status unless they feel at least some type of sympathy towards him. (O’Hogain 1985, 307.)
The heroes in the saga literature are warriors. Jan de Vries emphasizes that the warrior hero shares the values of a warlike aristocracy, and thus belongs to a definite historical era. The exemplary figure of a warlike community is naturally a warrior, and the virtues of a warrior are a readiness to die young, a desire for fame and an avoidance of shame. (De Vries 1963, 180–182, 184–189.) In other words, the duty of a hero in a heroic narrative is to act out those values that a community counts as sublime and ideal, without sparing himself (Bowra 1952, 61–64, 102). Nora Chadwick (1986, 74) has pointed out that the virtues of a hero in an aristocratic warrior community are, quite expectedly, physical courage and loyalty, and the leaders are additionally supposed to be generous towards their followers. A hero embodies such values and behaves accordingly.

The justification for a hero’s actions originates somewhere other than in the society to which he belongs. Aaron Gurevich has observed that,

[…] the heroic consciousness is not concerned with moral evaluations; it does not make any judgements. The hero of Germanic pagan poetry rarely performs deeds advisable from a practical point of view. He is not concerned with anyone’s welfare, including his own […] Here, another kind of justice reigns. (Gurevich 1992, 140–141.)

In other words, the actions of a hero can be condemned in the mythical Taleworld but these actions need to be approved among the audience to whom his deeds are being narrated. As Anthony Low has pointed out, a hero’s actions are not evaluated according to the same moral code as the actions of ordinary men, and the heroic narrative does not bend to the complexity of the real world. A hero’s free will is to choose whether or not to do what is right. (Low 2003, 17.) For the European warrior hero, the ultimate motivation is fame that is achieved through feats of valor and violence. As the central value in the Family Sagas, honor, which directs the actions of the characters, corresponds to the fame that a hero seeks. The mechanisms of honor provided a field of black and white values. Within this field, heroism and anti-heroism or the goodness or un-goodness of actions were all deduced directly from the consequences of one’s actions for the honor of the actor and his reference group. (For further discussion on honor, see chapter 9.3.)

A central concept in the discussion on heroic narratives is the Heroic Age. This is a golden, ideal age in the past; however, it is not in a too distant past to be identified with, but far enough to gain a mythical glow: “an age famous in literature or tradition, in which heroic conditions are predominant” (Chadwick 1986, 11). Indeed, for medieval Icelanders, the
Saga Age was a period during which there was a place for individual heroic deeds and in which they were even necessary. The age of the Legendary Sagas (*fornaldarsögur*) was the time of Scandinavian heroes because it preceded the settlement of Iceland, whereas the era of Iceland’s own heroes began in the Settlement Period (see chapter 4.1). The difference between the Saga Age and the perceived reality during the period of saga writing, partly reflected in the Contemporary Sagas, becomes evident in differences between these two saga genres (see chapter 15.2). Regardless of whether or not the medieval perception of the Saga Age was as a Heroic Age, the biographies of celebrated individuals in the Family Sagas comply with conventions that have been used in heroic biographies throughout history.

### 14.2 The Pattern of a Heroic Biography

Scholars have noted similarities in the heroic traditions of a wide geographical area that also includes Scandinavia. In the late nineteenth century, structural patterns were recognized in the heroic biographies in Indo-European cultures, and these patterns are reflected in the biographies of superior individuals in a wide range of narrative traditions. Although these patterns were not recognized in the Middle Ages, they aid the modern reader in understanding the biographies of celebrated, exceptional individuals, such as the outlaws in the Family Sagas, and to conceptualize the structural and formal features in them.

Indeed, Indo-European heroic traditions seem to be structured in a conventional way. As early as in 1876, J. G. von Hahn published a study in which he attempted to define a typical pattern of a heroic biography (Taylor 1964, 114–116; O’Cathasaigh 1977, 7). Since then, several scholars of mythology and literature have formulated patterns based on a wide corpus of heroic biographical narratives. For example, Otto Rank (1990) and Lord Raglan developed rather similar detailed patterns simultaneously and apparently independently. According to Lord Raglan (1936, 178–189), a set of twenty-two narrative items is regularly repeated in Indo-European heroic narratives. However, this pattern does not fit perfectly in any of the twelve heroic narratives that Raglan consulted as his material, which makes the pattern rather more descriptive than defining. The same applies to the pattern of a heroic biography that was constructed by Jan de Vries, who analyzed it pragmatically, aiming for a pattern that would describe as wide a sample of Indo-European heroic narratives as possible. These patterns concentrate on describing the key structural elements of a considerable number of heroic biographies, rather
than capturing the diversity of the heroic traditions. Nevertheless, these patterns indicate that heroic biographies have been conceived of and recounted predominantly within certain conventional structural terms for a long time and across a wide range of cultures.

Jan de Vries (1963, 211–216) describes these terms by listing the biographical elements that regularly appear in heroic biographies:

1) Begetting of the hero: a) mother is a virgin; b) father is a god; c) father is an animal, often a god in animal shape; d) the child is begotten in incest.
2) The birth of the hero: a) unnatural; b) hysterectomy
3) The youth of the hero is threatened: a) the child is exposed; b) animals feed the exposed child; c) shepherds find him; d) a mythical being raises him
4) The way the hero is brought up: a) hero shows his capabilities at a very young age; b) he is slow in development
5) The hero often acquires invulnerability
6) Battle with a dragon or a monster
7) The hero wins a maiden, usually after overcoming great dangers
8) The hero makes an expedition to the underworld
9) The hero is banished in his youth, he returns later and is victorious over his enemies. In some cases he must once again leave the realm which he has won with such difficulty.
10) The death of the hero: young, and miraculous.

This pattern of a heroic biography is relevant for understanding the outlaw biographies in the Family Sagas. This pattern can be used as a tool for considering the biographies of individual outlaws, not as unique personal histories (which also tend to follow certain patterns), but as tradition-based biographies. In tradition-based biographies, the personal histories of individuals were cast into a traditional “mould.” This “mould” comprised the process of orally transmitting the biography of an individual across centuries. In this process, the biography was refined into those elements that gradually conformed to the collectively acknowledged expectations of a schematic representative of the group of narrative characters with which he was associated.

Jan de Vries’ list contains many characteristics of the schematic outlaw biography that is recognizable in the Family Sagas. The extraordinary happenings in youth that predict the individual’s later career, his banishment and the consequent expedition to an alien spatial sphere (“underworld”), his feats such as battling with an overpowering
enemy and winning a noble maiden, as well as his death under extraordinary circumstances at an early age, all also characterize the biographies of those outlaws who are the main characters of sagas. For example, Lotte Motz (1973) applied the heroic pattern of de Vries to *Grettis saga*, which is what I did as well in Ahola 2000. Motz found numerous items of the pattern in Grettir’s biography: a) divine or semi-divine parentage; b) superhuman feats of strength; c) a voyage to the beyond; d) winning of a maiden; e) defeat of a monstrous being inimical to man; f) an early death. Motz suggested that the biography of a historical character who was conceived to resemble heroes in some aspect borrowed narrative features and biographical elements from the heroic traditions. This observation stresses the fluidity and interconnectivity of narrative genres in medieval Iceland, which also included the interpretation and representation of history. (See chapter 7.3 for further examples of this.)

According to Joseph Campbell, a significant, universally shared element in heroic narratives is the tripartite narrative structure of a journey. This includes a separation from the world, a discovery of some source of power, and a life-enhancing return (Campbell 1968, 35). This structure has an incomplete parallel in the Travel Pattern, which concentrates on the Icelanders’ successful conducts in the “otherworld” of the Norwegian court (see chapter 8.3.3). The separation from home and the consequent differences in the setting sufficiently associate the court with the otherworld, despite the fact that even the royal Norwegians were humans. For example, Hörðr’s journey abroad in *Harðar saga* (Ch. 12–20) appears as a heroic journey abroad (and to the underworld that is represented by the grave mound that Hörðr penetrates in chapter 15), and he returned from that journey with a royal spouse and thirty followers and redeemed his inheritance. Another example is in *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* in which Hrafnkell’s banishment to district outlawry and his subsequent return to his previous position can also be read as reflecting this structure. In contrast, Gísli Súrsson (*Gísla saga*) is a rather more static character than the other major outlaw heroes in this respect, as his biography is an account of successive escapes (like is that of Króka-Refr).

---

311 I conducted this analysis in my MA thesis (Ahola 2000) without being aware of Motz’s article. The method that I adopted for my analysis generally corresponded to Motz’s whereas we arrived at different conclusions. I used the heroic pattern as a tool to bring the Icelandic prose material to a comparable level with Finno-Karelian epic poetry. On the contrary, Motz treated Grettir as a “remodelled and redrawn” character from an older heroic tradition that, according to Motz, eventually had become a stereotyped image of literary and legendary heroic characters (Motz 1973, 91–92). She used the pattern as evidence of some type of ancient heroic rituals that Grettir’s biography would have reflected. Motz’s conclusions were difficult to accept by Ian Whitaker (1977), who criticized Motz’s methodology as relying on apparently randomly chosen comparative materials (Whitaker 1977, 146–147).
However, Gísli approached the otherworld, from which he gained superior knowledge (in the form of prophesies and retrospectively approvable rules of conduct in Christian sense), albeit only through dreams. The final example is Grettir Ásmundarson’s first journey to Norway (*Grettis saga*, Ch. 17–24), which is depicted as a series of successful feats of valour and a glorious return. In contrast, his second journey to Norway (Ch. 38–47) was a series of dreadful failures (Ahola 2005, 168–172; see also chapter 8.3.3).

14.3 The Hero’s Mythic Adversary

A hero’s adversary must be highly exceptional so that the hero receives recognition for defeating him. Superiority over one individual can only be considered as superiority that is restricted to that particular individual. However, if the hero is able to defeat several individuals at a time or especially if the hero’s defeated adversary originates beyond the sphere of ordinary humans, the hero can then gain recognition from the victory as being superior to any single ordinary individual. In short, the antagonist of a hero needs to be extraordinarily fearsome in order to contribute to the hero’s heroism.

In the medieval Icelandic texts, giants and trolls represent the otherness in relation to the focal group and consequently, they pose the primary external threat to this group. Whereas giants reside in the mythological Taleworld, trolls and half-trolls represent the mythic external threat in the Saga World. The trolls and half-trolls seldom appear in those Family Sagas that are socially oriented, and their appearance in these sagas is presumably connected with concurrent folktales and local folklore. The mythological forces of chaos, the giants, were seen as the epitome of danger, and thus, references to them emphasized the dangerousness of these beings.

Both the hero and his adversary are placed outside of human civilisation. The hero has origins in the human community and he maintains connections to it. However, to be able to conquer a non-human adversary, he needs to possess or to adopt non-human qualities. Riti Kroesen (1996) has noted that the relationship between heroes and giants is ambivalent; the heroes fear and envy the giants but also imitate them in order to overcome them. Similarly, the characteristics of heroes and monstrous beings are rather similar, and the definition of a narrative actor as a representative of either of these categories depends predominantly on the narrative point of view.
Those outlaws who could survive in the terrifying interior of Iceland were attributed with extreme qualities. Furthermore, in medieval Iceland, the deserted inland was associated with the uncontrollable, hostile Other. For this reason, the outlaws in the Family Sagas received characteristics that were typical of the beings that were associated with the interior, the trolls.

In the few instances in which trolls appear in the Family Sagas (these sagas being very close to the Legendary Sagas: Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss and Grettis saga), they are described as violent, harsh, emotionless, and pitiless creatures that resembled the nature up in the mountains itself. The distinctive features of outlaws and trolls merge together and, consequently, they can be perceived as inhabiting the same conceptual category. The stereotypical outlaw characters are big men who have extraordinary strength, they prefer to dwell in caves, and they constitute a threat to the ordinary people. These are a few common qualities for both outlaws and trolls.\(^{312}\)

The relatively insignificant function of the trolls in the whole corpus of the Family Sagas does not mean that trolls were marginal as legendary creatures in medieval Iceland. It rather reflects the fact that the Family Sagas are mostly occupied with other forms of tradition than those in which trolls appeared. The trolls are given many names in medieval sources: bergbúar, jötnar, þursar, risar, skessur, or gýgjur (Hastrup 1990, 260). This indicates that they were central to the traditional worldview of medieval Icelanders.

It is difficult to precisely differentiate between giants and trolls in the Saga World. Ármann Jakobsson (2005) classified the ambiguous figures of trolls and giants on the basis of Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss. This is a peculiar saga that can be counted among the Family Sagas by its spatio-temporal settings but it resembles Legendary Sagas by the cavalcade of non-human beings it represents. Jakobsson concludes that the giants (risi) were conceived of as big and fearsome but good-willing figures, whereas the trolls were conceived of as being variable in size, although always strong, and exclusively hostile towards people (Jakobsson 2005, 2). The Legendary Sagas mostly mention the troll (Kroesen 1996, 58) thus referring to a hostile creature that can be conquered with courage (Jakobsson 2008a, 182). It does not seem to matter greatly whether the hero has to do with a jötunn, a þurs or a troll, but the creature is usually

\(^{312}\) Moreover, ghosts “were metonymical non-humans. They were of the human world, but as apparitions they were no longer quite human” (Hastrup 1990, 265) and could adapt a similar role in the saga narrative to outlaws or trolls (for example, the haunting of Glámr in Grettis saga, Ch. 35). Outlaws were also conceptually close to ghosts in the sense that they were people who lived in a state between life and eternity.
something grotesque and often gruesome, and it is always ugly (Kroesen 1996, 58).

In contrast, in the Family Sagas, trolls comprise a category of beings that are more problematic to distinguish than those of risar or jötnar, because the term tröll is also used to refer to people with supernatural powers (tröldómr: “superhuman knowledge”) and only approximately one-third of the designations of the term refers to giant-like creatures (Jakobsson 2008a; 2008b, 44–48). Lotte Motz (1987, 298–302) states that “jötunn points to the giant’s ownership of nature, þurs designates mental deficiency and troll is used of giants who possess magic powers.” According to Martin Arnold, in the saga literature, a troll is an “indicator of something beyond the limit of social normality and acceptability” (Arnold 2005, 128). As such, the trolls create a similar horizon of expectations as the outlaws and hence it makes sense that despite the designation used to refer to them, the outlaws are represented by characteristics that are connected to the image of robust and violent inhuman beings that were associated with the deserted mountains. In the following discussion, I will use the term “troll” to differentiate the mythic being of the Saga World from “giant” that in this discourse refers to the corresponding being in the mythological Taleworld.

14.3.1 Trolls and Outlaws

Outlaws appear as troll-like figures in the Family Sagas and this is mainly based on their forced spatial belonging to the wilderness, on their exclusion from human society, on their social status that situated them beyond the norms of human behaviour and therefore made them threatening, and also on the physical strength and the respectable size that is often attributed to them in the saga narratives. Descriptions of Grettir Ásmundarson are outright (and purposefully?) trollish, especially on his second journey to Norway (Grettis saga, Ch. 38). A similar representation of Grettir appears in Fóstbræðra saga (Ch. 1) paralleled by a corresponding representation of Þormóðr Bersason in Fóstbræðra saga (Ch. 9): “It may be that they think it is a troll at the door when it is you.”313 This statement makes a direct connection between the stature of these “Grettir-type” heroes and trolls.

Even if this expression is only an attempt to address trollishness in terms of appearance, it simultaneously refers implicitly to other trollish qualities as well. This is emphasized by the accounts in Grettis saga in

313 “[…] má vera, at þeim sýnisk troll standa fyrir dyrum, þar sem þú ert.”
which Grettir establishes camaraderie with half-trolls (Grettis saga, Ch. 54, 57, 61) and in which he is even able to conquer hostile trolls in their own environment (Ch. 64–66). In the last part of Grettir’s biography, he is depicted almost as a troll who dwells in a place that is difficult to access and who causes damage to the local farmers. Furthermore, Grettir’s killer, Þorbjörn öngull, could be understood as the hero of the narrative sequence in which Grettir is killed even though Þorbjörn is severely condemned by the narrator immediately after the killing. Þorbjörn öngull is depicted as a kolbitur (Grettis saga, Ch. 70) and this fact, together with Þorbjörn’s notable family background that was mentioned above in chapter 10.2.1, imply that Þorbjörn could be conceived by the saga audience as the focal character of the sequence and that the killing of Grettir could be considered a feat of valor – as the killing of a monster (see Harris 1973).

The mysterious character Loptr, who later returns having changed his name to Hallmundr, appears in Grettis saga in Chapter 54. He responds to Grettir’s hostility with calm but overwhelming strength. In fact, Loptr is depicted as being stronger than Grettir, even though Grettir held the title of the strongest man in Iceland. Therefore, despite his anthropomorphic characteristics, Hallmundr seems not to be counted among humans. Later (Ch. 57), Hallmundr helps Grettir in his fight against overwhelming attackers as though he owes Grettir a favour from their previous encounter, and they become friends. Grettir stays on as Hallmundr’s guest over one winter. The nature of Hallmundr is never made clear, but he appears to have been some sort of half-troll, which is also indicated in Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss (Ch. 9) and in Bergbúa þátr. This last short story presents a poem entitled Hallmundarkviða (”Hallmundr’s poem”), which is put into the mouth of a creature that is encountered in a mysterious cave (see Ahola 2011, 41). In relation to Grettir, Hallmundr functions as a helper, whereas in his relation to his killer Grímr, as discussed above, Hallmundr assumes the role of a troll although a rather harmless one, not directly threatening to Grímr’s life or health. However, Grímr could show his valor by killing Hallmundr. In Grettis saga, Grímr is counted among the people from the human realm of habitation, whereas in Laxdæla saga (Ch. 57–58), Grímr is counted among the beings of the Icelandic interior. Furthermore, Grímr has a narrative role in relation to his pursuer Þorkell that is in some respects similar to Hallmundr’s relation to Grettir in Grettis saga. They both are attacked dwellers of the interior who spare the attacker’s life in spite of being capable of taking it (Ahola 2011, 43–44). This makes Grímr of Laxdæla saga a parallel character with his trollish adversary Hallmundr. This comparability of a hero and his adversary, who are indeed
differentiated solely by their roles in the narrative, effectively shows that the hero and the troll are essentially both of a kind.

The mythic, trollish and physically superior but nevertheless helpful as well as mysterious anthropomorphic being who dwells in the wilderness in these saga narratives has parallels in the outlaw characters in other Family Sagas as well, such as the wood-cutter Tófi in *Njáls saga* (Ch. 87) or the highwayman (*meinvættr*) in *Vatnsdæla saga* (Ch. 3). In *Vápnfirðinga saga* (Ch. 2), the outlaw Svartr makes a trollish impression indirectly through the armor that his opponent sees necessary to equip himself with: Brodd-Helgi hangs a stone plate on his chest in order to halt sword cuts.\(^{314}\) This is a very exceptional measure of precaution that creates an impression of an exceptionally dangerous adversary. This measure proves necessary as Svartr attacks Brodd-Helgi immediately without an attempt to communicate. However, the exceptional danger and brutal violence presented by Svartr can also be interpreted as something other than allusions to his trollish characteristics. Indeed, Svartr’s pursuer, Brodd-Helgi, was only twelve years old, which may be a justification for the “unmanly” armor he was equipped with, and Svartr’s hostile appearance, which seems almost inhuman, could well have been affected by the narrative laconism. However, with the other cases of an outlaw depicted as a troll, Svartr can be conceived as a trollish character whose killing brings Brodd-Helgi reputation as a champion.

The association of outlaws with trolls is related to the expressions of the saga outlaws’ extraordinariness. This extraordinariness is marked by their physical strength and the social and spatial positioning that is due to the sentence imposed upon them. This extraordinariness is also linked to being mysterious and it is manifested in being associated with the supernatural through the notions of fate, curses and prophesy. However, these elements do not qualitatively constitute a difference between a hero and a troll. Instead, this differentiation is made by the focal point of the narrative that is predominantly in the public social field in the Family Sagas whereas the outlaws are extraneous creatures in relation to this social field.

14.4 Heroic Poetry

The most archaic genres of heroic traditions, heroic poetry, have left evidence in medieval Icelandic literature. These poems were derived from

\(^{314}\) The same motif is applied in the Clint Eastwood Western “A Fistful of Dollars,” but in this case, it is the mysterious outsider who wears a stove door on his chest to deflect bullets.
the same Indo-European group of heroic traditions discussed above in connection with the pattern of a heroic biography. In the 1930s, folklorist Knut Liestøl established the connection between the heroic poems and the Family Sagas. Liestøl suggested the following:

Heroic poetry is no inorganic component of the saga. The sagaman [saga writer], meditating on his subject in his daydreams, was struck by certain resemblances to heroic motifs, and exploited his discovery. He did not, however, borrow mechanically [...] He kept the influence of the heroic poetry within narrow but natural limits. (Liestøl 1930, 179.)

Even though all Liestøl’s ideas about saga authorship cannot be considered to be valid, the idea of heroic traditions as an effective resource for saga narration is generally acceptable. Later, in the 1950s, Ulrike Sprenger argued that heroic poetry functioned as a model for the Family Sagas and that the similarities between the Family Sagas and heroic poetry are not limited to details but extend to stylistic features (Sprenger 1951, 118–119). Then in the 1960s, as was mentioned previously in chapter 8.3.1, Theodore Andersson focused on the structural patterns of the Family Sagas and discovered the diverse structural and motif-level connections between the Family Sagas and heroic poetry. According to Andersson, there are reasons to consider heroic poetry as being a direct structural model for the Family Sagas (Andersson 1967, 74–83, 92–93). Heroic poetry provided a traditional model for celebrating a hero’s accomplishments in a narrative form. It is plausible that the representation of a focal character and his behavior in a Family Saga, when it is intended to evoke sympathy and admiration in the audience, resorted to a traditional narrative form that was specialized for exactly these types of effects.

The heroic poems as well as the Legendary Sagas were recorded in writing at the same time as the Family Sagas. Torfi Tulinius (2002) concurs with Anne Holtsmark’s (1965) position that the Legendary Sagas are derived directly from eddic heroic lays as a type of expanded explanatory prose passages. Tulinius also considers that the Family Sagas “are the product of two traditions that had already been developing, the poetic and the historic traditions, which for ideological reasons came to influence one another and fuse together” (Tulinius 2002, 63). According to Tulinius, this development eventually led to the merging of the literary genre of the Family Sagas. In other words, heroic poetry and the saga literature, including both the Legendary Sagas and the Family Sagas, were both part of the same narrative tradition and each affected the other’s forms of expression.
14.4.1 Two Heroes of the Heroic Poetry

The heroes in the heroic eddic poems are rather straight-forward and superficial characters in the sense that was discussed earlier in relation to heroes in general. Sigurðr Fáfnisbani is a good example of this and he will therefore be discussed first. In order to introduce some contrast to this simplified image, I will however also discuss another slightly different type of a heroic character, Sigurðr’s half-brother Sinfjötli. These two are introduced here to demonstrate how different types of heroic characters may have relevance as referential characters for the outlaws in the Family Sagas.

14.4.1.1 Sigurðr Fáfnisbani

The most famous Germanic hero was Sigfried, or Sigurðr, whose most renowned and most oft-referred feat of valor was the slaying of the dragon Fáfnir (Talbot 1984, 16). The eddic poems Fáfnismál, Sigrdrífrumál, Guðrúnarkviða, as well as Sigurðarkviða in skamma narrate the different vicissitudes of Sigurðr’s biography (Sigurðsson G. 1999, 198–261), and Völsunga saga represents the prose narrative that surrounded the poetic tradition. Sigurðr is depicted as a brave, righteous and powerful warrior. After being involved in the complicated affairs of the court of King Gjúki, an assassin (his brother-in-law) finally murders Sigurðr in his bed.

Hermann Pálsson (2000) has noted that on the level of motifs, there are numerous direct allusions to Sigurðr Fáfnisbani’s biography in Gísla saga. For example, Sigurðr has his sword forged from his father’s old broken sword, and likewise the sword Grásída, which plays a major role in Gísla saga (Ch. 2, 11, 13, 16), is broken and repaired. Yet another example is Sigrdrífrumál’s narration on how a valkyrie teaches warrior ethics to Sigurðr. This is comparable to the dream-woman in Gísla saga who teaches Gísli a lesson in morals in a dream (Gísla saga, Ch. 22). As a final example, Sigurðr is finally slain in bed. The central killings in Gísla saga, which lead to Gísli’s outlawry, take place under similar circumstances and in a bed. In fact, the similarity is sufficiently evident that it may be due to an intertextual adaptation. According to Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (1986, 253–257), the account of Sigurðr’s death in Sigurðarkviða in skamma served as a model for the account of Þórgrimr’s death in Gísla saga (Ch. 16). In addition, Gísla saga even makes a direct allusion to the tradition surrounding Sigurðr in a poem that
is attributed to Gísli Súrsson himself (Gísla saga, Ch. 19). This poem is said to have been composed when Gísli heard that his sister Þórdís had revealed his guilt in the killing of her husband:

Wife veil-hearted wavering
Warped to miss, my sister,
Giuki’s daughter’s great heart,
Gudrun’s soul, stern moody. 315
(Translated by George Johnston)

In this poem, Gísli claims that he wished Þórdís had more of the spirit of Guðrún Gjúkadóttir, the wife of Sigurðr. Guðrún supported her brothers to extreme measures. When Guðrún’s husband, King Atli, had her brothers killed, Guðrún killed the children she had born to Atli and served them to him as a meal.

The poem effectively builds a referential bridge between the heroic Taleworld and the Saga World. This bridge underlines the difficulty of Gísli’s situation and his isolation from his family, and at the same time it establishes him as a hero comparable to Guðrún’s brothers. According to Anne Holtsmark (1965, 16), the poem suggests that “the saga-writer felt he could safely assume that his public would understand a rather guarded reminder of the Guðrún-legend.” Perhaps even more precisely, it is otherwise difficult to explain the poem’s presence in the saga.

Another example of a complicated relationship between a brother and a sister occurs in Helgakviða Hundingsbana II (st. 33). Here the motif of a sister turning against her brother and having him outlawed is conveyed in the image of Sigrún wishing that her brother Dagr would become a wolf that roams the forests and feeds on corpses. This wish is imposed on Dagr after he kills Sigrún’s husband. This poetic scene is reminiscent of the relationship between Gísli Súrsson and his sister. The latter indeed caused Gísli’s outlawry and the connection to the sequence in Helgakviða Hundingsbana II is evident if we bear in mind the semantic connection in the Icelandic context between a wolf and an outlaw.

All of these examples demonstrate how a heroic narrative was associated with the narration in a Family Saga and even affected it. For example, the family tragedies of the Völsung cycle did not seem to determine the structure and form of Gísla saga but they certainly affected its eventual form through references on different levels. These include referential associations, common motifs and even direct intertextual references. These repeated references to the mythic cycle produce an ongoing dialogue with the mytho-heroic Taleworld in Gísla saga. In

315 “Gatat söl fastrar systir / sveigar, mín at eiga / gætin, Gjúka dóttur / Goðrúnar hugtúnun.”
addition to the referential meanings thus generated, these references elevate the significance of Gísla saga to a mythic level and likewise elevate Gísli as a hero towards the most emblematic of the mythic heroes, Sigurðr Fáfnisbani. In terms of narration, this served to emphasize the tragedy of Gísli’s fate.

14.4.1.2 Sinfjötli

According to Völsunga saga, Sinfjötli is the son of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani’s father, Sigmundr. His mother is Sigmundr’s sister, Signý, who assumed the shape of a witch and seduced Sigmundr in order to bear a son who would be capable of avenging their father. Sinfjötli also appears as a wolf in Völsunga saga (Ch. 8). According to this saga, Sinfjötli and his father Sigmundr wear the wolfskins of two kings’ sons who have transformed into wolves and are only allowed to shed their wolf’s skins every tenth day. Wearing these skins, Sinfjötli and Sigmundr turn into wolves and they kill eighteen men. They are only able to rid themselves of the ill fates (óskop) of the wolf shapes by burning the skins. In this narrative, the wolf-shape is associated with hiding from hostilities in the woods after killing a societally central individual.

According to Helgakviða Hundingsbana I, the heroes of the poem, Sinfjötli and his half-brother Helgi, attack Guðmundr Granmarsson. Guðmundr then accuses Sinfjötli of “eating wolf’s food, killing his own brother, sucking on wounds, living in rocks” (verse 36). In response (37–39), Sinfjötli correspondingly accuses Guðmundr of being a witch-woman with whom he has begotten nine wolves. Guðmundr replies (40–41) that Sinfjötli has been gelded by troll-women and accuses him of living in the woods, of howling like a wolf, of killing his brother, and of becoming notorious for it. This exchange of insults between Sinfjötli and Guðmundr in Helgakviða Hundingsbana I, which includes references to wolves and trolls, is very interesting in light of the use of “wolf” both in connection with outlawry (see chapter 5.3) and with the mythological referents to outlawry (as discussed in chapter 13). The image of a wolf is also used in a poetic genre to express the negative attitude towards the state of being pursued in the woods.

Sinfjötli is a complicated heroic figure. However, as was mentioned earlier in this analysis, he is a recognized warrior hero, but having been transformed into a wolf seems to diminish his reputation in both Völsunga saga and in Helgakviða Hundingsbana I. Being a wolf (or an outlaw) in this poem is an element that occurs in the biography of the mythical hero (as mentioned previously). This element is nevertheless a subject of insult from Sinfjötli’s enemies and therefore presented as an
The indigenous Icelandic term for the saga genre here referred to as the Legendary Sagas, *fornaldarsögur*, “sagas of the ancient times,” originates in Carl Christian Rafn’s collection of saga editions, *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* (1829–30). Stephen Mitchell (1991, 27) has defined these sagas as “Icelandic prose narratives based on traditional heroic themes, whose numerous fabulous episodes and motifs result in an atmosphere of unreality.” Furthermore, in a somewhat later encyclopedia article, Mitchell elaborates on this definition by adding a “fondness for ancient settings, far-flung geographies, and one-dimensional heroes” (Mitchell 1993, 206). It also is possible to divide the Legendary Sagas into distinct groups. For example, folk-tale-like adventures with happy endings have been categorized as “adventure tales”, whereas in the “heroic legends,” the tragic death of the hero occurs through treachery (Mitchell 1993). According to Torfi Tulinius, from a literary (descriptive) perspective, the Legendary Sagas can be called “mythical-heroic sagas” (Tulinius 2005, 447). However, as was discussed in chapter 2.1, the distinguishing features that separate the Legendary Sagas from the other sagas are the former’s chronological and geographical settings.

The events in the Legendary Sagas occur before the settlement of Iceland, either in Scandinavia or elsewhere in Europe. Both the Family Sagas and the Legendary Sagas are narratives about the ancestors of medieval Icelanders, but the Legendary Sagas make no attempt to appear to be trustworthy accounts about the world as the audience conceived of it, but instead, they convey a world that was constructed to address the needs of the narrative at hand. Knut Liestøl (1930, 162–163) defined saga genres in terms of their formal features. To Liestøl, the distinction between the Family Sagas and the Legendary Sagas is, apart from their settings, related to the character description and the action accounts, which are more individualized in the Family Sagas, whereas the Legendary Sagas present stock material that resembles folktales. As Liestøl observes: “In their general character, in fact, they rather resemble folk-tales or romances” (Liestøl 1930, 163).

The Family Sagas and the Legendary Sagas orient differently to time. As has been discussed earlier, the Family Sagas approach chronicles in their precise temporal moment. In contrast, the Legendary Sagas portray
time as being more obscure. This means that the events in the Legendary Sagas are set in the “distant past” and the passing of time only has relevance internal to the narrative. In fact, the conception of time in the Legendary Sagas is closely related to that in oral traditions in general: rarely does any aspect of time, such as exact chronology, temporal setting or even the linear procession of time, play a significant role in them (Ong 1982, 97–98; Lüthi 1986, 21; Mitchell 1991, 54, 82). The treatment of time and space in the Legendary Sagas actually resembles the chronotope of “an alien world in adventure time,” emblematic of the Greek romance in Mikhail Bakhtin’s taxonomy (1990, 89). Time is therefore a nominal narrative framework: the passing of days and nights that does not affect the protagonists, and the order of events could sometimes even be changed without drastically disturbing the plot development. Moreover, concerning the spatial proportion of the above-discussed chronotope, the alien space is characterized by interchangeability. In other words, any location that qualified as an alien space could be exchanged for any other (Bakhtin 1990, 100). This holds quite true of the Legendary Sagas as well, although within the limits of the Taleworld that they represent.

In the terms of Mikhail Bakhtin, the difference between the Legendary Sagas and the Family Sagas is often arguably generic. However, the intertextual references between the different saga genres invite alternative interpretational models and horizons of expectation to the text being analyzed. For instance, when a narrative in a Family Saga is associated with the genre of the Legendary Sagas, supernatural intervention becomes acceptable and even predictable in the otherwise “naturalistic” saga discourse. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen addresses this by noting that

It may come as no surprise to find individual manifestations of the saga genre composed in such a way as to involve dialogic relations between different kinds of discourse within one text, each kind being distinguishable in terms of one or another of the saga’s descriptive sub-classes (Meulengracht Sørensen 1993a, 53).

In other words, a narrative feature in a Family Saga that resembles a typical narrative feature in the Legendary Sagas calls for interpretation not only in terms of the Saga World but also as related to the Taleworld of the Legendary Sagas.
14.5.1 Heroes of the Legendary Sagas

Here, the narrative feature in the Family Sagas that is interpreted in relation to the Legendary Sagas is the characterization of the saga outlaw and the stereotypical elements of his biography. Örvar-Odds saga, Áns saga bogsveigis and Sigrgarðs saga frækna provide examples of heroes in the Legendary Sagas who share representative features with the outlaws in the Family Sagas in these terms.

14.5.1.1 Örvar-Oddr

Örvar-Odds saga is a biographical saga that tells about the powerful warrior Örvar-Oddr who traverses the mythical regions beyond Scandinavia from Bjarmaland to Jötunheimar and from Russia to the Mediterranean. His fate is to live a long life (three hundred years, which is a conventional exaggeration for the genre) in spite of the numerous serious dangers and battles that he faces. Örvar-Oddr is victorious in his warlike endeavors and he defeats monstrous beings before eventually dying from a snakebite. The snake appears from the skull of the horse that had been predicted to cause his death.

Torfi Tulinius interprets Örvar-Oddr’s battle against supernatural opponents as a Christian’s fight against pagan forces and suggests that the structure of Örvar-Odds saga is modelled after a saint’s life (Tulinius 2002, 162–164; see also Ferrari 2006). A different viewpoint is expressed by Jónas Kristjánsson (1988b, 358), who suggests that Örvar-Oddr was popular because he was an image of an ideal viking warrior and that his being Christian was only of secondary interest. Örvar-Oddr was probably a popular character in the oral tradition in the thirteenth century (Ferrari 2006); the oldest manuscript that contains the saga is from the middle of the fourteenth century (Kristjánsson J. 1988b, 358). In other words, Örvar-Oddr was probably familiar to the Icelanders as a hero of the oral tradition during the period of saga writing. Örvar-Odds saga, which may or may not yet have been written in the thirteenth century, reflects this oral tradition to some degree.

According to Torfi Tulinius, the saga demonstrates that

[…] in lay society, one can win honor only by complying with certain rules and consenting to integration with the social structure that governs other members of that society. A life led outside this social structure can bring a modicum of glory and wealth, but further progress must come by way of the court. (Tulinius 2002, 162.)
This analysis provides an interesting point of comparison for many saga outlaws. The primary reason for outlawing those central outlaw characters who have biographical sagas dedicated to them was the conflict between their attempt to follow the heroic ideal and the requirements of the societal norms. Examples of this are Grettir Ásmundarson, Gísli Súrsson and Þorgeirr Hávarsson. The fugitive state provided these saga characters with the opportunity to demonstrate their superiority but it eventually led to their destruction. Similarly, Örvar-Oddr protects people against heathens and supernatural beings but he simultaneously has qualities that are associated with otherworldly characters. By possessing these qualities, Örvar-Oddr is capable of fighting dangerous adversaries.

Örvar-Odds saga provides a frame of reference for many outlaw biographies in terms of understanding the journeys abroad and in the wilderness as an opportunity to demonstrate one’s prowess. Örvar-Oddr is also an example of a legendary hero that does not differ fundamentally from his mythic adversaries and hence, he provides a model for Icelandic outlaws to be understood in positive terms even though they were associated with the fearful forces of the interior. However, the protective role that Örvar-Oddr assumes mainly corresponds to Grettir Ásmundarson among the saga outlaws.

14.5.1.2 Án bógsveigir

Áns saga bógsveigis is a Legendary Saga that contains many elements that are familiar from the Outlaw Sagas. Joost de Lange (1935, 129–132) suggested that narration in the Outlaw Sagas is based on a heroic tradition that is also reflected in this Legendary Saga. The name character of the saga, Án, is a Norwegian kolbítur. He enters King Ingjaldr’s court and is highly appreciated by the king for his great strength whereas Án is not very fond of the king. In a battle, Án shoots the king’s two brothers with arrows. Thereafter, the king has Án outlawed and Án flees to the forests in Eastern Norway. Án seeks shelter with a highwayman who turns out to be treacherous, and Án kills him. He finds shelter at a farm run by a woman, Jórunn. The farm profits greatly from Án’s work. King Ingjaldr sends killers after Án, but he repels them all. However, when the king attacks Án with a large naval force, Án is forced to flee. He flees to an island where his wounds are healed and he is treated by an old couple. After recovering, Án returns to the forests. One day, he meets a champion who is his match. This champion turns out to be his own son Þórir. Ultimately, Þórir avenges his father’s troubles by killing the king.
This saga introduces the family of Vatnsdælir as Án’s descendants. As was discussed in chapter 10.2.1, Grettir Ásmundarson also belonged to this family group. It is worth noting that Áns saga bogsveigis represents an outlaw as a legendary hero and that his story is told using the narrative elements of outlawry that occur in the Family Sagas, although seasoned with the exaggerated features that are appropriate to the Legendary Sagas. Áns saga bogsveigis is an example of how conceptions of heroism were connected to outlawry in the medieval Icelandic narrative tradition and how narrative elements of outlawry (see parallels in chapter 7.3) were applicable to texts in both these genres, that is, in narrating about an outlaw and his biography, be it based on oral tradition or on the writer’s intention.  

14.5.1.3 Siggrarðr frækni

Siggrarðs saga frækna is a narrative about the son of a Russian king, Siggrarðr, whose two friends are outlawed. Siggrarðr’s father gives him several ships and Siggrarðr travels in the Baltic Sea region, threatening people and womanizing everywhere he goes. He proposes in marriage to the bewitched queen of Taricia, Ingigarðr, who manages to prevent Siggrarðr from fulfilling his manly obligations during the three nights that they sleep together. Consequently, she drives him and his troops away. Siggrarðr returns in the shape of a viking, whom he has defeated during his voyage, and is accompanied by two peculiarly gifted friends that he has made along the way. On his arrival, Siggrarðr suffers a shipwreck and becomes dependent on Ingigerðr’s mercy but he remains unrecognized. He and his companions are compelled to complete a series of impossible tasks that they nonetheless perform. In the process, they overcome trolls, giants and other fantastic creatures. Finally, Siggrarðr and his two companions manage to undo the spell that has been cast on Ingigerðr and her two sisters. In addition, it is revealed that Siggrarðr’s two companions are actually his friends who were outlawed in the beginning of the saga. These three men subsequently marry the three maidens and everyone lives happily ever after.

As discussed in chapter 6.1.4, Siggrarðs saga frækna is included in Eggertsbók as the strange fowl among the Outlaw Sagas. Even though Siggrarðs saga frækna is the only Legendary Saga among the Outlaw Sagas, it does have thematic connections to the Outlaw Sagas. Like the

---

316 Joost de Lange interpreted the similarities between this saga and the remnants of the outlaw traditions in both England and in Iceland as evidence of these traditions having their origins in Scandinavia (de Lange 1935, 131). The relations between the outlaw traditions in Britain and in the Nordic areas are, however, beyond the scope of this analysis.
outlaws, Siggrarðr is represented as a wanderer whose solitariness or individualism is emphasized in addition to his superiority. Siggrarðr traverses hostile lands but acquires helpers and supporters from the creatures he encounters there, and he survives diverse situations by resorting to his resourcefulness and martial skills.

The fact that Siggrarðs saga frækna is included among the Outlaw Sagas in Eggertsbók implies that it was associated with them. The associative factor seems to be in the adventures of a wandering hero. Siggrarðs saga frækna has affected the reception of the Outlaw Sagas, at least wherever recited from Eggertsbók. It also probably called for reference in connection with other narrative elements involved in accounts of outlawry in the Family Sagas that could be associated with it.

For instance, an outlaw’s adventures among the opposite sex (see chapter 9.2) could find a heroic referent in Siggrarðs saga frækna.  

14.5.1.4 Starkaðr gamli

The legendary hero Starkaðr gamli Stórvirksson is recounted in Gautrekssaga and in Gesta Danorum (books 6–8). Starkaðr was a familiar figure to Icelanders as is evidenced by his appearance in the saga text and especially by the lengthy autobiographic skaldic poem Víkarsbálkr that is included in Gautreks saga and that has actually provided the core contents for the saga. This poem is attributed to Starkaðr gamli. However, Jónas Kristjánsson (1988b, 356) argues that this poem was composed in the eleventh century.

According to the accounts in these sources, Starkaðr was similar to the heroic figure of Örvar-Odd in that he was a solitary warrior who lived a long life and who accomplished his famous deeds in the service of nobles. At birth, Starkaðr was enormous, being a descendant of giants, and was later deformed by horrific wounds. Georges Dumézil describes him as being surly, brutal and isolating, without love and against the weakness of love; hardened by suffering and austere and frugal, without other passions but to fight in the service of chieftains. Þórr made him remain without progeny, and he was fated to commit three ignoble deeds. The first was the killing of King Víkarr. (Dumèzil 1970, 82–90.)

According to Gesta Danorum, Starkaðr was virtually immortal, but repeatedly received horrific wounds in the battles that he participated in.

317 In these terms, see for instance the romantic adventures of Búi in Kjalnesinga saga, Viglundr in Viglundar saga and Þormóðr Bersason in Fóstbræðra saga.

318 In Skáldatal, preserved in one manuscript of Snorra-Edda, it is reported: “Starkaðr inn gamli var skáld. Hans kvæði eru fornust þeira, er menn kunnu nú. Hann orti um Danakonunga.”
Especially memorable is a scene after a victorious battle against an overwhelming enemy when his intestines are hanging out, but he is too proud to allow men of lower rank, who happen to pass by, to provide him with help. Finally, he agrees to receive assistance from a farm owner’s son. (Davidson & Fisher 1999, 181–183.) Enduring these incredible sufferings seems to be a central, memorable element in the heroic figure of Starkaðr.\textsuperscript{319}

The characteristics associated with Starkaðr are similar to many outlaw characters and generally apply to the hero type in the saga discourse that Lars Lönroth refers to as the “Grettir type,” which was discussed in chapter 7.2. Numerous individual characteristics and motifs held in common with his figure and his biography characterize and signify the outlaw characters in the Family Sagas. The destructive qualities of a warrior, not always without harmful consequences for the nobles in whose service he is, characterize outlaw heroes such as Grettir Ásmundarson and Þorgeirr Hávarsson. The essential fate of almost any outlaw hero is severe suffering (see also chapter 12.4.1) and only a few outlaws are reported to have descendants (see chapter 10.3). Moreover, the impressive circumstances of Starkaðr’s death, articulated by the motif of the hero attempting to carry on fighting even when his intestines are falling out, find striking parallels in the deaths of two famous outlaw heroes, Gísli Súrsson (\textit{Gísla saga}, Ch. 38) and Þorleifr \textit{jarlaskáld} (\textit{Þorleifs þáttar jarlaskálds}, Ch. 7) that seem to be intertextually related to the story of Starkaðr.

As a poet and a destructive warrior – Starkaðr \textit{gamli} is independent of any single ruler and therefore a free agent – Starkaðr \textit{gamli} is a powerful image that hovers behind the outlaw poets (as discussed in chapter 7.2) of the Family Sagas. These outlaw characters are so central in the Family Sagas that they have a strong effect on the comprehension of outlawry in the Saga World overall. Therefore, Starkaðr \textit{gamli} is easily associable with outlawry in general. The three ignoble deeds that he was fated to accomplish, such as killing his king, could easily be punishable by outlawry and are linked to his role as a solitary agent. Because of the qualities mentioned above, Starkaðr is also a central link in the associative net that connects the saga outlaws to the mythological figure

\textsuperscript{319} Þorsteins þáttar skelks tells that Starkaðr was so powerful warrior that merely hearing a ghost who was visiting this world imitate Starkaðr’s screaming in Hell made the main character of the þáttur, Þorsteinn, unconscious. In this þáttur, Starkaðr is recognized as the most enduring of ancient heroes, mentioned with Sigurðr Fáfnisbani (see the next section), and Starkaðr’s screams of pain in Hell functions to emphasize the horrendousness of the circumstances in Hell. Starkaðr’s torment is described in the narrative as an “ankle-fire,” but when Þorsteinn wondered why Starkaðr suffered such minor torment so loudly, he was told that only the soles of Starkaðr’s feet rose above the “ankle-fire.”

356
of Óðinn, who, according to Gautreks saga, was fundamental in organizing Starkaðr’s fate and even orchestrated the killing of King Víkarr to make Starkaðr a model Odinic hero (Frog 2010: 288–290). Therefore, the accounts of outlawry that evoke direct associations with Starkaðr most likely benefit from inspecting Odinic associations as well.

14.5.2 Heroes in the Legendary Sagas and in the Family Sagas

The number of heroes in the Legendary Sagas is vast, and only some were selected for analysis in this study as examples of resemblances to the outlaws in the Family Sagas. These examples, however, suffice to show that many outlaws in the Family Sagas were associated with legendary heroes and were even depicted in ways that were conventionally used to express heroism in the Legendary Sagas. The Taleworld to which the legendary heroes belong is essentially the same as that of the heroic poetry, and the form of heroism depicted in the Legendary Sagas is likewise closely related.

14.6 The Outlaw Hero

The heroic narratives discussed above provided a model for the representation of heroism in the Family Sagas. However, the paradigms that were adopted to evaluate a narrative were more complicated within the Saga World than were those of the heroic Taleworld. This is because the connections between the Saga World and the everyday world of medieval Iceland made the complexities of reality more immediate to the narrative. This is why the heroic warrior’s straightforward actions are not likewise immediately accepted in a saga narrative, which is particularly evident in the representations of characters that resembled warrior heroes, such as Þorgeirr Hávarsson in Fóstbræðra saga or Grettir Ásmundarson in Grettis saga. This is also why actions that seem less extraordinary than those of a mythic hero are accepted as heroic deeds in discourse of the Family Sagas.

The structural pattern of a heroic biography is most usefully described by Jan de Vries. Elements of this pattern regularly occur in connection with the outlaws in the Family Sagas and this pattern can be recognized in the schematic model of an outlaw biography. In particular, Grettir Ásmundarson is depicted as a hero who is close to the mode of the Legendary Sagas, as is Hörðr Grimkelsson in his adventures in Scandinavia during his youth. Other examples are Grímr Helguson and
perhaps Þorgeirr Hávarsson. However, Grettir’s peculiar character is strong in this respect. Indeed, in the biography of Grettir, references to legendary heroes appear on a regular basis, as will be demonstrated below. To distinguish those characteristics of a hero that are found not only in heroic narratives, but in other narratives as well, I have adopted the pattern of a heroic biography as an analytical model to examine medieval Icelandic heroic narratives.

According to the pattern of a heroic biography, during his youth, a hero is typically threatened. Furthermore, he develops either exceptionally quickly, or exceptionally slowly. This slow development of a hero is manifested in the saga literature in what is referred to as the *kolbitur*-motif (see Boberg 1966, 189: motif L 124.1) of tale type AT 301 in Iceland. This motif presents the focal character as an unpromising “coal-biter” who is lazy and has a malicious tongue but proves to be exceptionally capable when faced with a worthy test (see also chapter 7.3). Accordingly, Grettir Ásmundarson was rather unpromising in his youth; he received work assignments at the age of ten that he completely failed to accomplish, although he apparently did this intentionally. Examples of Grettir’s antics include breaking the wings of the geese he was tending, rubbing his father’s back with a wool-comb and skinning the lead horse of his father’s herd (*Grettis saga*, Ch. 14). The overwhelming cruelty of Grettir’s deeds is reminiscent of the fairy tale type AT 650, “Strong John” (Aarne & Thompson 1961, 225), in which the hero is a strong man, often a crossbreed of a man and an animal. One of this man’s parents gives him work assignments that he completes totally wrong and due to his uncontrollable powers, causing rather serious damage. As a result, people use different means in their attempt to have him killed, but owing to his strength, he survives every attempt on his life. At the beginning of Grettir’s biography in *Grettis saga*, Grettir repeatedly concealed his potential: “People did not know of Grettir’s real strength because he did not wrestle. Often he composed poems and verses that were considered rather mocking. He did not lie in the kitchen and was usually taciturn.” (Ch. 14) This description is almost identical with a description of the *kolbitur* hero. The saga writer deemed it necessary to remark that Grettir “did not lie in the kitchen” in spite of all his other similarities with the tale hero.

As a *kolbitr*, Grettir is not a unique saga hero. Other heroes are depicted similarly in their youth, such as Þorsteinn in *Svarfídeela saga* (Ch. 1), Víga-Glúmr in *Víga-Glúms saga* (Ch. 5) as well as many heroes

---

320 See also Jónsson G. 1936, xlviii; Árnason 1980, 412.
321 “[…] einu vissu men göra afl hans, þvi at hann var óglíminn. Orti hann jafnan visur ok kvíölinga ok þótti heldr niðskældinn. Eigi lagðisk hann í eldaskála ok var fátalaðr lengstum.”
of the Legendary Sagas, such as Hrólfr Kraki (Ch. 23) and Göngu-Hrólf (Ch. 4). Youth as a kolbítr in the saga literature is a sign of future greatness. Grettir was taciturn like the semi-mythical heroes Ragnarr Íðbrókar (Völsunga saga, Ch. 45) and Starkaðr gamli (see Boberg 1966, L124.1). As mentioned above, exceptional development (either slow or fast) as a child is typical for a hero. This position is argued by Jan de Vries, and this is directly uttered in the case of Grettir: “[Grettir] did not develop fast when he was a child.” The exceptional physical strength of saga characters in their youth is often used in the saga literature as a sign of their future fame. In summary, the kolbítr theme evokes expectations of the future success of the character in question, and Grettir fulfils these expectations.

14.6.1 The Monster-Slayer Story Pattern

Like a true kolbítr, Grettir reveals the warrior hero in himself when the need arises. On his voyage to Norway (Ch. 17), in contrast to the other men on board who are engaged in hard labor, Grettir is described as merely lying around, spending his time patting the belly of the shipmate’s wife, and composing mocking verses in spite of his comrades’ disapproval. However, when a storm strikes and the ship is about to sink, Grettir joins the others and saves the ship by his powerful bailing. In Norway (Ch. 19–20), Grettir is not described as being particularly promising, that is, until he saves his host’s wife and daughter from lecherous berserks. After moving to another part of Norway (Ch. 21), he is scorned until he kills a bear bare-handed. The same motif is also repeated later in Chapters 48 and 69. As discussed above, a demonstration of one’s capability as a superior protector by killing a monster is an initiation rite for becoming a hero in the Indo-European heroic tradition (Dumèzil 1970, 114). The monster-slaying scenario appears in conjunction with many figures who begin life as kolbítr figures. These examples illustrate that the monster-slaying pattern could be achieved with diverse categories of beings in the structural role of the monster: a bear, berserks, trolls, giants, the dead, a dragon – or an outlaw.

Within the Family Sagas, Grettir Ásmundarson is a case in point. He fights supernatural creatures when they threaten decent people who are often helpless women. Furthermore, within the discourse of the Family Sagas, the walking dead are commonly depicted as threatening supernatural creatures (Aðalsteinsson 1987). In Grettis saga (Ch. 18), Grettir penetrates the grave mound of his Norwegian host’s father, Kárr.

322 “[Grettir var] ekki bráðger meðan hann var á barnsaldri.” (Ch. 14)
The dead Kárr then attacks Grettir while he is collecting valuables, but Grettir defeats and decapitates him.\footnote{323} Grettir subsequently carries the valuable treasure to his host. In comparison, \textit{Harðar saga} contains a very similar episode representing an outlaw-to-come penetrating a grave mound. This saga recounts how Hörðr Grímkelsson enters the grave mound of the viking named Sóti. Sóti rises and Hörðr is forced to wrestle him. Hörðr is about to be defeated, but when his companion, Geirr, lights a wax candle, Sóti looses his strength. As a result, Hörðr is able to collect the valuables from the grave mound, including a ring that turns out to be cursed. (\textit{Harðar saga}, Ch. 9.)

These types of fights with the walking dead occur in numerous sagas, and the motifs present in \textit{Grettis saga} and \textit{Harðar saga} appear in other sagas as well. In many saga accounts, a haunting corpse is decapitated and his head placed under his back to prevent the dead from returning to haunt.\footnote{324} This same motif occurs in later Icelandic folk beliefs as well (Aðalsteinsson 1987). Seizing a magical object from a grave is a typical saga motif, and the object is often a sword, as it is in the case of \textit{Grettis saga}.\footnote{325}

The most memorable wrestling scene in saga literature is Grettir Ásmundarson’s wrestling with the animate corpse of the man named Glámr (\textit{Grettis saga}, Ch. 32). Grettir is victorious in this thrilling contest, but the defeated monster, who is also said to be an “unclean spirit” (óhreinn andi), puts a curse upon Grettir. This curse leads to Grettir’s eventual destruction. The curse causes Grettir to become afraid of the dark and prevents his strength from increasing but it does not deter Grettir from being victorious in his fight against two trolls (\textit{Grettis saga}, Ch. 64–66). The account of this struggle states that Grettir volunteers to stay in a haunted house over Yuletide, which is the time of year when men have disappeared from the house over the last few years. On Christmas night, which is a stereotypical time in the Family Sagas for encounters with otherworldly beings, Grettir is attacked by a troll, which Grettir nevertheless manages to defeat after a long struggle. After Christmas, Grettir has himself lowered into a waterfall and behind it, he discovers a cave. There he meets a huge troll whom he manages to kill with a sword.

\footnote{323} The prose text recounts that Grettir decapitated Kárr with the sword given to him by his mother, Jökulsnaut, but in the poem that Grettir is claimed to have composed about the event, it is said that he did it with a sword (saxi) he found in the grave; this information would correspond with folktale type 301A, monster killed with its own weapon.

\footnote{324} For example, \textit{Svarfdæla saga}, Ch. 22; \textit{Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss}, Ch. 20.

\footnote{325} For instance, \textit{Reykdæla saga}, Ch. 19; \textit{Þórðar saga Hreðu}, Ch. 3; \textit{Þorsteins saga Vikingssonar}, Ch. 10.
that he finds in the cave.\footnote{Compare, for example, *Hjálmpérs saga ok Ölvis* (Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda III, 247–251).} Grettir collects the bones of the men whom the two trolls have earlier brought into the cave and takes them to the church to be buried in sanctified ground. Whether this scene was inspired by a literary heroic tradition or whether it was based on indigenous folklore (Óskar Halldórsson 1982), the similarities between this passage and a passage in Beowulf (for example, see Harris 1973), as well as the story of Hadingus in *Gesta Danorum* (Davidson & Fisher 1999, 31–32), emphasizes Grettir’s heroic qualities.

A structurally similar passage occurs elsewhere in *Grettis saga*, with the focal character being someone other than Grettir. In Chapter 62 of this saga, a man named Grímr dwells in the heaths in a hut that has previously been occupied by Grettir. When a massive creature attempts to steal Grímr’s fish, he kills the creature. However, this creature is actually half-troll Hallmundr, who is a friend of Grettir. On his deathbed in a cave, the dying Hallmundr expresses respect towards his murderer. To demonstrate this respect, a remark is made in the narrative that Hallmundr’s “tall but shapely” daughter allows Grímr to sleep with her after Hallmundr has died.\footnote{Compare Helgi Hjörvarðsson in the eddic poem *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* where he slays the giant Hati (see Kroesen 1996, 65).}

The relativeness and situation-boundedness of the relation between a hero and his adversary becomes visibly illustrated in this passage. Hallmundr is first introduced in the saga as being Grettir’s helper, but when Grettir departs from the scene and Grímr appears in his place as the focal character, the situation is constructed anew. Even if the narrator sketches a moving image of a dying warrior uttering a poem about his life to his daughter on his death bed, and allows Hallmundr to retain the sympathy he had gained as a loyal friend of the heroic main character, Hallmundr’s killer, Grímr, is not portrayed in a negative light, but quite the contrary. Grímr is the focal character of the scene, and this overrules Hallmundr’s role in the larger narrative framework and makes Hallmundr assume the role of a troll – even if he is a sympathetic troll. For instance, the Legendary Saga *Gríms saga loðinkinna* (Ch. 1) indicates that to kill a troll was indeed considered to be a heroic deed, and for instance, the message made clear in *Hjálpérs saga ok Ölvis* (Ch. 12–13) was that when one encountered a girl in a troll’s cave, she was a girl who needed to be saved (see Jakobsson 2008a, 184–185). Overall, this passage in *Grettis saga* illustrates how a saga character may have different, contrary roles in the complexity of saga narration and that the character may possess qualities that are attributed to these different roles even if the
roles themselves are contradictory within a frame of reference that is as simplistically black-and-white as the heroic one.

14.6.2 Berserks as Adversaries of the Hero

Berserks\textsuperscript{328} are typical opponents of saga heroes. Berserks were predominantly a Scandinavian phenomenon, but there were some imported berserks in Saga Age Iceland as well. Berserks are depicted in the saga literature as men who have the strength of a bear. It was said that iron did not bite them and that they feared nothing. Snorri Sturluson’s historical \textit{Ynglinga saga} (Ch. 6) explains this as some type of trance or psychotic state (referred to as \textit{berserksgangr}) that was achieved by biting a shield or by howling like a wolf.\textsuperscript{329} Berserks were conceived of as having altered their shape (\textit{hamast}) and were hence no longer thought of as being human. In short, they were superhuman and worthy adversaries of heroes. A troop of twelve berserks is an expression that refers to a superior enemy in numerous sagas, especially in the Legendary Sagas.\textsuperscript{330} Such a troop of a stereotypical number of inhuman attackers constituted a monstrous enemy.

For the warriors in the saga literature, battles with berserks are brave deeds, and often women are mentioned as the reason for their disputes, both in the Legendary Sagas (Liestøl 1930, 154) and in the Family Sagas.\textsuperscript{331} Marlene Ciklamini (1965, 119) observed that “The typical motif hence shows the berserk challenging the legal guardian of the woman he desires.” Moreover, Anne Holtsmark (1951, 7) has argued that “the fight with a monster who claims a woman” was an international motif in medieval Europe.

Grettir Ásmundarson successfully fights a troop of twelve berserks in \textit{Grettis saga}, protecting women who are at the Norwegian farm where Grettir is being accommodated. The women are helpless because the menfolk have left for a feast. Grettir feasts the berserks until they are intoxicated and manages to lure them into a storehouse. When they attempt to escape, he kills them one-by-one by the door. (\textit{Grettis saga},

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{Berserk}r: “bear-hide”; they were also referred to with the designation \textit{úlfheðinn}: “wolf-skin.”
  \item \textit{Ynglinga saga}, Ch. 6. Jónsson F. 1911, 7.
  \item For instance, \textit{Hrólf saga Kraka}, Ch. 12–14; \textit{Órvar-Odds saga}, Ch. 28–31; \textit{Göngu-Hrólf's saga}, Ch. 20, 25–26.
  \item Thósteins saga Vikingssonar; \textit{Egils saga}, Ch. 57–8. Compare also \textit{Heiðarvíga saga}, Ch. 4; \textit{Eyvbyggja saga}, Ch. 28; in which a girl is saved from berserks, Ch. 59; also \textit{Flóamanna saga} Ch. 30, \textit{Víga-Glúms saga}, Ch. 10. In \textit{Droplaugarsona saga} (Ch. 15), Grímr successfully defeats a berserk who desires Finngir’s sister.
\end{itemize}
Wining and dining of the enemy before attacking them is here in harmony with heroic conduct in the Family Sagas, where it is considered to illustrate cleverness or proof of strategic ability. Such hosting of an enemy before attacking them seems to be counted among the virtues of a warrior, and it also occurs in the Legendary Sagas. In addition, Grettir fights a berserk in order to protect a farmer’s daughter in another scene of Grettis saga as well (Ch. 40).

The motif of a heroic duel with a berserk is also echoed in Gisli Súrsson’s duel with a man named Skeggi in Gísla saga (Ch. 2), even though Marlene Ciklamini (1965, 126) states that “there is a conscious effort to remove from Skeggi any taint connected with berserks.” Nonetheless, the avoidance of explicit berserk markers related to Skeggi is understandable because the saga states that Gísli’s brother, Þorkell, was Skeggi’s friend, and this would have been neither probable nor convincing if Skeggi was a berserk. Assuming the role of an evil-willing threatener, Skeggi is represented as being so arrogant that the comparison to an impersonal berserk figure seems to be justifiable. The earlier battle of Gísli Súrsson’s uncle and namesake against a berserk (Ch. 1) also indexes the killing that Gísli commits for the sake of his sister’s reputation.

Also the third hero of the Outlaw Sagas, Hörðr Grimkelsson, is attributed with a victorious battle with a berserk. Hörðr killed the berserk Björn blásiða (Harðar saga, Ch. 17). The saga mentions explicitly that Hörðr succeeded in raiding expeditions better than others (Ch. 25), and also the killing of the berserk seems to be included in the saga in order to provide another piece of evidence of Hörðr’s superiority as a warrior.

This discussion has highlighted that the meaning of individual saga passages is grounded in traditional referentiality. Once this is recognized, it becomes reasonable to consider individual passages as not solely responding to the needs of larger narrative structures, but also as being potentially meaningful in themselves. For example, according to Fóstbræðra saga (Ch. 4–5), the sworn-brothers Þorgeirr Hávarsson and Þormóðr Bersason are accommodated by the widow Sigrfljóð at one point during their roaming in the Westfjords, ravaging and searching for fame as brawlers. Sigrfljóð eggs them on to attack her neighbors because these neighbors have caused trouble in the area. The sworn brothers agree. They attack the neighbors’ farm and kill the troublemakers. Sigrfljóð is

332 For instance, Göngu-Hrölfss saga, Ch. 30–31, 36; Völsunga saga, Ch. 5, 35; Hrölfss saga Kraka, Ch. 12.
333 A berserk dies in a battle over a maiden: see also Egils saga, Ch. 64; Droplaugarsona saga, Ch. 15; Víg-Glúms saga, Ch. 4; Örvar-Odds saga, Ch. 28–31.
grateful and manages to placate the local chieftain and prevent him from launching an attack against the sworn brothers.

The foster brothers’ heroic feat is possible to interpret in terms of the heroic frame of reference even though Fóstbræðra saga is naturalistic to a degree that approaches sarcasm. This episode has the same spirit. Sigrfljóð is able to use Þorgeirr’s and Þormóðr’s ideas of honor to her advantage and to persuade them to attack her adversaries on the one hand, in order to gain honor, and on the other, in order to avoid losing honor in the sense of ingratitude towards the host. The sworn-brothers agree to attack her neighbors, who may be unpleasant but do not qualify as being completely evil, especially in comparison to the manipulative hostess or to the sworn-brothers themselves. In structural terms, this episode is comparable to the heroic episodes of the other sagas in which a malevolent, violent male threatens a female representative of the host family of the focal character. The focal character then offers to come to the assistance of his host family and defeats the perceived threat. This sequence suits this pattern even though it is narrated in Fóstbræðra saga in a way that avoids any narrative conventions that are usually applied in texts of the heroic mode in order to elevate the hero (see also Meulengracht Sørensen 1993b, 404–405).

14.6.3 The Bear as an Adversary of the Hero

Creatures of nature could be represented as the superior inhuman opponents to heroes in the Family Sagas. For example, Icelanders had limited experience with bears because the only bears they encountered were an occasional stray polar bear. However, bears were conceived of as evil-willing adversaries. According to Grettis saga, Grettir lives an entire winter in northern Norway. A man called Björn (“bear”), who entertains himself by scorning Grettir, attempts to kill a bear that has begun to roam in the area. However, Björn falls asleep under his shield while he is trying to ambush the bear. The bear spots him and throws away the shield, and Björn flees. Later, Grettir goes to the bear’s cave and after briefly wrestling with the bear, he and the bear fall down a cliff and the bear is killed. (Grettis saga, Ch. 21.) The strong man Finnbogi rammi

---

334 Saxo Grammaticus states in Gesta Danorum that during his youth, the progenitor of the famous ruling family the Skjöldungar, Beowulf’s father Skjöld, was unarmed and defeated a large bear (Davidson & Fisher 1999, 15–16). The name Skjöld is associated with a shield (isl. skjöld) and invites comparison between Björn’s attempt to kill the bear and the successful attempt of Skjöld. This further contributes to Grettir’s heroism through a humorous association if we presume that this Skjöld’s feat was commonly known lore in Iceland: even
(“powerful”) is likewise claimed to have killed a bear in northern Norway barehanded (*Finnboga saga ramma*, Ch. 11–12). Later in the saga, Finnbogi profits from this feat, because fighting a bear also appears to be a feat that impresses the Norwegian ruler, Jarl Hákon (Ch. 18).

Finnbogi *rammi* resembles Grettir Ásmundarson (also attributed as having the additional name *sterki*, “strong”) by his physical powers and by the tendency to irritate fellow countrymen. They both lived in the same area of Húnavatn, but whereas Grettir was a descendant of the family of Vatnsdælir, Finnbogi was constantly quarrelling with this family. Both *Finnboga saga ramma* and *Grettis saga* go to great lengths to construe heroic portraits of their main characters. In the narrative traditions about the strong men in the Húnavatn district, it seems to have been appropriate to add to their depiction the motif of killing a bear barehanded.

14.6.4 The Heroic Death

Death contributes the final note to a saga character’s life. The death of a saga hero is typically depicted in a detailed manner. Indeed, the exceptionality of a hero is highlighted by the exceptionality of his death. Aaron Gurevich wrote that, “death does not figure in Germanic heroic poetry as something melancholic [...] it is the moment when the hero crosses into the world of glory. [...] Glory is the chief value of the heroic ethic.” (Gurevich 1992, 123.) A hero was expected to engage in heroic battle at the end, but the conquering force of an exceptional man had to be extraordinary. In other words, dying of old age was not considered to be saga-worthy, even if examples of this occur even among the acknowledged warriors. For example, the aging of the great viking heroes, such as Egill Skalla-Grimsson (*Egils saga*, Ch. 88) or Víga-Glúmr (*Víga-Glúms saga*, Ch. 28), is described in somewhat pathetic tones. The Family Sagas also express that aging and the resulting diminishing of male capabilities has unmanly connotations (see Meulengracht Sørensen 1983). Yet there are exceptions to this as well, such as in the cases of Finnbogi *rammi*, or Þórðr *hreða*, whose long lives are mentioned as a laconic remark without negative connotations. However, for a saga character that earned his reputation and his place in a saga through violence, a violent death was appropriate.

the shield, which is homonymously associable with the hero Skjöld, cannot help Björn whereas Grettir defeats the bear by the same means as Skjöld actually did in the past.
The two basic ways of losing one’s life through violence were either with bravery or cowardice. These led to either honor or dishonor, respectively. In a violent encounter of two parties, one could lose one’s life, but by doing it bravely, one could maintain one’s honor. A heroic death was depicted as being brave to an extraordinary degree. An exceptional individual, whose exceptionality primarily resided in his capabilities to face and overcome lethal dangers, such as outlawry, could be expected to die in an exceptional way, or, in de Vries’s terms, in a miraculous way.

The minimum requirement for an exceptionally brave death was to die while bravely defending oneself against an overwhelming enemy. For instance, Þorgeirr Hávarsson could be defeated only after a betrayal that stripped him of all support. Nevertheless, Þorgeirr defended himself bravely against the overpowering attackers and he reportedly killed at least two of them. (*Fóstbræðra saga*, Ch. 17.) Another example is Hörðr Grímkelsson, whose men were likewise lured to leave their refuge on an island, and as they were in small groups, the attacking farmers easily dispatched them (*Harðar saga*, Ch. 33–36). Hörðr’s sworn brother, Geirr, died fighting bravely. Hörðr also fought bravely and indeed, the only way to defeat him was by resorting to witchcraft (see chapter 7.3 for details). As a form of manipulating fate, witchcraft contributed to the exceptional circumstances of a hero’s death. This made it more difficult, if not impossible, for the hero to overpower an enemy that would otherwise be defeated. Like Hörðr, Grettir Ásmundarson was also killed by witchcraft (*Grettis saga*, Ch. 81–82). He had withdrawn to the unconquerable island of Drangey and he was defeated only by witchcraft and the carelessness of a thrall. Even though Grettir died during a battle, the saga claims that before the attackers’ weapons reached Grettir, he died of an infected wound that had been inflicted by magic.

In the Family Sagas, the extraordinary circumstances of death, such as the express involvement of magic or of fate, is a reference to the discourse and mechanisms of constructing a hero in heroic narrative genres. The supernatural in the Family Sagas resembles everyday experience more closely than in the Legendary Sagas and heroic poetry. Therefore, the signifiers of the supernatural differ in the Family Sagas. This realistic orientation did not allow for extensive supernatural activity. Most of *Grettis saga* and the section that has settings abroad in *Harðar saga* (Ch. 12–19) resemble the conventions of the Legendary Sagas, due to the spatial settings. However, the other outlaws of the Family Sagas are occupied with earthly threats that may be interpreted referentially within the heroic frame of reference. In other words, magic and treachery involved in the death of a hero in the Family Sagas are also familiar from
heroic poetry (for example, Sigurðr Fáfnisbani) and Legendary Sagas (see, for instance, Órvar-Oddr) and evoke referential associations with them.

14.7 Conclusion

Even though the focus of the Family Sagas is predominantly on the relationships of the family groups that formed the core structure of society (Andersson 1978), the biographies of the representatives of these groups also receive attention. The biographical threads in the Family Sagas were evaluated in relation to other examples of biographical narration. Heroic narratives therefore functioned as a ready frame of reference. One element of a heroic narrative as depicted by the researchers of the patternedness of Indo-European heroic traditions is banishment, which established a connection between a king and an outlaw because the heroic narratives that were analyzed for this pattern were mainly narratives about a hero who eventually ascended a throne. However, outlaws of the Icelandic Family Sagas were closer to the saga audiences; outlaws were part of the potential daily experience of people during the period of saga writing. Outlaws were semi-independent external agents in the social activities that comprised the subject matter and primary settings of saga narration. Outlaws represented the concepts of independence and strength (which return to heroism) and as a result, outlaws were a living form of a myth not only to the present-day researcher who can identify the mythic structures and heroic patterns in saga narratives about them, but also to the Icelanders who lived during the period of saga writing.

The protective function is not a crucial element of heroism. For medieval Icelanders, a hero was primarily a superior individual who might have served a monarch and who accomplished deeds that were worth narrating. In contrast, the heroism of the outlaws, as it is expressed in the Family Sagas, was essentially plain superiority that only focuses limited attention on how this superiority was utilized. Grettir Ásmundarson stands out as a protective outlaw character, whereas with regard to other outlaw characters, the protective function appears only in individual scenes or motifs. The outlaws were exemplary in their ability to maintain honor and in their general superiority within the scope of the manly skills and capabilities that were most appreciated in the Saga World. Those outlaws of the king of Norway who survived were heroes for their ability to oppose the tyranny of the foreign monarch, a ruler who seems to have been generally conceived of as being indifferent to the
concerns of the Icelanders. The analogies to two somewhat different although similarly central heroic figures, Starkaðr gamli Stórvíksson and Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, elevated the comparable outlaw characters as heroic characters. These analogies emphasized the outlaws’ tragic incapacity to improve their fate, as well as their isolation from the social sphere to which they originally had belonged.

The heroes and their mythical opponents, trolls, who appear mainly in the Legendary Sagas, were not exclusive referential figures for the characters in the Family Sagas. Instead, the saga heroes could be conceived of as having characteristics of both heroes and trolls. Trolls represented powerful anthropomorphic forces that existed outside the sphere of civilization and they consequently could be associated with outlaws who were positioned on the border of civilization. The application of the mythological conventions and heroic traditions detached the historical saga narratives as well as the characters in them from the surrounding reality, hence enabling the narration of events that would not be probable or even conceived as possible in everyday reality.

Even though the Kings’ Sagas are considered to be historical texts due to subject matter that consisted of central historical events and rulers, the more remote in the past events were situated, the less relevant their historicity. For medieval Icelanders, the Norwegian kings of the past were indeed almost mythical characters, as will be discussed in the following chapter. In contrast, in relation to the accounts of outlawry in the Contemporary Sagas, the outlaws of the Saga World appear to be rather mythical referential figures. In the Family Sagas, the narrative conventions applied in the narratives concerning outlawry were also used in a biographical account of an outlaw who lived in the period of saga writing. In the next chapter, I will also discuss this connection between the narrative tradition and the way that recent history was perceived in medieval Iceland.
15 Historical Texts – The Kings’ Sagas and the Contemporary Sagas

In addition to Christian texts, mythology and heroic texts, other sagas concerned with more recent history – such as the Kings’ Sagas and the Contemporary Sagas – also reflected conceptions connected to banishment, rejection and outlawry. These texts were produced within the same literary culture as the Family Sagas. The Kings’ Sagas narrated the vicissitudes of historical Norwegian kings. The writing of these sagas had a political dimension that could impact the formulation and structure of the narration (see Rowe 2005; Boulhosa 2005), but they nonetheless welled out of the same narrative tradition as the Family Sagas. This chapter will first introduce examples of kings’ biographies that have thematic connections to the narratives about outlawry in the Family Sagas. These connections provided outlawry with additional significations as cases of outlawry that occurred among the highest possible political authorities. The Contemporary Sagas depict the power struggles of the Icelandic political elite that took place only shortly before the time of their writing and hence, the current political situation had an impact on these narratives as well. Outlawry does not have a significant role in these texts but a few accounts of outlawry in them will be introduced in the latter section of this chapter. One of these, concerning a man named Aron Hjörleifsson, will receive special attention owing to the exceptional number of narrative elements of outlawry that appear in the extensive story about him.

15.1 The Kings’ Sagas

In the cases where the outlaw is a king himself, the Kings’ Sagas represent a royal, aristocratic perspective on being a fugitive. Connecting Norwegian kings with fugitivity and outlawry emphasizes that these notions were not only reserved for law-breakers and criminals but that banishment and rejection could even fall upon the most powerful individuals in society without necessarily affecting their reputation negatively. Instead, being a fugitive and an outlaw offered a context for demonstrating a king’s capability as well as his admirable personal characteristics and qualities.

In the history of Icelandic literature, the Kings’ Sagas were predecessors of the Family Sagas. The oldest extant texts containing fragments of Kings’ Sagas are from around 1180 (Jakobsson 2005, 389).
The Kings’ Sagas served as a model or, perhaps more accurately, as a literary foundation for the writing of the Family Sagas (Andersson 1984, 198–199; 2006, 2–4). The production of the Kings’ Sagas as written texts required a significant investment of time and material resources, which suggests that stories about the Norwegian nobility aroused sufficient interest among its Icelandic parallel, the chieftain class, to invest in the written production of these sagas (cf. Clover 1982a). Nevertheless, the Kings’ Sagas belonged to the Icelandic literary sphere and sprang from the same narrative tradition as the Family Sagas.

The focal characters in the Kings’ Sagas, the kings, are the complete opposite of outlaws insofar as the king was virtually an embodiment of the law for the land he ruled. However, many of the Kings’ Sagas represent the kings in a state of outlawry. The rejection or banishment of a reigning king constitutes an exclusion from society similar to outlawry for Icelanders. The potential threat posed by the supplanted rival was generally sufficient for the usurper to organize his pursuit. Fugitivity has a relatively strong position in the Icelandic biographical narratives about the Norwegian kings. This indicates that it was strongly associated with royalty during the period of saga writing. Three cases of royal outlawry in the genre of royal biography will be addressed here as examples of a royal individual’s biography being represented in structurally similar terms to the biographies of tragic outlawry, fortunate outlawry and pioneering outlawry.

15.1.1 The Tragic Fugitive King Óláfr Haraldsson

King Óláfr Haraldsson reigned in Norway during the last years of the Saga Age (1015–1030). He is a significant referential figure in numerous Family Sagas including Fóstbræðra saga and Grettis saga. King Óláfr Haraldsson is depicted in numerous biographies. He was among the most popular Norwegian rulers in the saga discourse, largely because of his popularity as a saint that prevailed across Scandinavia, as was discussed in chapter 12.4.2. The earliest texts about Óláfr Haraldsson were vitae (“lives”) of the saint written in Latin in the twelfth century. The Oldest Saga of St Óláfr was written somewhere between 1160 and 1200 (Jakobsson 2005, 394; Kristjánsson J. 1972, 156, 167) of which only fragments however are preserved. The Oldest Saga was a source for an elaborated version, the so-called Legendary Saga of St Óláfr, which was the most important source for Snorri Sturluson’s version of the saga in his Heimskringla (Jakobsson 2005, 394; Kristjánsson J. 1976; 1972, 223; Andersson 2006, 46–47). The earliest texts dealing with Óláfr Haraldsson
(Historia Norwegiae and Ágrip) follow the customs of hagiographic writing and concentrate on the latter part of Óláfr’s life, and on his death. All of the sagas about King Óláfr Haraldsson were written largely in the hagiographic mode. This holds true even for the saga written by Snorri. This saga is generally considered to have had secular intentions as a historical account. (Tómasson 1994.)

The battle of Stiklastaðr is a central event in many sagas. The death of King Óláfr in this battle was his birth as a saint. Insofar as he was primarily perceived as a saint and only secondarily as a mortal leader, it is natural that King Óláfr’s life was represented as prefiguring his future sanctity (through numerous miracles) and also that the circumstances of his death and the events immediately preceding that death constituted the most significant part of his biography. A period of exile immediately preceded Óláfr Haraldsson’s heroic death. His exile is referred to as outlawry at least in Fóstbræðra saga: “Þormóðr travelled abroad with King Óláfr and stayed with him throughout the outlawry” (Ch. 24).335

Óláfr Haraldsson’s lifetime coincided with Grettir Ásmundarson’s in the Icelandic historical tradition (and also to a degree with the sworn-brothers Þorgeirr Hávarsson and Þormóðr Bersason). As has been discussed in chapter 2.2, saga narration frequently anchors time externally to the reigns of Norwegian kings. It is therefore unlikely that the parallels between the careers of these outlaws and the career of the saintly king would remain unnoticed at the time that the sagas were being written and when the career of King Óláfr provided a conventional reference for historical chronologies.

335 “Þormóðr för ór landi með Óláfi konungi ok þolði með honum alla útleigð.”
Table 1. Comparison of the lifetimes and outlawries of St Óláfr Haraldsson and some famed Icelandic outlaws.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Birth</th>
<th>Reign</th>
<th>Outlawry</th>
<th>Death</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St Óláfr Haraldsson</td>
<td>995</td>
<td>1015/1016–(death)</td>
<td>1028–(death)</td>
<td>1030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grettir Ásmundarson</td>
<td>996</td>
<td>1016–(death)</td>
<td>1031\textsuperscript{336}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorgeir Hávarsson</td>
<td>995\textsuperscript{337}</td>
<td>1014–(death)</td>
<td>1024\textsuperscript{338}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þormóðr Bersason</td>
<td>998\textsuperscript{339}</td>
<td>1026–(death)</td>
<td>1030\textsuperscript{340}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The dates in Table 1 should all be considered approximate. The saga writers did not normally specify exact years, and the internal coherence of the saga narrative and the causality of events described was a primary concern in narration with the consequence that these events did not always coincide with the external anchors of time. With this relative accuracy in mind, it is safe to conclude that the lifetimes of Grettir Ásmundarson and Þormóðr Bersason in particular were practically identical to that of King Óláfr Haraldsson. The correspondences between the years imply that the lifetimes of these outlaws were related to prevailing knowledge about the life and career of King Óláfr and that this relationship created a referential link between the king and the outlaws. This link emphasizes or at least complements the relatively uncritical praise of these outlaws.

Besides this immediate referential link, the figure of King Óláfr Haraldsson also held a referential value for other tragic outlaw figures of the Family Sagas. The biography of Óláfr Haraldsson provided Icelanders with an exemplar narrative about a period of exile in the life of a king that resulted in a heroic but also sanctifying death. This exemplar of an icon of the aristocracy concretized the potential for the outlawry of men from noble families in the Saga World to be accepted, viewing the outlaw positively and even interpreting him in saintly terms, as was discussed in chapter 12.4.2.

\textsuperscript{336} Extratextually anchored by the times of the deaths of Snorri goði and of Skapti the lawspeaker the the previous year.
\textsuperscript{337} Guðni Jónsson 1958, lxix–lxx.
\textsuperscript{338} Before Þormóðr’s journey to Norway and Greenland.
\textsuperscript{339} “Þormóðr var nokkuru ellri”: Fóstbræðra saga, Ch.2; but Jónsson, G, 1958, lxix.
\textsuperscript{340} The Battle of Stiklastaðir on the side of King Óláfr Haraldsson.
King Sverrir had his own saga written in the end of the twelfth century in collaboration with Icelandic abbot Karl Jónsson. The prologue of the saga states that King Sverrir personally dictated the first part of the saga. Apparently, this took place during the winter 1185–1186 (Hauksson 2007, xxii–xxiii). According to Ludvig Holm-Olsen (1953, 71 ff.), this part ended before the great victories of Sverrir that are described in Sverris saga, Ch. 31. However, the style shifts even to a greater extent after Chapter 100. Þorleifur Hauksson suggests that this is where King Sverrir’s contribution ended and that Karl Jónsson returned to Norway to write the rest of the saga around year 1200 (Hauksson 2007, lx–lxiv). However, the work as a whole was composed for the purpose of praising him.341

King Sverrir had been raised in the fosterage of bishop Hrói in the Faroes; he was brought up with book culture and he was a priest by education (Sverris saga, Ch. 1). As a king, Sverrir claimed his right as a royal heir by claiming to be the illegitimate son of King Sigurðr munnr Haraldsson. Producing his personal history as a written saga in a form that supported his position seems to have been a strategy for asserting and confirming his right to the crown before his subjects. It is interesting that even though the political function of the saga is unambiguous, the first part of the saga, on which King Sverrir seems to have had the greatest direct impact, is a deliberate narrative of a fugitive who wanders in the Scandinavian wilderness and successfully gathers loyal troops around himself. Great attention is given to the hardships that these troops faced when marching across the difficult terrain (Ch. 12–14). Together with these troops and with divine help, Sverrir gains the throne. This suggests that Sverrir consciously presented himself as an outlaw character, presumably in order to serve the political aim of the saga.

Sverris saga (Ch. 1) describes how, at a young age in the Faroe Islands, Sverrir struck a man and was chased by the men of a king’s bailiff. He seeks refuge in a house, and a woman hides him inside an oven. The motif of a woman who hides the outlaw is a central element in the traditional narratives about outlawry (see chapter 9.2). The saga later tells how Saint Óláfr appears to Sverrir in a dream fighting King Magnús and Sverrir chooses to join St Óláfr, upon which St Óláfr promises to support his efforts to gain the throne. Encouraged by numerous ominous dreams, Sverrir travels to Norway and studies the political situation. On his way to meet his sister in Sweden, Sverrir wanders with only one companion in the woods of Värmland until he meets the defeated troops

of King Eystein who has fought King Magnús. These troops ask Sverrir to become their leader. Sverrir agrees and, according to the saga, Sverrir proves to be superior to his men in the wilderness. For instance, Sverrir is exceptionally resourceful in crossing bodies of water (Ch. 13), which indeed is an important skill in traversing the Swedish forests. He is also able to kindle fire when others are not. (Ch. 20.) In the saga, it is demonstrated that his skills in moving about in the wilderness and the maneuverability of his small troops make it possible for him to overcome his overwhelming enemy, the troops of King Magnús (esp. Ch. 14–18).

In these narratives, Sverrir’s heroism is built on his sufferings and endurance in the hopeless battle against superior forces. The small size of his troops and the cunning moves he makes with them are repeatedly emphasized and contrasted with his opponents’ large bodies of troops and their correspondingly clumsy maneuvers (esp. Ch. 15–26). The association of King Sverrir’s troops with the wilderness is expressed in a way that parallels the metaphorical images associated with outlaws: when Sverrir’s men attack Nidaros, they are described in Sverris saga as “trolls between the outbuildings and home” (Ch. 15). Furthermore, according to the saga, Sverrir’s men persuade him to attack Nidaros even though he hesitated, and the attempt proves disastrous. However, it is Sverrir who manages to turn the situation to their advantage with his exceptional skills, using the terrain and darkness to work in their favor (Ch. 27–31). In short, Sverrir is presented in Sverris saga as embodying the practical warrior ideal of his time. He is also depicted as a warlord who looks on his troops as a father looks on his sons. This sentiment remains present throughout the rest of the saga even though the chapters from 37 onwards concentrate on the reciprocal hostilities between Sverrir and King Magnús that result in the latter’s death in Ch. 99. From there on, the saga deals mainly with King Sverrir’s administrative problems, especially those that followed skirmishes with the Church, and with his suppression of numerous insurrections.

The representation of Sverrir as a pursued character in the wilderness, who nevertheless manages to overcome his enemies with skill and cunning, corresponds to the characteristic features of narratives about fortunate outlawry in the Family Sagas. The fundamental differences are due to the differing discourses and social settings within which these narratives take place – a king with an army of only a hundred men is practically a solitary character. From a solitary refugee, principally an outlaw, Sverrir becomes, through his own accomplishments and purifying

---

342 “[…] troll milli húss ok heima.”
343 This situation is quite similar to that which Hörðr Grímkelsson faced when his band of outlaws readily ran into the ambush of their enemies (Harbar saga, Ch. 34).

374
hardships, a king who dictates the law. However, it seems probable that the biographies of Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson served as models for the theme of the returning king in *Sverris saga*.

In addition to the typical motif in outlaw narratives of a woman hiding the outlaw, which appears in the opening chapter of *Sverris saga*, the general spirit of the whole first part of the saga is echoed in numerous outlaw narratives whose setting is in Norway, especially in those of Hrappr Örleigumsson and Þorleifr jarlaskáld. The outlaw’s superiority in the wilderness and ability to take advantage of better mobility is especially emphasized in Hrappr’s adventures in Norway. Superiority in the wilderness was strongly attributed to outlaws in general, as was discussed above in chapter 11.2. In *Sverris saga*, this theme is extensively utilized as a means to prove Sverrir’s exceptionality and capability in military leadership. His success against overwhelmingly superior troops serves as proof that he was favored in the eyes of God (Bagge 1993, 4–5). In addition, Margaret Cormack has suggested that the hagiographic overtones liberally applied in the saga were likewise used to assure the audience that Sverrir was the chosen representative of God in his position (Cormack 1994, 41). Divine favor is also implied by the mention that on a crucially difficult occasion, Sverrir was saved by calling on St Óláfr (Ch. 32).

Being victorious against an overwhelming enemy was a prerequisite for surviving outlawry. The difficulties of life as a pursued outlaw in the wilderness, be it in Norway, Sweden, Greenland or Iceland, also provided the basis for praising Sverrir’s endurance of hardships. Within *Sverris saga*, these become interpretable as stages of obstacles on the road to success while simultaneously serving as a platform on which Sverrir’s excellence can be proven according to the ideal practical warrior and leader. The focus on hardships in *Sverris saga* was a deliberate choice in organizing and composing the saga, but it was a choice among available strategies in narrating about heroes rather than a newly invented strategy of the author. This choice indicates that resourcefulness and the endurance of difficulties were considered necessary and praiseworthy qualities for a man who intended to find social acceptance for his social elevation.
15.1.3 The Pioneering Fugitive Jarl Göngu-Hrólf

The case of Göngu-Hrólf illustrates that even an outlaw of a king could, rather than perishing, become a great and celebrated ruler abroad, a position through which it was even possible to gain a reputation in the land where one was outlawed. In other words, this narrative offers an exemplar of personal characteristics and accomplishments overruling legal conviction. Göngu-Hrólf is described in Historia Norwegiae, Orkneyinga saga and Heimskringla. According to Haralds saga ins hárfagra in Heimskringla, King Haraldr’s good friend Ragnvaldr has a son called Hrólf. Hrólf is a great viking and so large that no horse is able to carry him – hence he is called Göngu-Hrólf (“walking Hrólf”). Hrólf harries in Vik while King Haraldr is there, and this outrages the king who has forbidden all harrying in the country. Subsequently, he sentences Hrólf to outlawry (útlaga af Noregi). Hrólf’s mother Hildr begs the king to have mercy on her son but the king refuses. Thus, she recites the following verse:

You banish Nefja’s namesake:  
now you oust as outlaw  
him the holders’ brother.  
Why so heady, ruler?

’Tis ill ’gainst wolf to be wolfish,  
warrior, such wolf opposing.  
Hard that wolf will harry  
your heards, once he runs to the forest.  
(Translation: Lee Hollander 1964, 79.)

In the poem, Hrólf’s mother claims that it is a great misjudgement of the king to banish such a good man from the country “like a wolf does to a wolf” into the woods where he will rather cause harm to the king. Hrólf’s mother’s prediction does not have a prefiguring function in this

---

344 The saga named after him, Göngu-Hrólf’s saga, has nothing to do with the historical character or the vicissitudes of his life; it is an adventurous Legendary Saga.
345 Finnur Jónsson 1911, 55–56 (Ch. 24). An Icelander named Snorri Sturluson had Heimskringla written during the second quarter of the thirteenth century. Heimskringla is a compilation of biographies of Norwegian kings which represents those biographies as a continuum, beginning from the mythic past of the first Scandinavian monarchs and providing an account of royal histories up to King Magnús Erlingsson (ruled 1161–1184).
346 “Hafnið Nefju nafna, / Nú rekið gand ór landi, / Horskan hölda barma, / Hvi belið þvi stillir? // Ilt’s við ulf at ylfask, / Yggr valbrikar, slikan; / Muna við hilms hjarðir / hægr, ef remnir til skógar.”
347 “Wolf” was a central paraphrase for outlawry in medieval Icelandic expression, as discussed in chapter 5.3.
saga, which may imply that in the thirteenth century, the poem was considered more generally applicable in connection with noble outlaws of the king. Indeed, the accounts of Icelanders outlawed by the king of Norway generally reflect the message of this poem: by having a good man outlawed, the king will only bring harm upon himself.\(^{348}\)

Hrólfur went to the Hebrides and plundered in Valland (the west coast of continental Europe) and later established a jarlriki (“earldom”) in Normandy. He came to establish a whole lineage of successful rulers, whose accomplishments were well known in thirteenth-century Iceland: “The earls of Normandy are the descendants of Hrólfur.”\(^{349}\) The case of Göngu-Hrólfur is also interesting because this hero is not simply “any” outlaw; he is of noble lineage and becomes a lord very similar to a king.

The biography of Göngu-Hrólfur provides an exemplar of pioneering outlawry. This biography is applicable as a frame of reference to interpret the biographies of two significant saga outlaws and could even function as a structural model to represent them in the Family Sagas. The first of these outlaws, Eiríkr rauði, as told in Eiríks saga rauða, was outlawed in Iceland. After being outlawed, Eiríkr explored Greenland and settled there. He was the first and the most respected Icelandic settler in Greenland. Interpreting Eiríks saga in the light of the biography of Göngu-Hrólfur emphasizes Eiríkr’s role as an outstanding nobleman and the founder of an aristocratic family and a colony that was still prosperous at the time of writing the saga in the beginning of the thirteenth century.

Another parallel to Göngu-Hrólfur’s biography can be found in Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða. According to this saga, Hrafnkell is banished from his own chieftaincy but he becomes a wealthy and influential chieftain in the district he moved to. Hrafnkell’s adversary Sámr does not kill Hrafnkell in spite of having the opportunity (Ch. 5), and Sámr’s companion Þorgeirr warns him: “You shall repent greatly that you spare his life”.\(^{350}\) This warning expresses a similar concern as the verse of Göngu-Hrólfur’s mother and it proves noteworthy as Hrafnkell builds a prosperous life in his exile in the neighboring district and eventually regains his position in charge of the chieftaincy he originally held.

\(^{348}\) The same idea is expressed in Grettis saga in Snorri goði’s statement that it would be wise to accept the proposed compensation instead of having Grettir outlawed because Grettir will cause harm during his outlawry: Grettis saga, Ch. 51: “Vili þér nú, Hrútfiðingar,” sagði hann, “at niðr falli fégljald þetta, ok verði Grettir sykn þvi at ek ætla, at hann verði sárbeitr í sekðinni?”

\(^{349}\) “Af Hrólfis ætt eru komnir jarlar í Norðmanndi.”

\(^{350}\) “Muntu þessa mest ðóðask sjálfri, at þú gefr honum lif.”
The settlement of Iceland was itself narrated as a process resulting from the ancestors of major families being outlawed from Norway. This consequently integrated the general story pattern of pioneering outlawry into many of the Icelanders’ own family histories. It is therefore unsurprising that pioneering outlawry would hold particular interest for medieval Icelanders.

15.1.4 Conclusion

The image of a fugitive king was integrated into medieval Icelandic conceptions of the world and of history. In addition to the examples discussed above, the figure of King Hákon Hákonarson (reigned 1217–1263) can also be mentioned: Hákon Hákonarson was the acknowledged illegitimate son of King Hákon Sverrisson (member of the birkebeiner) and as such he was a potential opponent of the ruling dynasty (the bagler). He was consequently born a fugitive and pursued by the bagler already as an infant. According to the legend about him, he made a close escape already at the age of one. He was brought to safety across the wintry mountains by a group of warriors. Hákon Hákonarson’s biography was probably known at least to some extent in Iceland already while he was still living, and indeed, the Icelander Sturla Þórðarson was commissioned to put his saga into writing soon after his death in the 1260’s (Bagge 1996).

The Kings’ Sagas, even if they were not direct models for the writing of the Family Sagas, reflect the Saga World and contribute to conceptions of outlawry. The Kings’ Sagas were produced in the same literary environment as the Family Sagas, and the same structures of representation and interpretation guided the authorship of both these literary genres. Sverris saga, a contemporary saga that was partly dictated by the main character himself, is an interesting exception. This saga offers insight into the narrative strategies that could be applied in elevating certain outlaws to a prestigious status.

By alluding to the sagas of outlawed nobility in connection with the biography of an Icelandic outlaw, this outlaw is identified with the royal figures. This necessarily equated the two characters in some sense. The narrative pattern of a rise to the throne after or as the result of a period of fugitivity forms the backbone of the biographies of King Sverrir and Gōngu-Hrólfr as well as of Eiríkr rauði and Hrafnkell Freysgōði. Indeed, the same can be said of the history of Iceland’s settlement (see chapter 6.3). Eiríkr rauði and Hrafnkell Freysgōði could not become kings or lords in the social circumstances of Iceland and Greenland but
nevertheless, their outlawry resulted in gaining the highest social position available, that of a höfðingi (chieftain with more than one godörd).

15.2 The Contemporary Sagas

Like the Kings’ Sagas, the Contemporary Sagas also were written in the same cultural milieu as the Family Sagas. Only a few outlaws appear in the relatively large compilation of them that is referred to as Sturlunga saga. One of these outlaws, Aron Hjörleifsson, is particularly interesting from the point of view of the narratives about outlawry in the Family Sagas. The accounts about outlawry in the Contemporary Sagas narrated concurrent experiences of outlawry. Therefore, the differences between these and the accounts in the Family Sagas reflect medieval Icelanders’ relationship to the Saga World, bearing in mind the differences between the two textual genres. In addition, through the comparison of two texts from different times that offer an account of the biography of Aron Hjörleifsson, it is possible to shed at least some light upon the processes of development of a historical character into a narrative character whose biography applies elements of traditional narration. In the following, the Contemporary Sagas will be briefly described as a textual genre and depictions of outlawry in them will be introduced. Special attention will be given to Aron Hjörleifsson because the colorful vicissitudes of his adventures are narrated extensively and in ways that are familiar from the narratives about outlawry in the Family Sagas.

The Contemporary Sagas (samtíðarsögur) describe the violent political events that took place in Iceland during the last century of the Icelandic commonwealth, from the twelfth century to the mid thirteenth century. Sturlunga saga is a collection of these sagas, compiled around year 1300, but its constitutive sagas were originally written earlier and by several writers. The Contemporary Sagas describe events occurring at the same time as those recounted in Bishops’ Sagas (biskupa sögur) but the Contemporary Sagas are differentiated from these by their secular content (Bragason 2005, 427).

The narrative conventions and attitudes expressed in Sturlunga saga resemble those of the Family Sagas. The style has however been described as being more cynical. For example, the descriptions of violence are more brutal. This has been explained as realism following from the depiction of relatively recent events (e.g. Liestøl 1930; Hallberg 1962, 33). The span of time between the writing of the Contemporary Sagas and the events they describe is relatively short. In many cases, the saga writers may have had first or second hand informants available. For
instance Sturla Þórðarson, the writer of Íslendinga saga, describes events in which he himself was a participant and eye-witness. The Contemporary Sagas have often been used as historical sources concerning thirteenth century Iceland. However, Lars Lönnroth (1994) and more recently, Úlfar Bragason (2010, 265–266) have claimed that these approaches do not take sufficient account of the saga writers’ (including the compiler of Sturlunga saga) narrative efforts and that such use of these works gives too little account for example to the role of the mythic in the saga expression.

Stephen Tranter suggests that the structure of Sturlunga saga reflects a thematic design that has a message. The prefatory section establishes the theme for the compilation. This is in support of reconciliation, showing that the less eager men are to find reconciliation, the more violence will follow. The remainder of the work is to be read as a “demonstration of the evils that came upon the land as a result of men’s failure to secure reconciliation,” and thus if there was a didactic purpose to this work, it would be to encourage seeking settlement in conflicts before falling deeper into chaos (Tranter 1987, 221).351 Quite similarly, Úlfar Bragason depicts the theme of Sturlunga saga as being “how Icelandic leaders’ unbridled greed for power and wealth brought the country to a point where the only option was to submit to be ruled by the king of Norway” whereas Bragason reads this theme as suggesting “that the best solution would be the appointment of an Icelander as Earl” (Bragason 2010, 298).

It is notable that this theme of a disaster following a failure to reconcile is discernible in the conflict structure of the Family Sagas as well (see chapter 8.3.1). Guðrún Nordal (1998, esp. 224–227) argues that the author of Íslendinga saga applied narrative models that are recognizable in the Family Sagas but not to the full extent because the events that were described took place so close to the time of writing the saga. According to Nordal, the saga also reflects the concurrent circumstances as well as, for instance, the morals that are in the focus of Nordal’s discussion.

The relatively short period between the events described and the time when they were being written down did not suffice for the oral narratives behind saga narration to crystallize. For instance, the editors of Sturlunga saga have pointed out that the Contemporary Sagas introduce more named common people than members of the social elite as actors than the Family Sagas do and that, in the Contemporary Sagas, the immediate consequences of events receive a great deal of attention in narration at the

---

351 Jónas Kristjánsson (1988a) however points out that the structure of Sturlunga saga follows the chronology of events, not literary conventions of narration.
expense of the overall narrative coherence: battles, killings and wounds are depicted in more detail than in the Family Sagas, and they also appear more cruel (Sturlunga saga, pp. lxxvi–lxxix). These differences are minor from a modal point of view, and Úlfar Bragason has pointed out that literary borrowings between the Family Sagas and other saga forms such as the Contemporary Sagas “should serve to prove that distinctions between different types of saga were far from clear in the medieval literary system” and that, as far as the Contemporary Sagas and the Family Sagas are concerned, “narratives of the sagas of both types are subject to the same rules” (Bragason 2005, 435).

The Taleworld of the Contemporary Sagas nevertheless differed from the Saga World in terms of the degree of similarity to and difference from experienced reality in the period when they were written, as discussed in chapter 4.1.1. The plausibility of the Contemporary Sagas as accounts of actual events was immediately evaluable by the implied audience for which some of the recounted events and individuals were potentially still relatively fresh in mind. However, it is necessary to bear in mind that this freshness of events also meant that the subject matter may have still been highly sensitive to parts of the Icelandic community and that the interest groups behind the saga texts may have had a significant impact on what was narrated and how.

The characters in the Contemporary Sagas are descendants of the characters in the Family Sagas. This connection by lineage made an immediate referential association between the characters and events across these two saga genres. In the Family Sagas, the introduction of a character’s ancestry could structure expectations towards the family line through prefiguration (as discussed in chapter 10.1). It is therefore reasonable to suppose that the choices in the narrative representation of a character in the Contemporary Sagas affected the way that the vicissitudes of the characters in the Saga World were perceived. Expectations could be created through lineage and also through other forms of association with Saga Age characters or their ancestors. It is notable that the ancestral lines that are recounted in the Contemporary Sagas seldom extend beyond the Saga Age.

15.2.1 Outlawry in the Contemporary Sagas

In the Contemporary Sagas, outlawry has a different ring than in the Family Sagas. This is mostly because in the Contemporary Sagas, it is exceptional for an outlaw to become a focal character. In a remarkable number of cases, outlawry is passed on anonymous groups of men
(Heusler 1912, 84). On the other hand, a striking number of the rare identified outlaws in Sturlunga saga exhibit connections to Grettir Ásmundarson. Many of these are associated with people whose lineage was drawn from Grettir Ásmundarson’s family, as discussed above in chapter 10.3.1, while others are associated with Grettir on the basis of their names. This indicates Grettir’s popularity as an outlaw character in the thirteenth century, which would qualify him as a significant “immanent” referential figure (see chapter 4.2) even where he has no immediate presence in the narrative.

According to Sturlunga saga (72–74), Oddr was the great-grandson of Grettir Ásmundarson’s sister Rannveig, and he was outlawed as one among nineteen men for killings that were committed in connection with certain conflicts (see chapter 10.3.1). Indeed, collective outlawry, such as in the representation of Oddr as one among many others that were outlawed, are encountered more often in the Contemporary Sagas than in the Family Sagas (Heusler 1912, 84). This type of description does not elevate the individual in the manner of mythic and heroic narrative traditions typical in the descriptions of the outlaws in the Family Sagas. Even though Oddr may be foregrounded by distinguishing and characterizing him separately from the rest, he nevertheless appears merely as a member of a group. This holds true in spite of him being referentially associated with the famous Saga Age outlaw Grettir.

In Sturlu saga, the outlaw Aðalríkr, who was outlawed the year 1149 for killing Skeggi Gamlason, the grandson of Grettir Ásmundarson’s sister Herdís, acts as an individual. Aðalríkr has the potential to become a focal character: he is the son of a priest, and as such a member of the higher strata, and he commits the killing that he is sentenced for to defend his honor. However, he disappears from the narrative, fleeing into the mountains after the killing, and he returns the following year only to be recognized by Sturla Þórðarson and to be killed. Rather than following the vicissitudes of Aðalríkr’s adventures as an outlaw, the narrative concentrates on Sturla’s negotiations to redeem him. (Sturlunga saga, pp. 53–56.) Aðalríkr appears in the saga predominantly because his biography crosses with that of Sturla, and his narrative potential remains overshadowed by Sturla, the main character of the saga.

Shortly after the account about Aðalríkr, Sturlu saga tells that Þóróddr, the son of a man called Grettir (about whom nothing more is known), who is a big and strong farmer, has a son with a vagrant woman. Their son is named Geirr, and he is told to be, “[…] unpopular, a thief
and an outlaw. He was so fast on foot that no horse could catch him.”

Geirr has two companions, Viðkunnr and Þórir. The three of them commit misdeeds together. One autumn, Helgi the Priest sends ten men from Hvoli to catch the malefactors, and they succeed in capturing Þórir. Viðkunnr flees to his foster-father Einarr and asks for help. The next day, this Einarr goes to Hvoli with fifteen men and demands Þórir to be delivered. Helgi the Priest refuses because Þórir has committed a deed that has made him violable (óhelgi). Einarr releases Þórir by force and Þórir kills a man in this process. Þórir and his two companions then set out as fugitives (lú úti). Helgi the Priest gets hold of Geirr and has him hanged. Later, Viðkunnr kills a man, and it is rumored that Einarr has ordered the killing although the case never comes to court. Eventually, Einarr delivers Þórir to his pursuers and Viðkunnur is said to have hidden in numerous places before he is killed while attacking a man. In short, the three outlaws are brought down one by one. (Sturlunga saga, pp. 58–60.)

These outlaws are treated as malefactors in the narrative and they appear as tools for the dubious actions of the impudent Einarr. The stories about them are treated from the social and political point of view of the broader society. In other words, they only have an instrumental function for the actual focus of the saga: they provide resources for characterizing Helgi the Priest and also Einarr in the narrative, introducing the benevolent strivings of the former and the insolence of the latter. After this is achieved, the passage is closed by telling how the outlaws, who set all of the events in motion, are eliminated from their potential to disturb the societal peace.

15.2.2 Aron Hjörleifsson

The biography of Aron Hjörleifsson makes an exception from the general marginality of outlawry in the narration of the Contemporary Sagas. Aron Hjörleifsson was one of the greatest champions in the Age of Sturlungs (Kristjánsson A. 1965, 149), the period that coincided with the period of saga writing. He is primarily addressed in Íslendinga saga and Þorgils saga skarða, and in a saga which bears his name, Arons saga. Arons saga is counted among the Bishops’ Sagas because of the central role of Bishop Guðmundr in it (Sturlunga saga, p. xxiii). Nevertheless,
the biographical saga represents him as a full-fledged hero. His character is depicted more ambiguously in *Íslendinga saga*.

Within the *Sturlunga saga*, Aron is the only outlaw that can clearly and in the full sense of outlawry be compared with the great outlaws of the Saga Age, namely Hörðr, Gísli and Grettir (Heusler 1912, 91). However, he is not made a tragic figure and his end is not a narratively significant event. With the exception of the fortunate outcome of his outlawry, the outlaw biography of Aron is especially close to that of Gísli Súrsson. For instance, he is neither a robber nor an adventurer in the wilderness, which are qualities characteristic of Hörðr and Grettir respectively. Indeed, Aron is closer to Gísli as an outlaw character although his existence is more constantly endangered than Gísli’s and although his biography is filled with hasty action (Heusler 1912, 91). He is sentenced to outlawry and his whereabouts in Iceland in the two years before his escape to Norway are carefully told. In all of the sources that refer to him, he is depicted in as an admirable figure, as a hero, even though he had bitter enemies in Iceland.

*Íslendinga saga* describes events that took place in Iceland during the period of 1183–1262. According to the prologue in *Sturlunga saga* (xl; Bragason 2005, 430), *Íslendinga saga* was written by Sturla Þórðarson. Sturla was born on July 29th in year 1214. He took charge of the farm at Hallbjarnareyri in Eyri after the death of his father, Þórð Sturlason. He took part in his relatives’ campaigns and was an influential chieftain in western Iceland. In 1263, Sturla was invited to Norway to write King Hákon’s saga, and he returned to Iceland in 1271 as a lägmaðr nominated by King Magnús, together with the new law called Járnsíða. According to the contemporary sources, Sturla was a very respected man, peace-loving and wise. Politically, he seems to have been an opportunist, ready to support anyone as long as he benefited from it himself. (*Sturlunga saga*, p. xliiv.) Sturla compiled *Íslendinga saga* sometime between his return to Iceland in 1271 and his death on July 30, 1284 (Grímsdóttir 1988).

---

353 It can be mentioned as a curiosity that Þorlákr, who is introduced as Aron’s protector in *Arons saga*, was a forefather of *Sturlunga saga*’s potential compiler (Hermannsson 1929, xxv–xxvi). Þorlákr’s son was Ketill, a law-speaker from 1259–1262, and daughter Valgerd. According to Björn M. Ólsen, one of Valgerd’s three sons (Þórðr, Þorlákr or Snorri) compiled *Sturlunga saga*. (*Safi til sögu Islands* III, 503–509). It will not be considered further here whether this may have had any effect on the representation of Aron Hjörleifsson in *Sturlunga saga*.

354 Sturla is mentioned as an historical authority in *Grettis saga*, and it has been suggested that he was the writer of a first version of the saga. Suggestions of Sturla as the author of *Grettis saga* begin from Arni Magnússon up to Sigurður Nordal. Sturla is one of few named saga-
According to Íslendinga saga, Sturla Sighvatsson has Aron sentenced to outlawry in 1224 for a killing in Grimsey. Aron stays with his relatives in the West Fjords until Staðar-Böðvarr fails to pay compensation for him (“handsalad í fyrir þá á þingi tíu hundruð og galt”). After this event, it is difficult for him to get protection, and he goes into hiding. He often stays in Geirþófsfjörður with a minor farmer who is named Þórarinn. While Aron is making a boat for Þórarinn, three of Sturla’s men attack him, but two other men come to his assistance. Aron and his new companions fight successfully and Aron escapes to the sea before any additional troops arrive to support his attackers. Aron moves to Barðarströnd and stays in a cave in Árnarbælisdal where women who live in Tungumúla provide food for him.

In the autumn, Aron sails south of Breiðafjörður and stays at Þórðr’s in Eyri, leaving his boat adrift to deceive his pursuers. Sturla arrives to Helgafell with a retinue and Aron spots him. Aron is eager to attack Sturla but his uncle Hafþórr prevents him from doing so. Sturla sends a spy (njósn) to find out whether Aron is in Eyri and on the basis of the information that the spy delivers, Sturla travels there with fourteen men. Indeed, Aron is in Valshamarr at that time. Aron’s uncle is killed whereas Aron kills one of the attackers and disappears across the river into the darkness. He runs south across the heath all the way to his mother who stays in Rauðamel. Vigfúss, who has sheltered Aron, has to agree to self-judgement for accommodating an outlaw. Later, Aron moves to Berserkseyri, and from there he travels south to Snæfellsnes together with Starkaðr Bjarnarson.

Aron seeks revenge on Sigmundr snagi who is after Aron’s head. Together with Starkaðr, Aron intrudes into Eyóihus where he takes Sigmundr by surprise and kills him. He and Starkaðr stay in the house for the night (to the apparent horror of the people there since Sigmundr was the only man in the house.) Then Aron moves about before going to Oddi to Haraldr Sæmundarson’s who has him transported abroad. Aron meets King Hákon of Norway and then makes a visit to Jerusalem. Back in Norway, he then becomes King Hákon’s man. (Sturlunga saga, pp. 290–294.) As a type of an epilogue, Íslinginga saga recounts later in the text that Sturla summons Haraldr Sæmundarson for assisting the outlawed Aron (Sturlunga saga, p. 401).

In Þorgils saga skarða, it is told that Aron offers the Icelandic Þorgils support in Norway and that Aron is obviously appreciated by the king (Sturlunga saga, p. 577–579). Aron is introduced in the saga as follows:

writers of the Middle Ages and this is probably why so many sagas are attributed to him (Grímsdóttir 1988, 29–30).
“Böðvarr had shown him great loyalty when he was the outlaw of Sturla Sighvatsson. Aron was a man of King Hákon and he was dear to the king. He was a good man.”\textsuperscript{355} (\textit{Sturlunga saga}, p. 577.) According to \textit{Þorgils saga}, Aron Hjörleifsson returns to Iceland in 1253, to Dýrafjörður, with Erlingr \textit{snagi} and another man. In the service of the king, he demands compensation for Erlingr’s father (\textit{Sturlunga saga}, p. 627). Let it be mentioned that in a fragment of \textit{Sturlunga saga}, preserved only in later copies of \textit{Reykjarfjarðarbók}, a more critical image of Aron is given as an unloyal and unjust man (\textit{Sturlunga saga}, pp. 933–934).

\textit{Arons saga} was written in the first half of the fourteenth century. As such, it is approximately contemporary with \textit{Grettis saga} and later than \textit{Gísla saga, Fóstbræðra saga} or \textit{Harðar saga}. \textit{Arons saga} expands the narrative told in \textit{Íslendinga saga} in both temporal directions. It was written a century later than \textit{Íslendinga saga} and the writer was apparently well aware of \textit{Íslendinga saga} as he constantly complements and comments the account in it.

\textit{Arons saga} beings by telling that Aron has a good lineage and respectable parents, and that he himself is large and strong-willed in his youth. He is a foster brother of his future enemy, Sturla Sighvatsson. After this, the saga tells how Aron joins bishop Guðmundr to repel Stura’s attack upon the bishop. They withdraw to the island Málmyr which is located close to the bishop’s see in Hólar. After a while, they make a successful counterattack. After this attack, they retreat to the island Grímsey where a major battle ensues. In this battle, Aron fights successfully and he kills nine men single-handed. However, the battle is lost and Aron flees the island and travels south to Svinafell by the glacier Vatnajökull. He is captured by Ormr, a friend of the Sturlungs, but he is released by his brother who joins him on his journey to the west. They go to Aron’s mother’s in Snæfellsnes and there, they are shown to a cave where they may hide in safety. Word arrives that Aron is outlawed.\textsuperscript{356} The influential farmers of Arnarfjörður attempt to pay compensation to Sturla on Aron ‘s behalf but Sturla refuses. Aron then moves to the remote fjord Geirsþjófsfjörður to a farmer called Jóhamarr. Then the saga recounts the same event that opens the sequence of Aron’s biography in \textit{Íslendinga saga}, namely Aron’s defense against the attack of two of Sturla’s men.

\textsuperscript{355} “Hann hafði reynt af Böðvari vináttu mikla þá er hann var skógsmaður Sturlu Sighvatssonar. Aron var hirðmaður Hákona konungs og var kær konungi. Var hann og góður drengur.”

\textsuperscript{356} “[...] var góðr skógar-maður, ok óheilagr ok óferjandi, ok óráðandi öllum bjargráðum, ok á öllum þeim stórsakir er hónum veitti nökkur bjarg-ráð.” (Ch. 11)
Details in this event differ from its account in Íslendinga saga. These differences indicate that the writer of Arons saga wanted to make corrections to that account (Glendinning 1969). According to Arons saga, Aron consciously acquires the confidence of the two men who support him in the battle by telling about his dream in which bishop Guðmundr shows him approval and by handing over his mail coat. Arons saga claims that it is a great lie that Sturla is anywhere near at the moment and that one of the attackers, a man called Þórvaldr, pretends to call for aid to deceive the victorious Aron. After winning the battle, Aron moves around the district together with his mother’s brother Haðþórir before going south to Valshamarr. They are attacked by Sturla and his men and, in contrast to the account in Íslendinga saga, Haðþórir is said to have died here. Aron manages to break the siege and escape into a forest, wounded in the calf by a spear. He goes to his mother’s where he is cured. He visits Eyðiðíhus and is told to kill Sigmundr snagi single-handed, in contrast to the account in Íslendinga saga. In the following spring, he goes to southern Iceland where transportation is arranged for him to Norway on the basis of his friendship with bishop Guðmundr. After this, the following seven chapters tell how Aron achieves the respect of Jarl Skúli, how he makes a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Jórsalir), how he returns to Norway to the service of King Hákon with a distinguished position in his retinue, and how he helps Þórðr kakali Sighvatsson to recover and return to Iceland. Arons saga also recounts that Aron settles with everyone he has had quarrels with in Iceland and that he finally died of sickness in Norway, fully redeemed, with the king at his bedside. After dying, Aron receives all possible honors from the king.

There is even a praise poem (Aronsdrápa) composed about Aron’s eventual success composed by Óláfr hvítaskáld, Sturla Þórðarson’s brother. Two stanzas of this poem are preserved. The first praises Aron’s successful evasion of Sturla Sighvatsson as an outlaw and the second celebrates his pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The second stanza of the poem is in both Íslendinga saga and Arons saga.

Connections between the biography of Aron Hjörleifsson and the outlaws in the Family Sagas have been recognized especially in relation to Gisla saga. A clear correspondence is Aron’s escape on the small islet in Breiðafjörður that is particularly reminiscent of the similar escape

357 “Fór sá er fremd og tíri / fleinr ýrir gat stýra, / mest lofa eg mikla hreysti / manns, Jórsali að kanna. // Naðr rak út við ítra / Jóðran við þrek stóran / skjal dar Freyr hinn skyri / skógarmanns að nógu.” (“He travelled, who fame and glory / for men could steer, / I praise the bravery to the most / of this man, to visit Jerusalem. // The name was spread to the excellent / River Jordan with great strength, / Freyr protects the clever, / of the outlaw, plentifully.”)
358 For discussion, see Heusler 1912, 91–92; Foote 1963; Ædalgeir Kristjánsson1965; Heller 1966; Porter 1973.
of the outlaw Gísli some 250 years earlier (Heusler 1912, 92; Kristjánsson A. 1965, 157), yet the cumulative mass of other minor correspondences also is impressive. Ádalgeir Kristjánsson (1965) presented an exhaustive list of such correspondences, using both Arons saga and Íslendinga saga as the sources for Aron’s biography. These corresponding narrative elements represent different levels of narrative structure from individual motifs up to narrative sequences, and the density and pervasiveness of the cumulative correspondences is unlikely to be accidental. Ádalgeir Kristjánsson (1965, 150–157) took the following narrative elements into account:

- Enmity between foster brothers
- Outlawing for a killing
- Geirsþjófsþjörðr as a setting
- Unsuccessful advocacy on behalf of the outlaw
- The outlaw travelling around Iceland
- Spies sent after the outlaw
- Fifteen men confront the outlaw and one companion
- The outlaw’s partners are killed
- The outlaw is wounded in the calf by a spear
- One of the fifteen attackers is killed by the outlaw and he manages to escape
- The outlaw is handy at ship-building
- The outlaw leaves a boat floating to deceive his pursuers
- The outlaw is told in a dream to be “generous to the poor”
- The spear Grásíða (in another passage in Íslendinga saga, this spear is said to have been the weapon of Sturla Sighvatsson at the battle of Örlygsstaðr)
- And some minor correspondences

Whereas Rolf Heller (1966, 63) suggested that Gísla saga has influenced the contents of Arons saga, Peter Foote (1963) and Ádalgeir Kristjánsson (1965, 157–158) believed that the memory of Aron’s vicissitudes in the early thirteenth century affected the accounts of Gísli Súrsson’s outlawry in Gísla saga. Kristjánsson did not consider it probable that the writer of Íslendinga saga would have used Gísla saga as a model for the accounts about Aron because the events in which Aron was involved took place only 20–30 years before Íslendinga saga was written (Kristjánsson A. 1965, 157). Instead, it is possible that events that had occurred close to the period of saga writing affected the saga narratives, Kristjánsson (1965, 149) implies. However, the same narrative elements that Kristjánsson listed above are also met in other narratives about outlawry in the Family Sagas (for the narrative elements, see chapter 7.3). It is also possible that the narrative tradition that evolved
around Aron Hjörleifsson’s vicissitudes in the thirteenth century had an impact on narratives about outlawry in general. However, many of these narrative elements are so widely used in the saga narratives that it seems more plausible that the same narrative conventions were utilized when telling of Aron’s vicissitudes as an outlaw that were used in telling about earlier outlaws in the narrative tradition. These conventions tended to affect the contents of the narratives about outlaws in general.

Aron’s biography includes numerous narrative elements of outlawry that are familiar from the Family Sagas. Individual elements, such as Geirþjófsfjörður as a location, spies sent after the outlaw, rules of conduct given in a dream and the spear Grásiða are the only ones in Aron’s biography that can be connected exclusively to the biography of Gísli Súrsson. For instance, islands comprise a central spatial setting for narratives about outlawry in the Family Sagas. Furthermore, the islands that have a central role in Aron’s biography are in the immediate vicinity of the islands that serve as important settings in two of the Outlaw Sagas: Flatey is located near Hergilsøy, which has a central position in Gísla saga, and it is only a few kilometers from Málmyey to Drangey, which was the final refuge of Grettir Ásmundarson according to Grettis saga. Aron hid in the periphery of habitation and a cave was even named after him (Aronshellir; see Arons saga, Ch. 10). Aron’s mother’s role was significant to him and she provided him regularly with help and shelter in a way that rather resembles the accounts in Grettis saga than Gísla saga. For instance, the way that Aron’s mother warned her son away from staying at her house (Arons saga, Ch. 14) is quite similar in content to a scene in Grettis saga (Ch. 48). The relatives from Aron’s mother’s side support Aron. In the Family Sagas, the relatives of the outlaw’s mother are often more helpful to the outlaw than those of his father (see chapter 9.4.3). In short, the accounts of Aron’s biography in both Íslendinga saga and Arons saga utilize conventions that are involved in narrating about outlaws in the Family Sagas in general.

Aron’s family background provided a foundation to conceive of him as a heroic character. According to the Sturlubók version of Landnámabók, Aron’s Norwegian forefather, Herjólfr svínhöfða Sigurðsson, was eight years old when he killed a forest bear, and when Herjólfr was twelve, he avenged his father. Herjólfr settled in Iceland between Búlandshöfði and Kirkjufjarðar (which was probably in Grundarfjörður, Snæfellsnes). Herjólfr’s son was Þorsteinn kolskeggr, the

---

359 “[…] ok var henna nú meiri foðnuð á fundi þeirra, en hón mætti í fyrstu orði upp koma” (Arons saga, Ch. 10).
360 There is a poem which is probably the basis for this account, in which the bear is referred to as Bersi brunninrazi and Herjólfr is called holkinrazi.
father of Þórarinn ðórólfr who was the father of Þórarinn enn svarti as well as Guðný. Guðný married Vermundr enn mjóvi and their son was Brandr enn örvi, Aron’s great-great-grandfather. (Landnámabók, p. 116–117.)

Herjólfr was a settler and as such, a semi-mythical founding father in Aron’s lineage. In Arons saga, a strong connection in Aron’s lineage is made to Brandr enn örvi who was said to have been famous but about whom there is not much told in Landnámabók or other sources. Brandr’s father Vermundr mjóvi is thus counted as a direct forefather of Aron, and Vermundr is the most oft-referred to of them in the Family Sagas. For example, Vermundr appears as a central, admired character in both Fóstbræðra saga and Grettis saga and he also receives praise in Eyrbyggja saga (Ch. 18): “He was a wise man and gave good council.”

These ancestors connect Aron to semi-mythical heroes (through the settler Herjólfr) and to outlaw heroes (through Vermundr inn mjóvi’s appearance in Grettis saga and Fóstbræðra saga).

15.2.3 Conclusion

The Contemporary Sagas deal with events in the recent history of their writers but these sagas nevertheless belonged to the same literary sphere as the Family Sagas. Outlawry is, however, depicted in them from the point of view of political turns within the society, which drew attention away from the outlaws themselves. Aron Hjörleifsson is an exception to this rule as a narrative character that grew to a significant measure because his vicissitudes in outlawry aroused interest and were considered saga-worthy even from the perspective of this literary genre. This process appears to be characterized by the application of narrative conventions that are also familiar from narratives about outlawry in the Family Sagas. The other outlaws in the Contemporary Sagas remain marginal characters with minor roles in larger series of events and subordinate to incidents and personal relations connected to the focal characters in the saga narratives. In spite of this, recognizable referential connections to the traditional outlaw characters of the Family Sagas can be recognized even among these accounts. The difference in attitude towards outlawry in the Contemporary Sagas in contrast to the Family Sagas may be a consequence of differences in the functions and aims of the literary genre or of the short period of time between the events and their rendering in

---

361 According to the Melabók version of Landnámabók, Herjólfr was twelve when he killed the bear that had killed the goat that Herjólfr’s father had given him and then he avenged his father.

362 “Hann var vitr maðr ok stundar heilráðr.”
narration. This period of time may not have been sufficient for the narration to fully accommodate the traditional narrative conventions.

It is also possible that the differences in the depiction of outlawry in the two saga genres reflect a change in the living conditions that took place between the Saga Age and the thirteenth century. The role of law diminished in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in societal interactions due to the process of the centralization of political power (see chapter 9.3) and this also affected the nature of outlawry. The violent acts of individuals that led to outlawry in the Saga World began to be comprehended as elements of conflict akin to warfare. The Contemporary Sagas largely focus on the relations between the parties of this centralized power. Therefore, the focus is on the political elite whereas the politically significant underdogs\(^{363}\) may be read as outlaw characters. This means that even if the actual events are comprehended and narrated according to the conventional manners of the saga discourse, the relative significance of the conventional resources for narration was diminished. This is because the focus of narration was directed to other themes than outlawry itself while still acknowledging different aspects of outlawry as being relevant to the events that were being described. Signs of crystallization and conventionalization in the narration of Arons saga, especially in the expansions advanced from Íslendinga saga, illuminate how the growth of temporal and social distance made it possible to re-depict an opponent of the ruling elite by applying narrative conventions that turn him into a heroic figure who demonstrates his worthiness not only in the hopeless struggle of outlawry but also in the eyes of a saintly representative of the Church and a representative of the royalty of Norway.

\(^{363}\) In addition to Aron, see for instance the treatment of Þórdur kakali in Sturlunga Saga.
16 Concluding Remarks: Outlawry in the Icelandic Family Sagas

The main purpose of the discussions in the preceding chapters has been to increase the understanding of outlawry in the Family Sagas. The Family Sagas were connected to the past of medieval Icelanders in a way that required the subject matter to be treated according to the formal prescriptions of traditional narration but at the same time in a way that maintained close connections between the narrative and the experienced world. As has been discussed, texts that are derived from the narrative tradition generate meaning primarily through their inherent relations to that cultural context. Therefore, the processes of generating meaning in the production of a text and in its reception are interlinked. The Taleworld to which the text refers determines the way that the text is interpreted. The narrated events in the Family Sagas are interpreted in relation to the Saga World.

Outlawry in Commonwealth Iceland was a legal judgment that resituated the individual in a new social state and this informed the primary meaning of outlawry. Outlawry followed violating the law. The law is treated in the Family Sagas as a set of commonly accepted norms and sanctions that are to be followed. As William Ian Miller (1990, 229) has observed, “It seems that people felt that law promoted order.” For an individual, being sentenced to outlawry meant that the law ceased protecting him, that he lost all of his property and that everyone was actually forbidden to help him in any way. In other words, the sentence excluded him from society. The general societal solidarity ensured people’s survival in the rather harsh natural environment and guided people’s mutual behaviour in Iceland. This solidarity was also guaranteed by the law, and the fact that outlawry denied the convicted individual this solidarity underlined the severity of the sentence.

The law played a significant role in the mindset of medieval Icelanders as a distinctive identifying factor and as the symbol of the unity of the society (Miller 1990, 8; Hastrup 1985). However, the Family Sagas do not exclusively express disapproving attitudes towards those who break the law and who, in the ultimate cases, become outlaws. The attitudes seem to have been guided rather by moral than juridical premises. In the Family Sagas, the law and its institutions appear as a framework and a setting for the narrative. Therefore, legal offences are not conceived of as acts that are directed against the general public. Rather, they are presented as acts against individuals. Similarly, a law
case is not a conflict between an individual and the society but rather a conflict between two parties.

Even though “the sagas make a strong case for natural law as the necessary bulwark of positive law in order for the latter to be enforced in Iceland’s free society,” as William Pencak (1995, 8) wrote, there is often a sensible tension between justice and law in the saga narratives about outlawry. The outlaw heroes in particular are represented as acting according to a moral that is based on the mechanisms of honor instead of the letter of the law. The discrepancy between this moral and the law is often what actually leads them to be outlawed. The significance of the law in the Saga World is twofold: on the one hand, the law and legal procedures occupy a large proportion of the saga narratives and the law has a central position in many sagas as a code that guarantees an individual protection against the caprices of his fellow countrymen and, as such, the law is the foundational pillar of the state. On the other hand, the law and legal procedures appear in the Family Sagas as a setting for intrigues, as a political playground that is dominated by powerfulchieftains who are capable of manipulating the legal procedures.

The societal role of the law changed with the subjectugation to the Norwegian crown and the introduction of the new law code in 1270. After the change of law, those people who were sentenced to outlawry were no longer directly sentenced by representative members of the population. Even the legislation was out of the Icelanders’ hands. Men were still sentenced for crimes against their fellow countrymen (and outlawry still existed as a punishment) but ultimately, they were summoned and sentenced by the officials of a foreign monarch and according to the rules set by him. The estrangement from the law that ensued may indeed be manifested in the marked difference in tone when the Family Sagas deal with the outlaws who are sentenced by the Norwegian king and when they deal with the men who are outlawed at the General Assembly. The approving attitude towards the king’s Icelandic outlaw was enabled both by the spatial distance between the narrator and the outlaw and also by the distance between the narrative and the identifiable interest groups against whom the outlaw in these narratives offends. The approving attitude could continue to endure after the outlaw comes to Iceland because the (ultimate) plaintiff remains overseas.

*Grettis saga* was written at a time when Iceland had belonged to the Norwegian throne for at least three generations. This was a time when the law was no longer in an equally strong symbolic position as in the Commonwealth Period and when the law no longer symbolised the unity of all Icelanders. Perhaps it is not too far-fetched to say that an outlaw
could become a land-cleansing, protective hero, such as the saga’s title hero Grettir Ásmundarson, only after outlawry no longer embodied the violation of communal peace in the extratextual reality of the Icelanders, and after the old law had received the nostalgic properties of an order of the good old days of independence. In this environment, Grettir’s outlawry was associable with outlawry that was sentenced by a foreign ruler.

As has become evident in this study, outlawry appears in the Family Sagas in diverse forms. These appearances were approached in this study primarily as tradition-based expressions of collective conceptions. Therefore, the focus has been on the recurrent and conventional narrative units in which outlawry and outlaws occupy a role. The variation within these conventional narrative units was approached in this study as formally differing manifestations of the same collective conceptions in differing textual environments. In principle, these collective conceptions (or the Saga World) are the source for the variation as long as the meanings of the text are generated through their inherent relation to the cultural context.

One reason for the variation in forms lies in the differing functions of outlawry in the narratives of the Family Sagas. Outlawry functions in these narratives either as a frightening consequence of illegal activity that directs the actions of characters or, more typically, as a sentence that is passed upon a narrative character. As a passed sentence, outlawry has a more significant narrative impact in the Family Sagas than as a threat and therefore, this study concentrates on those narrative characters who are marked with outlawry. Generally speaking, outlawry leads to two alternative outcomes for the individual burdened with the sentence. Either the purpose of the sentence is fulfilled and the sentenced individual loses his life, or he survives the sentence either by evading the death of an outlaw by managing to escape Iceland or by the mitigation of the sentence so that he is able to retain his position in society.

Another reason for the variation in forms is found in the differing roles that the outlaws occupy in the saga narratives. Two narrative strategies dominate the structure of saga narration. These strategies are related to a bilateral conflict and to biography. The actions of the characters in these narratives are constituent units of the narrative structure and determine the roles that the characters occupy in the narratives.

In the narratives about a bilateral conflict, outlawry appears as a tool with which an opponent could be harmed or as a threat that limits the extent to which violence can be a practical resort. Summoning another and having him outlawed functions in these narratives as a form of direct
hostile action. Furthermore, in many narratives about bilateral conflicts in the Family Sagas, outlaws turn the smoldering conflict between two parties into open hostility. This happens, for example, if two parties adopt colliding attitudes towards the outlaw. In outlawry, the individual is socially neutralized or marginalized, and this is probably why outlaws are frequently applied as stock characters in the role of the extraneous agent.

The biographical perspective presents a somewhat different image of outlawry than the more general communal point of view. In an individual’s biography, outlawry is exclusively a personal tragedy. Outlawry fundamentally interrupts the expected and preferred course of life. This tragedy is either represented as a challenge to a heroic individual who can demonstrate his capability by showing prowess in facing this challenge or as a state that turns out to be fatal to the otherwise superior character. However, the tragedy of outlawry can also prove to be an opportunity for the sentenced individual. This is the case in fortunate outlawry and in pioneering outlawry (see the categories in chapter 6). However, outlawry appears to have been exceptional among the people representing the higher social strata on which the biographies recounted in the Family Sagas predominantly focus. In many biographies of the men representing these strata, outlawry seems in fact to be the factor that made them saga-worthy in the first place.

The conventional narrative structures and the models for their representation in the narratives create expectations, or horizons of expectation, among the audience. These horizons of expectation were especially strong with regard to conventional narrative forms such as the saga literature. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the expectations of the audience and the way that the saga writer may have anticipated these expectations. However, because a single narrative passage can be a part of numerous narrative structures – for instance, a single killing scene can simultaneously be a constituent unit of a conflict that is central to the saga, a constituent unit of another conflict that is not at the focus of the saga, and an element of one or more biographies recounted in the saga – each character in each narrative passage may have several simultaneous roles in the overall saga. In other words, a single narrative passage could have relevance in many different plot structures and therefore, it had many potential frames of reference within the overall narrative. The differences in the narration of the same event in different sagas are partly explainable precisely by these frames of reference.

As this discussion about the functions of outlawry in the Family Sagas shows, outlaws do not appear at random in the Family Sagas. They have definite functions in the narratives. In many cases, it may well be impossible to reconstruct the thematic aims of the saga writers, but the
saga writers certainly had some type of criteria for selecting among traditional narratives. A saga text balances between resorting to the more or less fixed inherited traditional sources (such as the authorities of oral tradition, entextualized narratives as well as written sagas and histories), the genre-based requirements of narration, and the interpretations and alterations of the people who engaged in the narrative as its distributed authors during the course of the saga’s circulation as a written and copied work. Therefore, the selection and reformulation of the narrative elements of a saga text was affected by different factors. Such factors were, for example, the structural needs of the narrative, the demands or expectations of the patrons and other interest groups behind the saga text, the nature of the available sources (the material needed to conform with the Saga World), the conventions of saga narrative and the personal taste and preferences of the writer – which could be motivated, for instance, by religion or by family interests. Under these varying circumstances, the relatively uniform representation of a common narrative character such as an “outlaw” in differing narrative environments and narrative roles indicates a crystallized traditional image. This image is manifested as a stock character whose stereotyped characteristics also became the signifying elements of more individualized narrative characters identified as “outlaws.”

Although the sections of the law that define outlawry can shed light on the appearances of outlawry in the saga texts and vice versa, these sections of the law cannot explain the different attitudes that are expressed towards the outlaws in the saga texts. Understanding outlawry in the Saga World requires the interpretation of the impacts and significance of outlawry in relation to the structure of the Saga World. This structure is divided in this study into the social and spatial structures.

The law was largely associated with the people in medieval Iceland: rather than as a legislative system per se, the expression “vår lög” (“our law”) designates the difference of the societal systems, as a way of life, between monarchist Norway and Commonwealth Iceland, as discussed in chapter 9.1. In this sense, outlawry is a violation against the society, against the prevailing values. However, in a legal system without an executive institution in which the plaintiff was responsible for both summoning and for implementing the verdict, outlawry was inevitably also a result of a bilateral dispute. In other words, a person could be banished from society as a result of a private dispute and this did not require that the society banished him as a collective. Therefore, outlawry had different meanings from different societal perspectives.

From the perspective of the outlaw, the Icelandic society comprised two fields to which he was related in fundamentally different ways. These
societal fields were the public field and the private field. The outlaw had no place within the public field of society. The public field consisted of the formal, contractual relations between (male) Icelanders and the institutions that formed the basis for these relations, such as the General Assembly. However, even in outlawry, a person was still acknowledged as a member of the private field. The private field primarily consisted of the person’s family members and close relatives. The saga accounts also indicate that the private field could be extended to cover the female sex even beyond immediate family relations. This is perhaps connected to the fact that in Icelandic society, women were left outside most activities in the public field. The saga narratives about outlawry make these fields visible. Indeed, in many instances, the narrative tension is based on the contradiction between these fields, as discussed in chapter 9.4. It seems that the societal structures of the Saga World corresponded in many ways with those of the saga-writing period. Therefore, the Saga World provided a sounding board for the personal experiences of the people who lived within those corresponding societal structures.\(^\text{364}\)

Lineage created a direct link between the people who lived during the period of saga writing and those who had lived in the Saga Age. The Family Sagas treat the social relations of the past with great sensitivity. The deeds of the outlaws and the relations that the outlaws had with other people were evaluated and interpreted in relation to their acknowledged descendants in the period of saga writing. The different interest groups behind the writing of the Family Sagas were without a doubt especially sensitive in regard to the representation of their ancestors in such a specific and identifiable frame of reference. For example, the general conceptions about outlawry were actualized and delivered in the saga texts in accordance with the Saga World and in connection with more or less specific historical individuals, but their representation in these texts (selection, application and wording) was affected by the social dynamics of the contemporary reality. The meaning of the relations between the characters in the saga texts for the saga audiences was based on the current relations between the descendants of the represented saga characters. However, not enough evidence has been preserved of these current relations to fully understand, for example, why certain characters are mentioned in the saga texts in connection with particular outlaws. However, the evidence of acknowledged lineages that extend from certain saga outlaws to the period of saga writing, as given in the Contemporary Sagas, may offer a small indication of this semantic potential, as discussed in chapter 10.3.

\(^{364}\) This is also suggested in Guðrún Nordal’s study of Íslendinga saga, one of the Contemporary Sagas (1998).
The spatial surroundings comprised the most concrete bridge between the past and the present for the people who lived during the period of saga writing (and today). There was a certain space within the physical environment of the Saga World that was demarcated for outlaws or emphasized as the space reserved for outlaws. This space was located at the margins of the inhabited space of society. This space is manifested in the general features of the specific settings in which the narratives about outlawry predominantly take place in the Family Sagas and it illustrates how outlawry was conceived of in relation to the inhabitants and to the societal division of space. For example, outlawry is observably related to the public and private fields of the society in different ways in the Family Sagas. Consequently, the space that was available for the outlaws was limited to the peripheries of the public field – to the wastelands of the interior and to the islands of the shores of Iceland – and to suitable proportions of the private field of society that constructed socially isolated spaces within the inhabited territory and the community networks. The conceptions and beliefs concerning this space, and their manifestations in the beings that were connected to this space (such as the trolls of the interior), were associated also with the outlaws.

These spatial associations comprise one example of the connotations that affected the representation of outlaws in the Family Sagas. Such connotations make it necessary to study the secondary meanings that the outlaws had through analogous or associative connections with other contemporary literature and the corresponding Taleworlds. In the same way that a given passage in a saga text could be associated with more than one narrative section, this passage could also be associated with more than one Taleworld through referential connections. The schematic narrative structures vary between the different saga genres and other forms of literature. For example, formal markers may evoke a shift in the schematic narrative structure, or the occurrence of an “alien” narrative structure in a saga text may add to the meaning of the narrative, as was discussed in the introduction to Part III. Besides this “structural referentiality,” the Family Sagas may refer to other traditions through minor structural units such as motifs, stock scenes or stock characters that are typical of these traditions.

The basic signifying elements of outlawry in the Family Sagas are reducible to the banishment, rejection and marginalization of a person. In order to recognize the narratives and narrative characters that are associable with the saga outlaws in other Taleworlds, these simplified elements of outlawry were employed in this study as guidelines for analysis together with the conventional narrative elements such as
themes, motifs and characterizations that are used in the narratives about outlaws in the Family Sagas.

The third part of this study deals with the referential meanings that outlawry, and consequently outlaws, had in relation to other Taleworlds than the Saga World. The texts that reflect these Taleworlds provide different kinds of models and examples that provide a complementary insight into the nature of outlawry in the Family Sagas. They reflect the same conceptions that were the constitutive elements of outlawry in the Saga World but in a differing discourse from that of the Family Sagas. The reflections of the constitutive elements of outlawry in different frames of reference are an indication of the centrality of the concept of outlawry within medieval Icelandic culture. The breadth of this associative net surrounding the outlawry of the Saga World means that outlawry was a polysemic and central concept for medieval Icelanders, which consequently meant dynamic applicability in narrative expression. This applicability guaranteed outlawry a place in a wide range of discourses.

Christian texts and text criticism provided a learned mode for treating traditional resources in reception and in their adaptation into a written form. The Family Sagas were written in a society that had been Christian for more than two centuries, and the writing took place predominantly within a clerical environment. Exegetical methods were widely used in the interpretation of secular texts in Iceland as they were in continental Europe. This means that the oral historical traditions were decoded and further encoded within an environment that encouraged textual interpretation that differed from that of traditional oral narrative. This form of interpretation inevitably left traces in the delivered texts and it was an organic part of textual reception in the Christian surroundings. Within this Christian frame of reference, outlaws could be presented as cautionary examples of evil heathenism, as virtuous eremites, and even as a type of pre-Christian martyrs.

The outlaws were banished from society, which categorically meant banishment from the sphere of humans. This is why the outlaws were strongly associated with otherworldly beings such as trolls and connected to the most inconstant deities of the vernacular myths. Indeed, these myths functioned both as a traditional frame of reference and as models for narration. The mythic wolves and giants comprise the clearest proportion of the mythological imagery that is associable with outlawry. They reflect a socially determined spatial category as characters that form a constant external threat to the in-group of the mythological Taleworld. The male members of this group were not shown any sympathy in the mythological narratives and the gods, the representatives of the in-group
of the mythological Taleworld, destroy them without hesitation whenever possible. The imagery connected with the giants and wolves is mostly applied to those outlaws who occupy minor roles in the Family Sagas, but this imagery is also widely applied to other outlaw characters.

The demonic character Loki is a proper outlaw character within the mythological Taleworld. This is because Loki represents fundamental marginality as related to the society of the gods. As a marginal character, Loki brings the relations between the gods and the giants out of balance. His excessive misdeeds lead him to be chased, captured and punished as though he were a convicted outlaw. Loki does not have a position in either the public or the private field of the gods’ realm. Instead, he is prophesied to attack Ásgarðr at the end of the World together with the other enemies of the gods. The narratives about Loki have had a definite value as entertainment. Loki is conceivable as a sympathetic figure because he arouses amazement as a trickster character. As such, the narratives about Loki have parallels in the saga narratives about the Icelanders who are outlawed by the Norwegian king in particular. The Icelandic outlaws of the king of Norway are principally represented positively in the Family Sagas (although this positive attitude seems occasionally to have been reluctant, as in the case of Hrappr Örgumleiðason in Njáls saga).

Deities were the actors in those narratives that had settings in the mythological world. This is why the outlaws are possible associate even with those beings who belong to the heart of the mythological in-group. For example, outlaws resemble the chief god Óðinn as mysterious characters and as anthropomorphic embodiments of the otherworld together with the potential that they possess as such. As another example, the god Þórr is represented in mythology as an immensely strong warrior who traverses hostile lands. The exemplar of Þórr provides outlawry with positive connotations in the mythological frame of reference. In the eyes of the giants, whom Þórr terrorized, he would be an outlaw even though Þórr is never represented from this point of view. In other words, the perspective of the mythological narratives morally justifies the outlawry that is manifested in Þórr. The references to a multitude mythic characters in the narratives about outlawry in the Family Sagas show on the one hand the centrality of the image of the outlaw in the culture of medieval Iceland and on the other hand, they show how multiple and even ambiguous this image was.

The heroic narratives set in the ancient past that are recounted in the Legendary Sagas do not acknowledge the law as an effective social institution. These sagas take place abroad, in the lawless Heroic Age, but the heroes who wander outside their society in a hostile world move in a
space that conceptually resembles that in which outlaws are forced to move in the Saga World. The heroic poems and sagas tell about solitary men who are superior to ordinary mortals when it comes to physical strength and martial skills. Many motifs, in which the saga outlaws demonstrate these characteristics, make a direct association with legendary heroes. Whereas for heroes, solitary wandering was a phase before returning victoriously home, the tragic outlaw heroes generally have a worse fate before them. The fortunate biographies of outlaws in the Family Sagas most resemble the Legendary Sagas. The heroic narrative tradition provided narrative principles for the biographies of solitary men who were forced to fight successfully in order to survive. These principles are manifested in elements of the saga narratives ranging from a biographical structure to motifs that contribute to the construction of the narrative characters.

The Norwegian kings could not be outlawed as they embodied the highest condemnatory power. However, the Kings’ Sagas recount the vicissitudes of kings and kings-to-be who are banished or pursued by possessors of a power superior to their own. Banishment is the closest equivalent to outlawry in this connection, and the Kings’ Sagas provided an elevated model of exile to the medieval Icelanders. Many of the Kings’ Sagas represent exemplars of exile as being an approved phase of a royal career that occasionally appears to be an almost obligatory stage preceding acknowledged kingship. This theme is applied in both the biography of King Sverrir, which the king had written himself, as well as in the biography of Óláfr Haraldsson who was generally the most respected of the Norwegian kings. In these royal biographies, exile is an opportunity or stage in which the king or the king-to-be could demonstrate his prowess and competence. Within this frame of reference, outlawry in the Family Sagas was conceivable as a personal challenge that even Norwegian monarchs did not disregard.

In the Contemporary Sagas, there is an outlaw character that stands out as a representative of the stock outlaw character albeit in a discourse that differs from that of the Family Sagas. The biography of Aron Hjörleifsson is narrated in two distinct texts that are separated by almost a century: Íslendinga saga and Arons saga. The dynamics of variation between these versions illustrate the narrative techniques of saga writers that had differing interests. More significantly for the present study, they simultaneously serve as an example of the process of a historical character becoming perceived in terms of traditional narration. The historical character of Aron Hjörleifsson grew towards mythic proportions as the temporal distance from the actual events increased. These mythic proportions are especially visible in the correspondences
between narratives about Aron Hjörleifsson and about the outlaw heroes of the Family Sagas.

All in all, the basic constituent elements of outlawry in the Family Sagas have parallels in other texts that were concurrently produced in Iceland, including those that represent other genres. In spite of the obvious differences in representation, which follows the differences in genre and in the referent Taleworlds, the parallels are often apparent. Even formal narrative elements are applied across genres. The recognizable narrative conventions of another narrative genre in a text add to the semantic depth of that text. This is because the expressions that create the connections across different Taleworlds give the text multiple potential frames of reference. Those frames of reference that are conceived as meaningful become relevant in the reception of the text. The saga writer could affect how the text was interpreted in reception but, ultimately, each receiver made the interpretations individually, although in relation to the inherited principles of the narrative tradition.

The saga outlaw was a central figure in the medieval Icelandic worldview in two different ways. First, outlawry was a central element in Icelandic legislation. The law in its turn had a central position within the culture as a concept that was proportional to the Icelandic way of life, or identity, and as a framework for important collective gatherings, the assemblies. The centrality of the law and legal processes in the Family Sagas may indicate the centrality of law in the worldview of medieval Icelanders only to a limited extent, but it definitely explains why outlawry appears frequently in the saga literature. Second, outlawry reflects, either directly or indirectly, numerous cultural values of the medieval Icelanders. Outlawry not only had a central position in the Saga World; saga outlawry was further referentially and connotatively linked with many forms of cultural expression. This guaranteed that the concept of outlawry also held relevance in a considerable proportion of the general worldview. Furthermore, the treatment of outlawry and especially of its constituent elements in differing discourses creates an impression of its holistic and varied significance within the society on whose tradition the texts are based. At the same time, this diverse treatment provides outlawry the semantic diversity that made it a useful and expressive concept in the narrative craft. Outlawry had significance in a large proportion of the narrative production in medieval Iceland, and this provided the narratives about outlawry the popularity that is required of a cultural phenomenon to become steady and firm.

In this study, the literary tradition and the oral tradition are not categorically separated from one another because it is impossible to show any part of a saga narrative to belong exclusively to either one or the
other. It has also been my presupposition that, in medieval Iceland, where
the written media had a minor role in the overall transmission of
narratives, written accounts also ended up circulating in oral narration.
The origins of the saga narratives are not of interest here: if a narrative
was culturally expressive, it earned its place within the saga tradition.
However, it is quite probable that written saga narration used traditional
ideas in a different way than they were used in oral narration. The
apparent tendency of saga writers to incline toward written sources
perhaps led to a preference of those narratives and narrative elements that
were conceived as expressive in the literary sphere. Nevertheless, even
the saga writers probably did not make a full distinction between “oral”
and “literary” sources of traditional matter.

The frames of reference in the experienced reality of Icelanders in the
period of saga writing receive relatively less attention in this study than
their indirect implications in other contemporary literature receive. This
ought to be born in mind while evaluating the results of this study. The
treatment of the selected Family Sagas and Íslendinga þeittir as one
corpus, in spite of the diachronic depth of material that spans a period of
more than a hundred years, was an attempt to develop an image of the
conceptions beyond the literary expressions. This therefore justified
refraining almost completely from discussion concerning the age of
individual sagas and the philological relations between them. The study
of the development of expressions and conceptions concerning outlawry
within the growth of saga literature would require a different kind of
approach. Such an approach could nevertheless benefit from the results of
the present study.

Outlawry manifests the idea of banishment, rejection and exile in the
Family Sagas. The same ideas have other kinds of manifestations in
forms that span from medieval conceptions concerning Iceland’s
settlement to mythology and to the different branches of saga literature.
Nevertheless, all these manifestations are referentially connected to each
other. Only some of the outlaws in the Family Sagas are presented in an
admirable light and the ill deeds preceding the sentence dominate the
characterization of most of the saga outlaws. Nevertheless, some of the
most popular saga heroes earned their reputation for their
accomplishments in outlawry. For the medieval Icelanders, outlawry
represented the fantasy of self-sustainability in an extremely hostile
environment, and perhaps even more significantly, outlawry represented
the fantasy of freedom. This fantasy received even greater symbolic value
along with the great societal changes that took place when administrative
power shifted to the Norwegian crown in 1264. Outlawry could not
realistically be a desirable state for anyone because of the discomfort and
risks involved in it, but the concept of outlawry was saturated with connotations and ideas that could, detached from the grave reality, appeal to popular imagination. In addition, many of the outlaws in the Family Sagas are depicted as being unpleasant and mischievous. However, just as a trickster “represents the subconscious desires of the society which created him [and as such,] he is the personification of their released inhibitions” (Newall 1984, 47), the saga outlaw personifies in many ways the fantasy of independence from the small and strictly normative community of medieval Iceland.


Heilagra manna sögur: see Unger 1877.

Heimskringla. See Jónsson, F. 1911.


Jónsbók. Edited by Ólafur Halldórsson. København 1904.


Morkinskina. See Jónsson, F. 1932.


Stjórn. See Unger 1862.


Literature


——— 2009a: Toteutuvat sanat – kohtalon artikulointi islantilaisessa saagassa. In Knuuttina, Seppo and Piela, Ulla (ed.): Korkeempi kaiku:


——— 1978: The Art of Poetry and the Figure of the Poet in Egils Saga. Parergon 22. Pp. 3–12.


Falk, Oren 2005: Beardless wonders: ‘Gaman vas söxu’ (The sex was great). In Frank, Roberta, Harbus, Antonina & Poole, Russell (eds.): *Verbal Encounters: Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse Studies for Roberta Frank.* University of Toronto Press: Toronto.


McKinnell, John 2005: *Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend.* D.S. Brewer: Cambridge.


Melve, Leidulf 2007: *Inventing the Public Sphere: The Public Debate During the Investiture Contest (c. 1030–1122).* Brill: Leiden.


Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben 1977: *Saga og Samfund.* Berlingske Forlag: København.


Pálsson, Pálmý 1883: *Króka-Refs saga og Króka-Refs rímur.* København.


Schach, Paul 1959 (transl.): *Eyrbyggja saga.* University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln.


——— 2000: Variation and genre as practice : strategies for reproducing oral history in the southern Cook Islands. In Honko, Lauri (ed.):


Ström, Folke 1974: *Nið, ergi and Old Norse moral attitudes*. Viking Society for Northern Research: London.


Vigfússon, Guðbrandur 1883: Corpus Poeticum Boreale. II. Oxford.


## Appendix 1: Outlaws in the Family Sagas – First Name

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outlaw</th>
<th>Saga</th>
<th>Chapters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ásbjörn</td>
<td>Reykðæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Víga-Glúms saga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atli</td>
<td>Njáls saga</td>
<td>Ch. 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auðunn bakskiki</td>
<td>Bjarnar saga Hítðælakappa</td>
<td>Ch. 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Búi Andriðsson</td>
<td>Kjálnesinga saga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egill Skalla-Grímsson</td>
<td>Egils saga</td>
<td>Ch. 56, 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eilíffr</td>
<td>Ljósveitinga saga</td>
<td>Ch. 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eiríkr rauði</td>
<td>Eiríks saga rauða</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grenlendinga saga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eysteinn Mánason</td>
<td>Reykðæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flosi Eiríksson</td>
<td>Grettis saga</td>
<td>Ch. 11–12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fóstólfr</td>
<td>Vatnsdalæ saga</td>
<td>Ch. 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geir Grímsson</td>
<td>Harðar saga</td>
<td>Ch. 7, 11–15, 18, 22–35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gestr (Helgu-Steinn)</td>
<td>Fóstbræðra saga</td>
<td>Ch. 20, 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gestr bórhallason</td>
<td>Heiðarviga saga</td>
<td>Ch. 9–11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gisli Súrsson</td>
<td>Gísلا saga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grettir Ásmundarson</td>
<td>Grettis saga</td>
<td>Ch. 14–24, 28–41, 46–82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grímr</td>
<td>Grettis saga</td>
<td>Ch. 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grímr</td>
<td>Reykðæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grímr Droplaugarson</td>
<td>Droplaugarsona saga</td>
<td>Ch. 14, 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grímr Helguson</td>
<td>Grettis saga</td>
<td>Ch. 62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laxdalæ saga</td>
<td>Ch. 57–58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guðbrandr Þorvarðarson</td>
<td>Víga-Glúms saga</td>
<td>Ch. 22–23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gunnarr af Hliðarendi</td>
<td>Njáls saga</td>
<td>Ch. 73, 75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gunnarr Þiðrandabani</td>
<td>Gunnars þátr Þiðrandabana</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laxdalæ saga</td>
<td>Ch. 69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fljótsdalæ saga</td>
<td>Ch. 17–22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hánsna-þórir</td>
<td>Hánsna-þóris saga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Háls Fjörleifarson</td>
<td>Reykðæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hánefr</td>
<td>Reykðæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 4–6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helgi Sigmundarson</td>
<td>Harðar saga</td>
<td>Ch. 9, 12, 13, 14, 21–36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hrafn</td>
<td>Eyrbyggja saga</td>
<td>Ch. 59–62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hrafn Guðrúnarson (Sighvatrsson)</td>
<td>Hrafnís þátr Guðrúnarsonar</td>
<td>Ch. 1–7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlaw</td>
<td>Saga</td>
<td>Chapters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hrafnkell Freysgoði</td>
<td>Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða</td>
<td>Ch. 87–92, 91–92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallfreðsson</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hrappr son Örgumleiða</td>
<td>Njáls saga</td>
<td>Ch. 82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hrolleifr hinn mikli</td>
<td>Vatnsdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 18–26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hórðr Grímkelsson</td>
<td>Harðar saga</td>
<td>Ch. 7, 10–36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klangr Narfason</td>
<td>Víga-Glúms saga</td>
<td>Ch. 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolbakr</td>
<td>Fóstbraðra saga</td>
<td>Ch. 9–10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolgrím</td>
<td>Þórgrimms þátr Hallasonar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolr</td>
<td>Njáls saga</td>
<td>Ch. 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolr Jósteinsson</td>
<td>Flóamanna saga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Króka-Refr Steinsson</td>
<td>Króka-Refs saga</td>
<td>Ch. 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ólafr</td>
<td>Reykdæla saga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Óspakr Kjallaksson</td>
<td>Eyrbýggja saga</td>
<td>Ch. 57–62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Óspakr Glúmsson</td>
<td>Bandamanna saga</td>
<td>Ch. 4, 6, 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sæmundr</td>
<td>Vatnsdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 7–10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sigr Sigridarson</td>
<td>Fóstbraðra saga</td>
<td>Ch. 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stigandi Kotkelsson</td>
<td>Laxdeala saga</td>
<td>Ch. 37–38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svartr</td>
<td>Vopnfirðinga saga</td>
<td>Ch. 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trausti Þorgrímsson</td>
<td>Viglundar saga</td>
<td>Ch. 6–23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veglær</td>
<td>Fóstbraðra saga</td>
<td>Ch. 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermundr</td>
<td>Finnboga saga ramma</td>
<td>Ch. 41–42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Víglíuss Víga-Glúmsson</td>
<td>Víga-Glúms saga</td>
<td>Ch. 17–18, 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Víglundr Þorgrímsson</td>
<td>Viglundar saga</td>
<td>Ch. 6–23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þórarinn svartr</td>
<td>Eyrbýggja saga</td>
<td>Ch. 15–22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorbjörn</td>
<td>Finnboga saga ramma</td>
<td>Ch. 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorbjörn jarlakappi</td>
<td>Grettis saga</td>
<td>Ch. 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þóðr hreða</td>
<td>Þóðar saga hreðu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorgaútr</td>
<td>Reykdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorgeirr gyrðilskeggi</td>
<td>Harðar saga</td>
<td>Ch. 23, 32–33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorgeirr Hávarsson</td>
<td>Fóstbraðra saga</td>
<td>Ch. 2–8, 12–17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorgrím</td>
<td>Finnboga saga ramma</td>
<td>Ch. 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorgrímr Hallason</td>
<td>Þórgrimms þátr Hallasonar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorgrímr prúði</td>
<td>Viglundar saga</td>
<td>Ch. 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þórir</td>
<td>Vatnsdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þórir Akraskeggr</td>
<td>Ljósvetninga saga</td>
<td>Ch. 13–14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þórir Ketilsson</td>
<td>Reykdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 16, 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þórir rauðskeggr</td>
<td>Grettis saga</td>
<td>Ch. 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorkell krafla</td>
<td>Vatnsdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorgrímsson</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorleifr</td>
<td>Eyrbyggja saga</td>
<td>Ch. 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorleifr jarlaskáld</td>
<td>Þórleifs þátr jarlaskálds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þormóðr</td>
<td>Gunnars þátr Piørandabana</td>
<td>Ch. 2–4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlaw</td>
<td>Saga</td>
<td>Chapters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þormóðr Kolbrúnaskáld</td>
<td>Fóstbræðra saga</td>
<td>Ch. 2–11, 18–24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bersason</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þórólfr</td>
<td>Bolla þátr Bollasonar / Laxdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 79–82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þórólfr Mostrarskeggr</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þórólfr</td>
<td>Eyrbyggja saga</td>
<td>Ch. 2–3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þórólfr</td>
<td>Laxdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 14–15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þórólfr heljarðinn</td>
<td>Vatnsdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þórólfr sleggja</td>
<td>Vatnsdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorsteinn fugri</td>
<td>Þorsteins saga hvita</td>
<td>Ch. 4–7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorsteinn stangarhégg</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þróttólfr</td>
<td>Vatnsdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Önundr</td>
<td>Hallfreðar saga</td>
<td>Ch. 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 2: Outlaws in the Family Sagas – Saga

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Saga</th>
<th>Chapters</th>
<th>Outlaw</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Bandamanna saga</em></td>
<td>Ch. 4, 6, 12</td>
<td>Óspakr Glúmsson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bjarnar saga Hítadalakappa</em></td>
<td>Ch. 5</td>
<td>Auðunn baksikki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bolla þáttur Bollasonar / Laxdæla saga</em></td>
<td>Ch. 79–82</td>
<td>Þórólfur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Droplaugarsona saga</em></td>
<td>Ch. 14, 15</td>
<td>Grímr Droplaugarson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Egils saga</em></td>
<td>Ch. 56, 57</td>
<td>Egill Skalla-Grímsson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Eiriks saga rauða</em></td>
<td>Ch. 59–62</td>
<td>Eirikr rauði</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Eyrbyggja saga</em></td>
<td>Ch. 57–62</td>
<td>Óspakr Kjallaksson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Eyrbyggja saga</em></td>
<td>Ch. 15–22</td>
<td>Þórarinn svarti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Eyrbyggja saga</em></td>
<td>Ch. 36</td>
<td>Þorleifr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Eyrbyggja saga</em></td>
<td>Ch. 2–3</td>
<td>Þórólfur <strong>Mostrarskeggr</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Finnboga saga ramma</em></td>
<td>Ch. 40</td>
<td>Þorbjörn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Finnboga saga ramma</em></td>
<td>Ch. 39</td>
<td>Þorgímr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Finnboga saga ramma</em></td>
<td>Ch. 41–42</td>
<td>Vermundr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fljótsdæla saga</em></td>
<td>Ch. 17–22</td>
<td>Gunnar <strong>Piðrandabani</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Flóamanna saga</em></td>
<td>Ch. 19</td>
<td>Kolr Jósteinsson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fóstbræðra saga</em></td>
<td>Ch. 20, 24</td>
<td>Gestr (Helgu-Steinn)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fóstbræðra saga</em></td>
<td>Ch. 9–10</td>
<td>Kolbakr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fóstbræðra saga</em></td>
<td>Ch. 24</td>
<td>Sigr Sigríðarson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fóstbræðra saga</em></td>
<td>Ch. 2–8, 12–17</td>
<td>Þorgeirr Hávarsson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fóstbræðra saga</em></td>
<td>Ch. 2–11, 18–24</td>
<td><strong>Þormóðr Kolbrúnaskáld</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bersason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fóstbræðra saga</em></td>
<td>Ch. 13</td>
<td>Veglágr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Gísla saga</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gísti Súrsson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Grenlendinga saga</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>Eirikr rauði</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Grettis saga</em></td>
<td>Ch. 11–12</td>
<td>Flosi Eiríksson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Grettis saga</em></td>
<td>Ch. 14–24, 28–</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41, 46–82</td>
<td>Grettir Ásmundarson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Grettis saga</em></td>
<td>Ch. 55</td>
<td>Grímr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Grettis saga</em></td>
<td>Ch. 62</td>
<td>Grímr Helguson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Grettis saga</em></td>
<td>Ch. 10</td>
<td>Þorbjörn <strong>jarlakappi</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Grettis saga</em></td>
<td>Ch. 56</td>
<td>Þórir rauðskeggr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Gunnars þátttr</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gunnarr <strong>Piðrandabani</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Piðrandabana</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Gunnars þátttr</em></td>
<td>Ch. 2–4</td>
<td>Þormóðr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Piðrandabana</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hænsna-þóris saga</em></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Hænsna-þórir</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

451
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Saga</th>
<th>Chapters</th>
<th>Outlaw</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hallrœðar saga</td>
<td>Ch. 9</td>
<td>Önundr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harðar saga</td>
<td>Ch. 7, 11–15, 18, 22–35</td>
<td>Geir Grimsson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harðar saga</td>
<td>Ch. 9, 12, 13, 14, 21–36</td>
<td>Helgi Sigmundarson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harðar saga</td>
<td>Ch. 7, 10–36</td>
<td>Hörðr Grimkelsson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harðar saga</td>
<td>Ch. 23, 32–33</td>
<td>Þorgeir gýrölilskeggi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heiðarviga saga</td>
<td>Ch. 9–11</td>
<td>Gesstr Þórhallason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hrafnkell Freysgoði</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hrafnð bætr</td>
<td>Ch. 1–7</td>
<td>Hrafn Gudrúnarson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guðrúnarsonar</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Sighvatrsson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kjalnesinga saga</td>
<td></td>
<td>Búi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Króka-Refs saga</td>
<td></td>
<td>Króka-Refr Steinsson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laxdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 57–58</td>
<td>Grímr Helguson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laxdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 69</td>
<td>Gunnar Þiðrandabani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laxdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 37–38</td>
<td>Stigandi Kotkelsson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laxdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 14–15</td>
<td>Þórólfr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ljósvarninga saga</td>
<td>Ch. 20</td>
<td>Eilífr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ljósvarninga saga</td>
<td>Ch. 13–14</td>
<td>Þórir Akraskeggr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Njáls saga</td>
<td>Ch. 5</td>
<td>Atli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Njáls saga</td>
<td>Ch. 73, 75</td>
<td>Gunnar af Hlíðarendi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Njáls saga</td>
<td>Ch. 87–89, 91–92</td>
<td>Hrappr son Örgumleða</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Njáls saga</td>
<td>Ch. 82</td>
<td>Kolr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reykdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 26</td>
<td>Æsbjörn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reykdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 3</td>
<td>Eysteinn Mánason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reykdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 21</td>
<td>Grímr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reykdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 2</td>
<td>Háls Fjörleifarson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reykdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 4–6</td>
<td>Hánefr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reykdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 22</td>
<td>Ólífr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reykdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 22</td>
<td>Þorgautr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reykdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 16, 20</td>
<td>Þórir Ketilsson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vatnsdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 47</td>
<td>Föstólfur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vatnsdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 18–26</td>
<td>Hrolleifr hinn mikli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vatnsdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 7–10</td>
<td>Sæmundr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vatnsdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 39</td>
<td>Þórir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vatnsdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 44</td>
<td>Þorkell krafja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vatnsdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 30</td>
<td>Þórólfr heljarþkinn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vatnsdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 28</td>
<td>Þórólfr sleggja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saga</td>
<td>Chapters</td>
<td>Outlaw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vatnsdæla saga</td>
<td>Ch. 47</td>
<td>Þróttólfr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Víga-Glúms saga</td>
<td>Ch. 16</td>
<td>Ásbjörn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Víga-Glúms saga</td>
<td>Ch. 22–23</td>
<td>Guðbrandr Þorvarðarson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Víga-Glúms saga</td>
<td>Ch. 27</td>
<td>Klængr Narfason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Víga-Glúms saga</td>
<td>Ch. 17–18, 23</td>
<td>Vigfúss Víga-Glúmsson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viglundar saga</td>
<td>Ch. 6</td>
<td>Þógririm prúði</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viglundar saga</td>
<td>Ch. 6–23</td>
<td>Trausti Þógrímsson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viglundar saga</td>
<td>Ch. 6–23</td>
<td>Viglundr Þógrímsson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vopnfirðinga saga</td>
<td>Ch. 2</td>
<td>Svartr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þóðar saga hreðu</td>
<td></td>
<td>Þóðør hreða</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorgrims þátr Hallasonar</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kolgrím</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorgrims þátr Hallasonar</td>
<td></td>
<td>Þógririm Hallason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorleifs þátr jarlaskálds</td>
<td></td>
<td>Þóreifr jarlaskáld</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorsteins saga hvíta</td>
<td>Ch. 4–7</td>
<td>Þórsteinn fagri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorsteins þátr stangarhögg</td>
<td></td>
<td>Þórsteinn stangarhögg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 3: Outlaws in the Family Sagas – Outcome of Outlawry

#### Tragic Biographies of Outlaws

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Characters</th>
<th>Saga/Chapter(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gísli Súrsson</td>
<td>Gísla saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grettir Ásmundarson</td>
<td>Grettis saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hörðr Grimkelsson</td>
<td>Harðar saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geir Grímsson</td>
<td>Harðar saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorgeirr Hávarsson</td>
<td>Fóstbraðra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helgi Sigmundarson</td>
<td>Harðar saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klængir Narfason</td>
<td>Víga-Glúms saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þormóðr</td>
<td>Gunnars þáttir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Þiðrandabana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gunnarr af Hliðarendi</td>
<td>Njáls saga</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minor Characters</th>
<th>Saga/Chapter(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Þorleifr</td>
<td>Eyrbyggja saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorgrimr</td>
<td>Finnboga saga ramma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorbjörn</td>
<td>Finnboga saga ramma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grímur</td>
<td>Grettis saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þórir rauðskeggr</td>
<td>Grettis saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grímur</td>
<td>Reykdaela saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Óláfr</td>
<td>Reykdaela saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorgautr</td>
<td>Reykdaela saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þórir</td>
<td>Vatnsdaela saga</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bandits</th>
<th>Saga/Chapter(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Óspakr Kjallaksson</td>
<td>Eyrbyggja saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorgeirr gýrðilskeggi</td>
<td>Harðar saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hrafn</td>
<td>Eyrbyggja saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Önundr</td>
<td>Hallfredar saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlí</td>
<td>Njáls saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolr</td>
<td>Njáls saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ójafaðarmenn</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þórólfur</td>
<td>Bolla þáttar Bollason / Laxdla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eysteinn Mánason</td>
<td>Reykdæla saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haensna-þórir</td>
<td>Haensna-þóris saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svartr</td>
<td>Vopnfirðinga saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thieves</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hánefr</td>
<td>Reykdæla saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þórólfr sleggja</td>
<td>Vatnsdæla saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þórólfr heljarskinn</td>
<td>Vatnsdæla saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Witches</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stigandi Kotkelsson</td>
<td>Laxdæla saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hrolleifr hinn mikli</td>
<td>Vatnsdæla saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þórir Ketilsson</td>
<td>Reykdæla saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Óspakr Glúmsson</td>
<td>Bandamanna saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helgi Sigmundarson</td>
<td>Harðar saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unknown Outcome of Outlawry</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auðunn</td>
<td>Bjarnar saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hiðdælakappa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ásbjörn (2)</td>
<td>Víga-Glúms saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eilífr</td>
<td>Ljósvetninga saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gestr (Helgu-Steinn)</td>
<td>Fóstbræðra saga</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Fortunate Biographies of Outlaws

#### Escape from Iceland or Greenland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Saga/Chapters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grímr Helguson</td>
<td>Grettis saga ch. 62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laxdæla saga ch. 57-58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gunnarr Piðrandabani</td>
<td>Gunnars þáttr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Þiðrandabana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laxdæla saga Ch. 69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fljótsdæla saga Ch. 17–22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grímr Droplaugarson</td>
<td>Droplaugarsona saga ch. 14, 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þórarinn svarthi</td>
<td>Eyrbyggja saga ch. 15-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sigr Sigriðarson</td>
<td>Fóstbræðra saga ch. 24: p. 250, p. 256, 257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flosi Eiríksson</td>
<td>Grettis saga ch. 11-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guðbrandr Þorvarðarson</td>
<td>Víga-Glúms saga ch. 22-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þórólfur</td>
<td>Laxdæla saga ch. 14-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þormóðr Kolbrúnaskáld</td>
<td>Fóstbræðra saga ch. 2-11, 18-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bersason</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorbjörn jarlakappi</td>
<td>Grettis saga ch. 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gestr Þórhallason</td>
<td>Heiðarvíga saga ch. 9-11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Undeserved escape from Iceland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Saga/Chapters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kolbakr</td>
<td>Fóstbræðra saga ch. 9-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veglágr</td>
<td>Fóstbræðra saga ch. 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þórir Akraskeggr</td>
<td>Ljósvetninga saga ch. 13-14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Return to Iceland and Outlawry Mitigated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Saga/Chapters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Þróttólfr</td>
<td>Vatnsdæla saga ch. 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Föstólfr</td>
<td>Vatnsdæla saga ch. 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorsteinn fagri</td>
<td>Porsteins saga hvita ch. 4-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Háls Fjörleifarson</td>
<td>Reykæla saga ch. 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trausti</td>
<td>Viglundar saga ch. 6-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viglundr</td>
<td>Viglundar saga ch. 6-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolr Jósteinsson</td>
<td>Flóamanna saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorkell krafla Þorgrimsson</td>
<td>Vatnsdæla saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermundr</td>
<td>Finnboga saga ramma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vigfúss Víga-Glúmsson</td>
<td>Víga-Glúms saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorsteinn stangarhögg</td>
<td>Þorsteins þátr stangarhöggs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hrafnkell Freysgoði</td>
<td>Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þórðr hreða</td>
<td>Dóðar saga hreðu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Chapter(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Æsbjörn (1)</td>
<td>Reykdæla saga</td>
<td>ch. 26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Pioneering outlaws

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Chapter(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eiríkr rauði</td>
<td>Eiríks saga rauða</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Króka-Refr Steinsson</td>
<td>Króka-Refs saga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hrafnskell Freysgoði</td>
<td>Hrafnkels saga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallfreðsson</td>
<td>Freysgoda</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þórólfr Mostrarskeggr</td>
<td>Eyrbyggja saga ch. 2-3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorgrimr trúði</td>
<td>Víglundar saga ch. 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sæmundr</td>
<td>Vatnsdæla saga ch. 7-10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Outlaws of the Norwegian Ruler

#### Outlaws Able to Escape

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Chapter(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Egill Skalla-Grímsson</td>
<td>Egils saga</td>
<td>ch. 56, 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grettir Ásmundarson</td>
<td>Grettis saga</td>
<td>ch. 14-24, 28-41, 46-82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hrappr son Örgumleiða</td>
<td>Njáls saga</td>
<td>ch. 87-89, 91-92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geirólfssonar gerpis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hrafns Guðrúnarson (Sighvatrsson)</td>
<td>Hrafns þáttr</td>
<td>ch. 1-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eiríkr rauði</td>
<td>Eiríks saga rauða</td>
<td>ch. 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auðunn</td>
<td>Bjarnar saga</td>
<td>ch. 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hítðælakappa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Króka-Refr</td>
<td>Króka-Refs saga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorleifr jarlaskáld</td>
<td>Porleifs þáttr jarlaskálds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Outlaws Unable to Escape

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Þorgrimr Hallason</td>
<td>Porgríms þáttr Hallasonar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Outlawry Mitigated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kolgrímr</td>
<td>Porgríms þáttr Hallasonar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

The present study scrutinizes the outlawry and outlaws that appear in the Icelandic Family Sagas. Since the classic study by Andreas Heusler (1912), outlawry in the Family Sagas has been discussed only in a few general articles, in wider legal studies, or in studies of individual sagas. However, as the present study shows, the concept of outlawry was fundamental for the medieval Icelanders’ conceptions about their past. Indeed, understanding outlawry is essential for understanding many of the Family Sagas.

The Icelandic Family Sagas comprise a group of prose narratives that were written down in the 13th and 14th century Iceland and that are based on events and personae that belong to the 10th century Iceland. These sagas introduce many outlaws, out of which some 75 are named. These outlaws and their biographies, which are discernible from the sagas, serve as the basis for this study.

The Family Sagas are studied here as one corpus. Therefore, the objects of this study are the medieval Icelanders’ general conceptions about the historical outlawry and the variations of these conceptions. Outlawry was one element of the historical taleworld that the Family Sagas reflected, or in other words, of the Saga World.

The denotative framework of outlawry is provided by the Family Sagas that tell about the circumstances of outlawry and by the law texts. The law texts were derived from the 10th century legislative traditions. Even though they had been altered throughout the centuries to the period during which the Family Sagas were written, they represented those conceptions about the historical law according to which the saga writers and their audience understood the outlawry of the Saga World. These sources reveal that outlawry meant banishing from the society, denying the outlaw all help and that he lost the protection of the law. In practice, outlawry was a death sentence.

The meaning of outlawry in the saga narratives and as a part of the Saga World is also studied through the variation of their use in the narratives. This variation is approached primarily through the varying roles that outlaws have within the narrative structures of the Family Sagas. These roles reflect the social and spatial structures of the Saga World that also defined outlawry. The inspection of outlawry within these structures leads to that the absolute definition of outlawry in the law texts proves to be insufficient for understanding outlawry in the saga texts. This shows that the outlaws had an impact on the community from its boundary surface,
simultaneously defining this surface, and that the social structures within the community enabled varying attitudes towards an outlaw.

The social and spatial structures provided a basis for the connotations of outlawry. These connotations illuminate the use and form of outlawry and outlaws in the Family Sagas. In this study, connotations are inspected primarily from the referential connections between the Family Sagas and other contemporary literature. This is done by studying the implementations of the basic elements of the outlawry of the Saga World, namely marginalization, banishing, rejection and solitariness, within other literary genres and the taleworlds that they reflect. It is argued that these taleworlds functioned as potential frames of reference for the outlawry in the Family Sagas. The present study scrutinizes Christian texts, mythology, heroic narratives, sagas of the Norwegian kings and sagas about the contemporary events of the period of saga writing as reference material in this respect.

The variety of denotations and connotations of outlawry that is visible in the medieval Icelandic texts reflect the ambiguity of outlawry within the Family Sagas. This ambiguity explains why the outlaw could be perceived either as a hero or a villain in a saga narrative.