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COMPLETING *ÞÓRÐAR SAGA HREÐU*:

A Regional Saga in Disguise[1]

1. Introduction

ÞÓRÐAR SAGA HREÐU, sometimes translated as the "Saga of Thord the Menace", is an *Íslendingasaga* about a talented carpenter, poet, and warrior. It seems to have once been a popular saga. There are 43 attestations in extant manuscripts, including six in pre-Reformation parchment manuscripts, making it one of the better attested sagas.[2] Its popularity lasted into the nineteenth century in Iceland, seeing two separate *rímur* treatments develop.[3] Today, community members in Northern Iceland still discuss the saga with interest.[4]

There are also two different versions of the saga. Although there was an attempt in one manuscript, AM 486 4to,[5] to combine the two versions into a single saga, the Íslenzk fornrit editors choose instead to print both versions, plus a summary by Árngrímur the Learned in his 1609 work *Crymogæa*. They explain this unusual editorial decision thus: "Um Þorð

1 This article is a refinement and expansion of arguments in Elisabeth Ward, "Nested Narrative: *Þórðar saga hreðu* and Material Engagement" (PhD dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 2012). I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of the article for their feedback, and colleagues at Berkeley and Árnastofnun for inspiration, and the audience members who heard and commented upon versions or parts of this article at conferences from 2008 to 2014.

2 Emily Lethbridge, "'*Hvorki glansar gull á mér / né glæstir safir í línum*': Some Observations on *Íslendingasögur* Manuscripts and the Case of *Njáls saga*," *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 129 (2014): 55–89, at 84–88.

3 Hans Kuhn, "Þórðr hreða in saga and *rímur*," in *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature. Sagas and the British Isles. Preprint Papers of the 13th International Saga Conference, Durham and York 6th–12th August 2006*, ed. John McKinnell et al, 524–532 (Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006).

4 See Sigurjón Páll Ísaksson, "Hugleiðingar um staðfræði Þórðar sögu hreðu," *Skagfirðingabók* 32 (2010): 137–152.

5 "Brot af Þórðar saga hreðu," in *Kjalnesinga saga*, ed. Jóhannes Halldórsson, Íslenzk fornrit, vol. 14 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1959), 239.

hreðu eru til tvær sögur, önnur í heilu lagi, hin brot ein. Að efni og orðfæri eru sögur þessar mjög frábrugðnar hvor annarr ... Tengls milli sagnanna eru harla veik ... En tvær ólíkar sögur um sömu persónu get verið girnilegar til fróðleiks um vinnubrögð höfunda þeirra" ['There are two sagas about Þórður hreða, one complete and one fragmentary. In content and style, they are very different from one another ... and the relationship between the sagas is quite weak ... but two different sagas about the same person can give much insight as to authorial style']. The structural and plot distinctions between the Complete and Fragmentary (*brot*) versions will be further discussed below, as will how generic conventions may be useful in understanding why these two separate traditions developed.

It is the Complete version, though, that is far more widely attested and was apparently more popular.[6] So a short summary of the Complete version is hereby offered. The saga begins in Norway, where a man named Þórður, with three promising sons, dies; shortly thereafter his wife gives birth to a fourth son, who is named Þórður after his father. When the oldest brother is cuckolded by Sigurður slefa Gunnhildarson, the brothers redress the dishonor by attacking and killing him; the oldest brother dies in the attack, but the others escape to Iceland. Arriving in Miðfjörður, they receive a cool reception from the chieftain of the area, Skeggi. Matters do not improve even when Þórður saves Skeggi's son Eiður from drowning; instead Skeggi sees it as a slight when his son decides to move in with Þórður and leaves his foster family. An opportunity for reconciliation arises when Skeggi's nephew Ásbjörn arrives from Norway, catches sight of Þórður's sister Sigríður, and is smitten. Ásbjörn asks Skeggi to make a marriage proposal to Sigríður on his behalf, and Þórður agrees to the marriage on her behalf. But when Ásbjörn leaves on a trading expedition, his brother, Ormur, arrives in Iceland and also falls in love with Sigríður. A feud becomes inevitable once Ormur seduces Sigríður: Þórður catches and kills Ormur.

The saga then recounts the efforts of various figures connected to Ormur to avenge his death, none of which involve formal legal proceed-

6 Hans Kuhn in "Þórðr hreða" notes that the *rímur* were likely based on the AM 471 4to manuscript of the Complete saga, which is less wordy than the version used by the Íslenzk fornrit editors (AM 551 d β 4to). AM 471 4to is also the manuscript upon which the Svart á hvítu edition was based.

ings. Instead, ambushes and skirmishes in various locations play out, instigated variously by Skeggi, Skeggi's relative Özurr, or other fictive kin and business partners, as well as by Ormur's brother, Ásbjörn. These skirmishes take place as Þórður moves from Miðfjörður to Skagafjörður and back, as he travels to locations where he is building halls or ferry-boats, picking up building supplies, looking for a horse, or as he returns from Yuletide celebrations. In all cases, Þórður survives, most often thanks to the intervention of Skeggi's son, Eiður, who breaks up the mêlée. Between encounters, Þórður lodges sometimes with his brothers in Miðfjörður, but more often with a husband and wife living in Skagafjörður named Þórhallur and Ólöf, the latter of whom is skilled at healing. In one of the final battles of the saga, Skeggi kills Þórhallur with the sword Sköfnungur after being thwarted in his attempt to kill Þórður. Þórður marries the widow Ólöf towards the end of the saga. A final reconciliation between Þórður and Skeggi, brought about by Ásbjörn's change of heart and desire to marry Sigríður, occurs after one final failed ambush. The saga ends by saying Þórður lives out his life peacefully with Ólöf, Eiður gets married, and Ásbjörn and Sigríður return to Norway.

The Fragmentary version, in its extant form, has a lacuna beginning before the saga narrative leaves Norway and continuing all the way until near the end, when Þórður asks for Ólöf's hand in marriage.[7] Both the Fragmentary version and the Complete version find their oldest extant attestation in manuscripts dated to the first half of the fifteenth century. The Fragmentary version in AM 564 a 4to (so-called 'Pseudo-Vatnshyrna') has been dated by John McKinnell and was likely transcribed by one of the scribes who worked on Vatnshyrna, therefore it may have been produced in Eyjafjörður.[8] The Complete version in AM 551 d β 4to has been dated by Jonna Louis-Jensen and is believed to have been written by a scribe active in the Bishopric of Hólar around 1420.[9] Thus the differences between

7 The lacuna seems to have occurred after 1609, since Árngrimur's summary in *Crymogæa* has more plot details and is clearly based on the Fragmentary version. Jóhannes Halldórsson, "Formáli," *Kjalnesinga saga*, ed. Jóhannes Halldórsson, Íslenzk fornrit, vol. 14 (Reykjavík: Híð íslenzka fornritafélag, 1959), xliii.

8 John McKinnell, "The Reconstruction of Psuedo-Vatnshyrna," *Opuscula* 4 (1970): 304–337, 333.

9 Jonna Louis-Jensen, *Kongesagastudier: kompilationen Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* (Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana 32. Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1977), 11.

these two versions do not seem to be a function of different times or places of composition. In this paper, it is argued that the two versions of the saga use different means of engaging with the intended audience and may have been written for different political purposes.

2. Scholarly Reception of *Þórðar saga hreðu*

Scholarly opinion of the saga, especially the Complete version, has been low and the saga has been roundly neglected in terms of literary analysis. The lack of scholarly interest in the Complete version of *Þórðar saga hreðu* may have something to do with the plot: as demonstrated by the summary above, it is repetitive and predictable, lacking a tragic element. Although individual scenes and skirmishes are dramatic, and there are some amusing characterisations and clever verses, the saga ends on a flat note without a strong narrative arc. There is also a lack of intriguing legal action to add political complexity to the story, and this has been taken by Vésteinn Ólason, for instance, as a sign that the saga author was not striving for verisimilitude comparable to that of the more classical sagas.[10]

The negative scholarly assessment of this saga began in the mid-nineteenth century, when Guðbrandur Vigfússon put it in among a group of sagas he termed "spurious sagas" that were "partly extemporisations on "hints in Landnáma and other sagas" and partly pure fabrications "when the very dregs of tradition have been used up".[11] The sagas thus designated, including *Þórðar saga hreðu*, were published in 1959 in volume 14 of the Íslenzk fornrit series, rather than with other *Íslendingasögur* in volumes 3 to 13, because they "eru taldar einna yngstar Íslendingasagna" ['are considered amongst the youngest Icelandic sagas'].[12] Once relegated to this volume, a literal backwater of the corpus, it seems *Þórðar saga hreðu*'s scholarly reputation continued to erode. Jónas Kristjánsson cites *Þórðar saga hreðu* as the worst example of the "wildly exaggerated stories" that Arngrímur Jónsson relied upon for his *Crymogæa*,[13] and Vésteinn Ólason characterizes *Þórðar*

10 Vésteinn Ólason, *Dialogue with the Viking Age: Narration and Representation in the Sagas of Icelanders*, trans. Andrew Wawn (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1998), 217.

11 Guðbrandur Vigfússon, as translated in Martin Arnold, *The Post-Classical Family Saga* (Lewington NY: Edwin Mellen Press), 91.

12 Jóhannes Halldórsson, "Formáli," lxxv.

13 Jónas Kristjánsson, "The Roots of the Sagas," in *Sagnaskemmtun: Studies in Honour of Her-*

saga hreðu as one of a group of fourteenth-century sagas whose purpose was "pure entertainment".[14] Other general works on the *Íslendingasögur* have simply been silent in regard to *Þórðar saga hreðu*.

It is important to note that the classification of the saga as late, and therefore derivative, was based entirely on the stylistic elements of the story, such as plot, characterization, and structure, and not on more "objective" linguistic criteria. Einar Ól. Sveinsson was only able to identify four words in *Þórðar saga hreðu* that linguists do not believe were spoken in Iceland before the thirteenth century, and he notes that a greater concentration of young words would be needed to make a determination of the age of the saga.[15] He was, however, unwilling to reassess the date of the saga, given its unsatisfying narrative.

The only effort to reverse this judgement came in a 1988 M.A. thesis by Jón Torfason which utilized Joseph Harris' structural analysis method.[16] In an article summarizing his M.A. research, Jón argues that especially in terms of sentence structure, dialogue, and style, there is an economy to *Þórðar saga hreðu* which warrants that "frásagnartæknilega eigi Þórðar saga heima með þeim klassísku" ['in terms of narrative technique it ought to be considered amongst the classic sagas'].[17] He suggests that the negative appraisal of this saga has had very little to do with the actual style, and instead is a judgment about the plot: "Líklega er það einna helst að sagan er skemmtisaga með 'góðum' endi og að persónur er í daufara lagi. Aðalpersónan leysir hverja þrautina á fætur annarri áreynslulítið en ekki fer fram mögnuð glíma við stríð örlög" ['Most likely this is primarily because it is a happy saga with a "good" ending and because the main characters are somewhat shallow. The main character solves one problem on top of another with little effort and never has an epic struggle with fate'].[18]

Jón Torfason's more positive assessment of *Þórðar saga hreðu* as having

mann Pálsson on his 65th Birthday, 26 May 1986, eds. Rudolf Simek, Jónas Kristjánsson, and Hans Bekker-Nielsen (Vienna: Hermann Böhlaus Nachf, 1986), 184.

14 Vésteinn Ólason, *Dialogue*, 217.

15 Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Ritunartími Íslendingasagna: rök og rannsóknaraðferð* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag), 126.

16 Jón Torfason, "Þeir nafnar sóttust í ákafa: könnun á frásagnartækni og aðföngum í *Þórðar sögu hreðu*" (MA thesis, University of Iceland, 1988).

17 Jón Torfason, "Góðar sögur eða vondar: athugum á nokkrum frásagnareinkennum í Íslendinga sögum einkum með hliðsjón af *Þórðar sögu hreðu*," *Skáldskaparmál* 1 (1990): 128

18 Jón Torfason, "Góðar sögur eða vondar," 128.

much stylistically in common with the core of the genre, except its happy ending, does seem to have had some influence on other scholars. Thus Martin Arnold's work *The Post-Classical Icelandic Family Saga* does not consider *Þórðar saga hreðu*, even though the other sagas addressed in his work are all found in Íslenzk fornrit volume 14. This silence is not necessarily because Arnold considers *Þórðar saga hreðu* to be a classical saga; it simply does not fit into the intentionally subversive and ironic framework he proposes to be the definitive characteristic of the "post-classical" genre. The latest scholarship has therefore, ironically, dismissed *Þórðar saga hreðu* from the one sub-genre it used to belong to. In what follows, I will discuss why this saga in its complete form might best be thought of as a regional saga, a sub-genre in need of more robust theoretical consideration.

3. Genres

Assigning a genre or subgenre to a particular *Íslendingasaga* is a complicated effort. Generic conventions change and drift over the length of time between the development of a saga from an oral anecdote, through an immanent saga,[19] and into a written form, plus later emendations and changes to that text as artistic styles evolve.[20] Generic classification is also complicated by the fact that a saga about the same character or events may be treated utilizing different generic frames by different traditions of transmission (either oral or written), which means a saga given the same name, but carried in divergent variants and versions, could be working in differing generic modes.

And unlike other literary fields where production information and authorship are known, generic distinctions in saga studies carry an additional complexity: they have had to be used as a proxy indicator of age, or at least relative age, an exercise undertaken for instance by Theodore Andersson.[21]

19 Carol Clover, "The Long Prose Form," *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 101 (1986): 10–39.

20 Lars Lonnröth, "The Transformation of Literary Genres in Iceland from Orality to Literacy," in *Scandinavia and Christian Europe in the Middle Ages: Papers of the 12th International Saga Conference, Bonn/Germany, 28th July—2nd August 2003*, edited by Rudolf Simek et al., 341–344 (Bonn: Hausdruckerei der Universität Bonn, 2003).

21 Theodore Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Saga: 1180–1280* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

Regional sagas have sometimes been argued to be early steps in the development of saga literature, and sometimes argued to be late in the development of saga literature.[22] The Íslenzk fornrit editors by contrast seemed to have assumed that the entire body of *Íslendingasögur* is ipso facto about a region: the volumes they published were organized, except for volume 14 discussed above, by region, starting in the southwest corner and moving clockwise around the island, utilizing the same organizational principle as *Landnámabók*. Perhaps this is why regional sagas as a subgenre have not received particular attention; it can be seen as a ubiquitous and general characteristic of the *Íslendingasögur* rather than a generic mode.

But in the discussion below, a different approach to genre is taken, which in turn could justify thinking of regional sagas as a distinctive generic mode. In keeping with broader trends in literary analysis outside of saga studies, the discussion below asks how genre conventions affect the author, text, and audience in the hermeneutics of reception, interpretation, and meaning making.[23] Genre is part of the agreement between the author and the reader as to what is expected: a reader who knows she is reading a crime fiction novel approaches the text in a different mode than a reader who knows she is reading a romance. It is a learned mind-set that affects the act of reading.[24] Generic expectations motivate the production, reception and transmission of a work. Because necessary generic identifiers for medieval manuscripts can be unclear,[25] it is necessary to look at clues within the text for how it is engaging its intended audience, and what response those readers may bring in the act of interpretation.

22 Cf Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland's Medieval Literature,* trans. Peter Foote (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka bókmenntafélag, 1988), 218; and Christopher Callow, "Reconstructing the Past in Medieval Iceland," *Early Medieval Europe* 14.3 (2006): 297–324.

23 Ansgar Nünning, Marion Gymnich, Roy Sommer, eds., *Literature and Memory: Theoretical Paradigms, Genre, Functions* (Tubingen: Franke Verlag, 2006).

24 See Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980) for a general discussion; Amy Devitt "Integrating Rhetorical and Literary Theories of Genre," *College English* 62.6 (2000): 696–718; and for a more specific analysis of how genre affects both the reader and the world, Jason Swarts, *"Textual Grounding: How People Turn Texts Into Tools," Journal of Technical Writing and Communication 34 (2004): 67–89.*

25 Emily Lethbridge notes that efforts to assign genre based on rubrics or text groupings may not be particularly fruitful, "Hvorki glansar," 70–73.

4. Genealogy and the Fragmentary version

One way audiences have been invited to engage with a saga is, according to Kathryn Hume, through the genealogies at the beginning and end of a saga; these genealogies establish a chronological link between the action of the saga and the members of the audience.[26] The Fragmentary version of *Þórðar saga hreðu* has interesting genealogies at both the beginning and end which have received some scholarly attention. For instance, the opening genealogy includes the story of Úlfljótur bringing the Gulaþing law to Iceland – Ulfljótur being, according to this genealogy, the son of Þóra, who is the sister of Þórður's father Þórður Hörðakárason – in an account that differs from other accounts.[27] The closing genealogy has also been of considerable scholarly interest: it is cited by the Íslenzk fornrit editors and others in relation to the provenance of manuscript AM 564 4to, which contains not only *Þórðar saga hreðu* but also the earliest versions of several other *Íslendingasögur*.[28] The closing genealogy of the Fragmentary version is critical because it names not only Jón Hákonarson but also his wife Ingileif, establishing a strong link between the manuscript and the known compiler of *Flateyjarbók.*[29] Gísli Sigurðsson analyzed the closing genealogy of this saga as a demonstration of Jón Hákonarson's knowledge of and reliance upon oral sources.[30]

The closing genealogy of the Fragmentary version of *Þórðar saga hreðu* does not just list Jón and his wife, it also makes a genealogical link between Þórður hreða and Þórður kakali.[31] The latter was the member of

26 Kathryn Hume, "Beginnings and Endings in the Icelandic Family Sagas,"*The Modern Language Review* 68 (1973): 593–606.

27 Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, *Blót í norrænum sið. Rýnt í forn trúarbrögð með þjóðfræðilegri aðferð* (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 1997), 163.

28 "Formáli," xliii. The Íslenzk fornrit editors believed AM 564 4to to be the book Árni Magnusson called *Vatnshyrnabók*, but it is now believed to be a copy of that book, and called therefore Pseudo-Vatnshyrna. See McKinnell, "The Reconstruction of Psuedo-Vatnshyrna."

29 Jóhannes Halldórsson, "Formáli," l. See also Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, *The Development of Flateyjarbók: Iceland and the Dynastic Crisis of 1389* (Odense: The University of Southern Denmark, 2005), 404.

30 Gísli Sigurðsson, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition: A Discourse on Method,* trans. Nicholas Jones (Cambridge MA: Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, Harvard University, 2004), 165.

31 "Brot af Þórðar sögu hreðu," 246–247.

the Sturlungar family who managed, after two other prominent family members were killed in Skagafjörður in earlier attempts, to subjugate Skagafjörður to the power of the Sturlungar.[32] As Axel Kristinsson argues, it is likely that those aristocrats who commissioned sagas "used a popular hero of his principality to strengthen his own position."[33] By creating a genealogical link between the two Þórðurs, one a popular and likeable local saga hero and the other a political interloper, Jón Hákonarson is legitimizing not only his family's importance but also the political structure that forced Skagafjörður, a final hold-out of the traditional chieftaincies, to fall in line with the new post-Commonwealth political order.

The Complete version lacks a genealogy of the family at either the beginning or ending of the saga, which may have added to the scholarly perception of a shallow, fictional generic mode for the Complete version; genealogy adds historical weight to a saga. It is extremely difficult to identify political links in the Complete version of the saga through traditional saga analysis, leaving Vésteinn Ólason to hypothesize that the Complete saga was written so long after the traumatic events of the Sturlungaöld that residents of the area had simply ceased to care.[34]

5. Preferencing the Spatial over the Chronological: Regional Sagas

Rather than considering *Þórðar saga hreðu* as a pure literary fabrication unaware of the politics of the area, I propose quite the opposite: that the saga was intimately engaged with its local milieu and political situation. However, the nexus by which the Complete version expresses it is not

32 Árni Daníel Júlíusson and Jón Ólafur Ísberg, eds. *Íslandssagan í máli og myndum* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2005).

33 Axel Kristinsson, "Lords and Literature: The Icelandic Sagas as Political and Social Instruments," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 28 (2003): 11. Axel does not discuss Jón Hákonarsson because his primary interest was in finding what inspired saga writing to begin with, rather than manuscript production. He also limited his thesis to Classical sagas, and his introductory argument depends on excluding *Þórðar saga hreðu*. This is unfortunate, since the "happy ending" of the saga might well have fit into his hypothesis that a saga composed in a traditional chieftaincy would be less critical of that structure, see "Lords," 9.

34 Vésteinn Ólason, *Dialogue*, 217.

through genealogical emendations or overt political echoes,[35] but rather in the specific place-names mentioned in the saga. As a generic mode, landscape's relationship to text has been only loosely discussed. Torfi Tulinius notes that there seems to be a different tone when a saga is taking place in Iceland versus when it is not[36] and Jürg Glauser has argued that place-names can have enduring efficacy in linking the contemporary audience to the saga narrative: "By narrative means, a place-name is thus established to whose literary description the fiction immediately following it can refer repeatedly … [this] transformation of nature into culture … forms a trope of memory."[37] As Pierre Nora demonstrates, place is a strong mnemonic, and it is capable of generating and regenerating story.[38] In this paper, the mnemonic link established by places is offered as serving in the same way as genealogies, to bridge the gap between the time period of the sagas and the audience's own experiences.

Þórðar saga hreðu, despite being named for a stereotypical hero, is very localized: once the action of the saga arrives in Northern Iceland from Norway, it stays in Miðfjörður and Skagafjörður with only short forays into nearby Eyjafjörður and one into Borgarfjörður. This is not a saga sweeping all over Iceland or following the exploits of the hero to kingdoms abroad and back to Iceland again. As a carpenter involved in building many prominent halls and ferry systems in the area, Þórður is an important shaper of the built landscape and in that sense integral to the region.[39]

35 Cf Torfi Tulinius, "Political Echoes: Reading *Eyrbyggja Saga* in Light of Contemporary Conflicts," in *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, eds. Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills (Turnhout: Brepols 2007), 49–62.

36 Torfi Tulinius, "Landafræði og flokkun fornsagna," *Skáldskaparmál* 1 (1990): 142–56.

37 Jürg Glauser, "Sagas of Icelanders (*Íslendinga sögur*) and *þættir* as the Literary Representations of a New Social Space," trans. John Clifton-Everest, in *Old Icleandic Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 209.

38 Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," trans. Marc Roudebush. *Representations* 26 (Spring, 1989): 7–24.

39 The built landscape – roads, buildings, and other architecture – is distinguished from the natural landscape in as much as it is the product of human action. This is however a relative dichotomy, since even areas designated as "wilderness" are, in the act of naming, subjected to shaping by human minds. Ármann Jakobsson has discussed this in regard to *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* in "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Giants in *Barðar saga*," in *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature. Sagas and the British Isles. Preprint Papers of the 13th International Saga Conference, Durham and York 6th–12th August 2006*, ed. John McKinnell et al. (Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006).

Not only is the setting of the saga regionally defined but also, to the extent knowable, the saga was written and rewritten in the same geographic area where it was set.[40] There is also little doubt, given the lack of parallels in *Landnámabók*, that a long-standing oral tradition about a carpenter in Skagafjörður inspired the written saga; even the Íslenzk fornrit editors acknowledge that.[41] And the *rímur* tradition was similarly localized in its transmission history.[42]

Below, the effect this close contextual relationship with its local area could have on the reception of the text is analyzed. This method requires close attendance to place-names and landscape features in the text, and mapping those locations alongside the development of the narrative. Such a hermeneutics mimics the mental process which the local intended recipient audience, themselves intimately familiar with the landscape, would have undergone whenever they were listening or reading the saga. Knowledge of place brings a heretofore unacknowledged political complexity and richness to the Complete version of *Þórðar saga hreðu*.

6. Mapping as Method

As a method for understanding the rhetorical aim of a work of literature for its author and its reception by the intended audience, Franco Moretti suggests a rigorous use of mapping.[43] In his methodology, and for other literary scholars interested in issues of textual representation of place and space, what is important to note is that the real physical space referenced in a textual story influences the readers' interpretation of a text constantly and subconsciously. The reader plots the action described in a narrative fiction against their real-world knowledge of place. Scholars can replicate this mental process by marking onto a real geographic map places mentioned in

40 A full discussion of the manuscripts and their probable dating is found in Ward, "Nested Narrative," 23–26. Given the concentration of manuscript production areas in the Northwest of Iceland, such an overlap is not unexpected.

41 Jóhannes Halldórsson,"Formáli," liii.

42 Kuhn, "Þórðr hreða."

43 Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel* (London, New York: Verso, 1998); see also Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary Histories* (London, New York: Verso, 2005).

a text. The resulting map is an apparatus that allows a visual representation of the interpretive links a knowledgeable reader – or thoughtful writer – would have been mentally engaged in while navigating a text. The resulting map can then be analyzed for patterns after the act of reading is over. Saga studies have begun to take note of mapping as a tool for understanding how the sagas interact with environmental, gender, historical, and political changes, and includes important work by Christopher Callow[44] and an ambitious mapping project described in an article by Emily Lethbridge and Steven Hartman.[45] This paper builds on these efforts but with a greater emphasis on the intimate, phenomenological sense of lived landscape that the original, engaged reader/audience would have had in mind while listening to the saga.[46]

For the original medieval audience, a two-dimensional representation of real space – a map – was neither needed nor utilized. Instead, local people familiar with the landscape of the saga would carry with them a mental map that was not an abstract aerial depiction but rather an eye-level immersive sensory memory.[47] Perhaps they had traveled the same route as Þórður, perhaps they knew someone who lived at a farm named in the text. They would therefore be able to visualize the saga events in ways scholars and readers unfamiliar with the landscape can only approximate. For those sagas like *Þórðar saga hreðu* that have a limited geographic sensibility, the saga-teller was anticipating that the intended local audience would have that level of knowledge; in other words, it was part of its generic modus operandi.

44 Chris Callow, "Putting Women in their Place? Gender, Landscape, and the Construction of *Landnámabók*," *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 7 (2011): 7–26.

45 Emily Lethbridge and Steven Hartman, "Inscribing Environmental Memory in the Icelandic Sagas and the Icelandic Saga Map," *PMLA* 131 v. 2 (2016): 381–391.

46 My work is directly inspired by Gillian Overing and Marijane Osborn, *Landscape of Desire: Partial stories of the Medieval Scandinavian World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

47 See Howard N. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2nd edition, 2009) and Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge, and Description* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

7. Mapping Farmsteads

To illustrate how cognizance of the real-world locations of places mentioned in a text can influence understanding of the saga, I want to start with Chapter 6 of the Complete version.[48] In rather common saga convention, it interrupts the narrative to introduce new characters who will come into the saga. Each new character gives the audience a clue as to the narrative that will thereafter unfold, and each personality trait assigned to them, as well as each juicy bit of gossip we learn about them, will come to have import in the story. This is normally understood as the saga style of foreshadowing plot:

> Özurr hét maðr. Hann bjó í Skagafirði á þeim bæ, er á Grund heitir. Hann var Arngrímsson. Jórunn hét móðir hans ok var systir Miðfjarðar-Skeggja. Özurr var höfðingi mikill, því at hann hafði goðorð um inn efra hlut Skagafjarðar ok út til móts vid Hjaltasonu. Hann var ódældarmaðr, ok ekki var hann vinsæll, meiri ok sterkari en flestir menn, ótrúr ok undirhyggjufullr. Þórhallr hét maðr. Hann bjó á Miklabæ í Óslandshlíð. Ólöf hét kona hans. Hon var væn kona ok inn mesti skörungr. Þórhallr var vellauðigr at fé; engi var hann kempa kallaðr ok heldr hræddr ok at öllu it mesta lítilmenni. Hann var hælinn ok inn mesti skrumari ok þóttist flest ráð kunna. Ólöf, húsfreyja hans, var Hrolleifsdóttir, þess er nam Hrolleifsdal upp af Slettahlíð. Hon var fyrir þeim um alla hluti. Hafði hon verit gefin honum til fjár. Hon var ung, en Þórhallr við aldr. Hon var læknir góðr. Kálfr hét bondi einn í Hjaltadal. Hann bjó á Kálfsstöðum. Hann var mikilhæfr bóndi. (ÍF XIV, pp. 190–191)
>
> [There was a man named Özurr. He lived in Skagafjörður at that farm which is called Grund. He was Arngrímsson. His mother was called Jórunn and she was the sister of Skeggi of Miðfjörður. Özurr was a great chieftain, because he had authority over the outer part of Skagafjörður and all the way out until the claim of the sons of Hjalti began. He was an unkind man, and not popular, although he was stronger and more powerful than most other men, untr-

48 "Þórðar saga hreðu," in *Kjalnesinga saga*, ed. Jóhannes Halldórsson, Íslenzk fornrit, vol. 14 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1959), 190–191.

> ustworthy and careless. There was a man named Þórhallur. He lived at Miklabær in Óslandshlíð. His wife was named Ólöf. She was a kind woman and the boldest. Þórhallur was financially well off, but far from being a champion, rather fearful and in every way an unremarkable man. He was boastful and a great exaggerator and thought he knew what was best. Ólöf, his wife, was the daughter of Hrolleif who had claimed Hrolleifsdalur up to Slettahlíð. She was more remarkable than he in every way. She had been married to him for his money. She was young, but he was old. She was a good healer. There was a certain farmer in Hjaltadalur named Kálfur. He lived at Kálfsstaðir. He was a well-respected farmer.[49]]

For some readers, i.e. those used to reading for plot and unfamiliar with the landscape, the details about farm names are easily skipped over in favor of the character traits and the premonition of a showdown between Þórður and Özurr. But for anyone familiar with the geography of northern Iceland, the list of place names also serves as a mental map, akin to a "google fly over". The characters are mentioned in an orderly progression across the landscape, from southwest to northeast, the order in which they would be seen if one were standing at the western entrance to Skagafjörður, Arnastapi, a site mentioned later in the text. The place-names encourage the reader's mind to start in the middle of Skagafjörður at Grund, and then look to the north, a mental effort especially encouraged by reference to the full expanse of the land claims, which pushes the audience's mind northeast. Although serving as a foreshadowing of a chronological plot, this chapter also invites the audience to elicit their knowledge of place and landscape, and to fix the characters within that landscape. Özurr is mentioned before Ólöf, even though Þórður will meet her first, not only because he is the primary antagonist of the upcoming part of the saga, but also because his farm is in the middle of the valley. The other characters are listed from that central place.

Moreover, the original recipient audience may well have noted the Christian bias in the locations of these characters. The "google fly over" pulls the audience's mental eye from the middle of Skagafjörður towards Hjaltadalur in the northeast, which is where the northern bishopric of

49 All translations of excerpts from the saga are by the author of this paper.

Hólar was established in 1106 A.D. The only direct reference to Hólar found in the text is the clause "er Egill biskup var at Hólum" ['when Bishop Egill was in charge of Hólar', i.e. 1332 to 1341], which is used as a time referent to explain how long one of Þórður's halls stood. But even without being directly named, Hólar would have had tremendous real world associations for the intended audience of this saga. The saga seems to use Hjaltadalur, the small but dramatic valley ringed by steep mountains in the Northeastern part of Skagafjörður,[50] as a sort of stand in for Hólar, a site still today referred to as Hólar í Hjaltadal.

Mapping the named farms in the rest of the Complete version of the saga brings to light just how very much the text is favoring Hjaltadalur. No place-names are listed in the main valley of Skagafjörður traversed by Héraðsvötn River, which is the productive farmland and geographic center of the valley, even when Þórður travels through this area on his way to Flatatunga and Egilsá. Also, the only farmstead not leading directly into Hjaltadalur associated with a recurring character in Skagafjörður is the farm of Þórður's enemy, Özurr. All of Þórður's friends are from farms in the part of Skagafjörður that leads into Hjaltadalur or inside Hjaltadalur itself, such as the farm Kalfstaðir. One of his friends, Þórgrímur, is from the farm of Ás, the site where the first church in Iceland was erected sixteen years before Iceland formally adopted Christianity.[51] It is very likely the medieval recipient audience would have known this and would have picked up on the Christian association of these helpful friends of Þórður's.

The heavy preference for the area near Hólar, combined with the silence about other parts of the valley, allows the text to create an authentic core of Skagafjörður that serves to define the whole valley. As Moretti notes, when texts create such a geographic focus, they are participating in identity politics: the features associated with that particular area are rhetorically offered to the audience as appropriate characteristics to define a larger region.[52] For the Complete version of *Þórðar saga hreðu*, only the farms very near Hólar can lay claim to being the authentic core of Skagafjörður, and thus Skagafjörður as a whole becomes a very Christian place.

50 Sacred sites are often located in noteworthy topographies. See Richard Bradley, *An Archaeology of Natural Places* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

51 See chapter 3 of *Kristni saga*, in *Biskupa sögur I*, edited by Jónas Kristjánsson, Íslenzk fornrit, vol. 15 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 2003).

52 Moretti, *Atlas*, 47

7. Mapping Skirmishes

With this understanding of the landscape in mind, certain other features of the text begin to make more sense. For instance, the various battles, which may seem frustratingly repetitive and inconclusive to some readers, have a geographic sensibility to them that helps explain why certain battles turn out the way they do. Within Skagafjörður, Þórður seems unwilling to kill his primary opponent (though he is willing to kill his companions). This pattern starts the first time Þórður leaves Miðfjörður and is entering Skagafjörður at its western boundary, Arnastapi. Although Þórður's quick temper and fast sword were emphasized in the killings of Jón, Auðólfur, and Ormur just a few chapters earlier, we suddenly find him here sparing the life of Ormur's blood brother, Indriði, taking him to get healed, and becoming friends. There is nothing in the set up to the incident to suggest such a change of heart; rather, it has all the markings of a major battle since Þórður falls asleep and dreams of "ófriðarfylgjur" just before it occurs.[53]

The geographic motivation for the change in character is apparent when comparing the skirmish with Indriði against the skirmish with Sörli towards the end of the saga. Both opponents are merchants who have links to Ormur, whom Þórður killed early in the saga.[54] They also stand out from all the other skirmishes in the saga because, unlike the strife with Skeggi and Özurr that plays out over multiple encounters, these are single, decisive incidents. In both cases, when the merchants arrive by ship to Iceland and hear of Þórður's killing of Ormur, they immediately set out across the landscape in search of Þórður. In both cases, Þórður is coincidentally heading himself across the landscape in their direction, and they meet out on the heath. In both cases, they ask each others' names, realize they are enemies, and then Þórður goads them into attacking him by saying they will not get a better chance to avenge their comrade Ormur. In both cases, Þórður makes a statement afterwards that they were incredibly valiant opponents. However, in the case of Indriði, Þórður decides not to kill him, and instead takes him to get healed, while in the case of Sörli, Þórður does not hesitate to kill him. There is no good motivation for Þórður to

53 "Þórðar saga hreðu," 195.

54 Indriði is described as a business partner and blood-brother to Ormur, whereas Sörli is described as an uncle (föðurbróður) or foster brother (fóstbroður) in the manuscripts.

spare Indriði in the first instance, since he had recently killed not only Ormur but also Jón, and conversely no good motivation for him to kill Sörli in the latter incident, especially since Þórður's encounter with Sörli occurs after everything has finally been satisfactorily settled and Ásbjörn has married his sister.

The saga tells us specifically that the encounter with Sörli took place at Lurkasteinn, a landscape feature that marks the entry into Eyjafjörður. It is, in other words, just outside of the boundary of Skagafjörður. By contrast, the sparing of Indriði happens at Arnastapi, exactly when Þórður enters into Skagafjörður and can literally see Hjaltadalur. Similarly, the first sparing of Özurr takes place within Skagafjörður, the area right around Hjaltadal. It occurs as Þórður leaves a Christmas celebration at Kálfsstaðir.[55] The text draws attention to Þórður's decision to spare Özurr:

> Eptir fundinn gekk Þórðr at Özuri ok kippti honum ór blóði ok skaut yfir hann skildi, svá at eigi rifi hann hrafnar, því at hann mátti sér enga hjálp veita. Allir flýðu undan menn Özurar. Eigi váru menn Þórðar færir til eptirferðar, því at engi komst ósárr af fundi þessum. Þórðr bauð Özuri at láta græða hann. "Eigi þarftu að bjóða mér lækning," segir Özurr, "því at jafnskótt skal ek drepa þik sem ek komumst í færi við þik." Þórðr kveðst ekki at því fara ok sendi Þórhall yfir í Ás til Þorgríms, er þar bjó, at hann sækti Özur ok græddi hann.[56]
>
> [After the encounter, Þórður went up to Özurr and pulled him out of the blood and set up a shield over him so that the ravens could not pick at him, since he was unable to defend himself. All of Özurr's men had fled the scene. None of Þórður's men were fit to pursue them, since no one had emerged unscathed from this encounter. Þórður offered Özurr to get his wounds patched up. "You do not need to offer me doctoring," replies Özurr, "because I will kill you the very second I get another chance against you." Þórður replies he is not worried about that and sends Þórhall over

55 This farm, located today directly across the stream from Hólar, is likely used within the fictional frame of the saga as a pre-1106 stand in for Hólar itself, since the saga time is circa 950 A.D., before the bishopric was established.

56 "Þórðar saga hreðu," 204.

to Ás to Þórgrímur, who lived there, and he brought Özurr home and tended to his wounds.]

Sverrir Jakobsson notes that in the eleventh and twelfth century, there was a specific ecclesiastical movement called the Peace of God, later broadened to the Truce of God, which called for the adoption of a non-violent mindset, especially towards priests' and Church property, but also more generally away from weapons and toward mercy.[57] Christian men were discouraged from spilling the blood of any other Christian man, no matter the cause, in this movement.[58] The pattern of Þórður sparing his opponents' lives inside of Skagafjörður and killing them outside of it, combined with the geographic emphasis on Hjaltadalur, seems a nuanced rhetorical effort on the part of the narrative to suggest Skagafjörður is a holy place. It certainly brings questions of Christianity and Christian behavior into the saga without any overt references to religion or conversion. That entire layer of meaning is carried only by strategic use of places as the locale of specific saga events, a pattern the original intended audience likely noticed at least subconsciously, but which modern scholars overlook entirely.

8. Mapping Speech Acts

More overt themes are also expressed in the saga at strategic locales, and appreciating the importance of those locations can add a layer of complexity to the saga narrative. For instance, in both the Complete version and Fragmentary version, key speech acts related to kinship bonds take place at boundary markers.[59] Three examples of this, two in Miðfjörður and one in Skagafjörður, show an awareness on the part of the saga of the contours of the regional boundaries, and the fit between having pivotal narrative

57 Sverrir Jakobsson, "The Peace of God in Iceland in the 12th and 13th Century," in *Sacri canones servandi sunt: Ius canonicum et status ecclesiae saeculis XIII–XV*, ed. Pavel Krafl (Prague: Historický Ústav CR, 2008), 205–213.

58 Various instances of people seeking refuge inside churches in the contemporary *Sturlunga-sögur* demonstrate that the idea of sparing the lives of those who sought sanctuary in holy places was well known in Iceland in the twelfth and thirteenth century.

59 The boundaries of Miðfjörður and Skagafjörður are defined by rises in the landscape on either side of a river valley. As natural landscape features based on geography rather than political units, they have remained consistent, and are still marked on some maps of Iceland.

moments occur at pivotal places in the landscape. These locations would have lent dramatic weight to the event for an audience intimately familiar with the local landscape.

This pattern begins to come into focus the first time the saga has Þórður leave Miðfjörður. Skeggi, Eiður and Þórður are together on this trip, and Skeggi has to manage his personal dislike for Þórður with his obligations to his son, who has moved into Þórður's household, and his nephew, who wants to marry Þórður's sister. The saga highlights that they did not speak to each other at all during the return trip until they came to Miðfjörðará. There Skeggi says, "Hér munu vér af baki stíga, því at eg á við þik, Þórðr, erindi" ['We should get off our horses here, because I have request to make of you, Þórður'].[60] The request is indeed a weighty one: Skeggi is asking for Þórður's sister's hand in marriage on behalf of his nephew Ásbjörn. That the saga places this request when the characters arrive at the river is likely not arbitrary; this river defines the region of Miðfjörður and reaching it indicates they have arrived in the district. This speech act, which calls for the unification of the two families, comes shortly after Eiður made the following argument as to why his father should come to Þórður's aid in a trade dispute: "Hann er ór því heraði, sem þú ert; hann er ok min lífgjafi ok fóstri" ['he is from the same district as you are, and he also saved my life and is my foster-father']. This location not only marks that they have come into Miðfjörður, a district they share, but it is also at the other end of this river, as it empties into the sea, where Þórður had saved Skeggi's son's life earlier in the saga. It is a very fitting location for Skeggi, the chieftain of Miðfjörður, to make this proposal, one which would realign the political dynamics of the region.

It may also explain why in Chapter 10 of the Íslenzk fornrit edition, when Skeggi has arrived at Óslandshlíð in a rage over Þórður's killing of Özurr, Þórður invites Skeggi to the location where Özurr is buried. The beginning of the family alliance, begun at a riverside on the southwest side of Miðfjörður, is now about to break down at a cliffside on the northeast side of Skagafjörður. The place is called Sviðgrímshóla,[61] and it was a bor-

60 "Þórðar saga hreðu," 182

61 The exact referent of this place-name has been the subject of lively debate in the local area, including most recently between Jón Árni Friðjónsson, "Þórður hreða í Kolbeinsdal: um Þórðarsögu, Þórðarrímur og örnefni," *Skagafirðingabók* 31 (2008): 121–134, and Sigurjón Páll Ísaksson, "Hugleiðingar." What is clear is that it is located out from Óslandshlíð, likely

derland between original *landnám* claims, although today the whole area is considered Skagafjörður. Þórður invites the enraged Skeggi out to this place with the words, "ek fylgja þér þangat, sem ek drap Özur, frænda þin; má þér þá minnissamara verða, hvílíkt ættarhögg eg hefi höggvit þér" ['I'll follow you to the place where I killed your nephew Özurr, since it will remind you of the terrible blow I struck against your family'].[62] The "reminder" referenced in this speech act is not just a memory of an incident but is also a physical reminder, in the form of the burial mound erected over Özurr.[63] When they reach the burial mound, Þórður utters a verse of poetry encouraging Skeggi to redden his sword with Þórður's blood. Living up to his reputation as "ballsy", Þórður is clearly goading Skeggi on here. But he is also displaying a remarkable appreciation for the rhetoric of place, for fit between location and action. Burial mounds represent the ability of landscape to conjure memories, creating a dialogue between people and place.[64] Although the move to this location proves a strategic one as well – it allows time enough for Eiður to come and break up the fight – the text emphasizes other reasons why this action needed to move to this hinterland area.

But the clearest example of Þórður's appreciation for the synergy between important speech acts and boundary-marking locations is found in the Fragmentary version of the saga, whose lacuna picks up at the moment when Þórður is leaving Miðfjörður for the last time. It has him pause to give a memorable and lengthy parting speech at a spot called Bessaborg, which is a rock that marks the eastern boundary of Miðfjörður. He makes the following declaration:

on the other side of Kolbeinsdalsá river, and outside of the area that would be visible looking from Arnastapi over Skagafjörður. As Chapter 6 quoted above notes, it would have been within the landnám claim of the Hjaltasons, and therefore not part of the original goðorð for Skagafjörður.

62 "Þórðar saga hreðu," 213.

63 The play on words between 'ættarhögg', meaning 'a blow to the family', and 'ættarhaugur', a family burial mound, is perhaps intentional. For the ubiquity of burial mounds in border areas, see Adolf Friðriksson, "Haugur og heiðni: minjar um íslenzkt járnaldarsamfélag," in *Hlutavelta tímans: menningararfur á Þjóðminjasafni*, eds. Árni Björnsson and Hrefna Róbertsdóttir (Reykjavík, Þjóðminjasafn Íslands, 2004), 56–63.

64 See Erin Halstad-McGuire, "Sailing Home: Boat Graves, Migrant Identities and Funerary Practices on the Viking Frontier," in Elizabeth Anderson et al., *Memory, Mourning, Landscape* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010).

> Nú búast þeir allir brott ór Miðfirði; reið Eyvindr með þeim. Ok er þeir kómu á þá borg, er Bessaborg heitir, þá sneri Þórðr aptr ok leit á fjörðinn ok mælti: "Fagr ertu þó Miðfjörðr, þó at ek verði nú við þik at skilja; mun þeim nú höfðingjunum þykja af einn inn ólmasti, er ek em á burtu. En þat læt ek um mælt, at þeir, sem mestir menn eru í Miðfirði, verði aldri samhuga, svá at árum skipti. Ok þat annat, at þat haldist, ... at hér er fólk orðslaugarmeira ok ósannorðara en í flestum sveitum öðrum. Þat it þriðja, at af takist hafskipalægi i Miðfirði. Þat mæli eg ok um, sakir þess at mér er vel við sveitina, at hér sé menn gestrisnari en annars staðar og buandi þó betr. Þat annat, at hér sé bóndaval betra en víða annars staðar ok komi sjaldan óár. Þat it þríðja, at sá maðr er hér vex upp, verði aldri hengdr.[65]
>
> [They prepared now all to leave Miðfjörður and Eyvindur went with them. And when they got to the rock which is called Bessaborg, Þórður turned around and looked back at the fjord and spoke: "Although you are lovely, Miðfjörður, I must separate myself from you now. I come away from one who must be considered the most horrible of chieftains. And I permit myself to say, that those who are most powerful in Miðfjörður will never be able to agree on anything, even as the years pass. And I say further, that it is considered that here people are more prone to exaggeration and dishonesty than people in most other districts. For another thing, harborage is not very good in Miðfjörður. But I will add, since I do like the district, that people are more friendly with visitors than other places and the farms nicer. For another thing, the selection of farmland is better than most other places and there is seldom famine. Finally, no one that grows up in Miðfjörður is ever hung.]

In the Complete version of the saga, this speech is referenced as the final comment on the whole saga:

> Mikil ætt er komin frá Þórði hreðu og margir göfgir menn, bæði í Nóregi ok Íslandi. Þat er mál manna, at þat hafi orðit at áhrínsorðum, er Þórðr mælti, at jafnan mundi vera nökkurar hreður í Miðfirði; hefir þar jafnan verið deilugjarnara en í öðrum heruðum.

65 "Þórðar saga hreðu," 240.

> Þórðr hreða varð sóttdauðr. Höfum vér ekki fleira heyrt með sannleik af honum sagt. Ok lýkr hér nú sögu Þórðar hreðu.[66]
>
> [A large lineage is descendant from Þórður hreða and many noble men, both in Norway and Iceland. Men say, that it had become a prophesy, the words which Þórður spoke, that there would always be some contentiousness in Miðfjörður. More divisiveness has always been there than in other districts. Þórður died of natural causes. We have not heard anything else truthful said about him. And here ends now the Saga of Þórður hreða.]

Interestingly, although Þórður's speech itself is nowhere to be found in the Complete version of the saga itself, it is referenced here at the conclusion of the Complete version in such a way to suggest that it must have been an especially well-known aspect of the saga.[67] Though the poor preservation of the Fragmentary version makes us unable to know if other such parallels exist, the speech receives considerable narrative weight in both versions, even constituting the closing remark of the Complete version. This indicates that his speech describing and characterizing the people and landscape of Miðfjörður was fundamental to the saga before the two versions diverged. Indeed, Þórður's speech defining the people of Miðfjörður appears to be the narrative core of *Þórðar saga hreðu*.

The Fragmentary version of the saga associated this important speech act with a prominent boundary marker, which reinforces the efficacy of his declaration. His words defined the character of the people while the boundary marker physically defined the outline of the region. This kind of feedback loop – a synergy between place and content – would assist in the memorization and transmission of the saga, certainly. It is also a good example of literature participating in the construction and maintenance of cultural memory tied to a regional identity.[68]

66 "Þórðar saga hreðu," 226.

67 Arngrímur's summary of the saga in *Crymogæa* also emphasizes Þórður's move from Miðfjörður to Skagafjörður as a concluding sentiment: "In prædio Micklabæ Borealis Islandiæ parochiæ Slettalyd postquam Midfjordesnes reliquiesset, bonus et fortunatus senex obiit" ['He died late in life, happy and fortunate, at the farm of Miklabær in the northern Icelandic district of Sléttuhlíð after he had moved from Miðfjörður'], "Viðbætir úr niðjatali Ketils Hörðakára i Crymogæu," in *Kjalnesinga saga*, ed. Jóhannes Halldórsson, Íslenzk fornrit, vol. 14 (Reykjavík: Híð íslenzka fornritafélag, 1959), 250.

68 Cultural memory theory as a means by which societies manage their shared identity is

9. A Negative Map

It is therefore worth asking if the Complete version of *Þórðar saga hreðu* participates in other forms of cultural memory making, namely in response to the shifting political tide that came during the late thirteenth century when the Commonwealth collapsed, a period sometimes referred to as the Sturlungaöld. The Fragmentary version of *Þórðar saga hreðu*, as discussed above, directly references the Sturlungaöld through the genealogy at the end of the saga, demonstrating an awareness and a desire by that version of the saga to process the events of the period. The Complete version seems, by contrast, silent on the matter.

This is especially odd given that the saga is set in the exact region most directly affected by the bloodshed associated with the collapse of the Commonwealth. Late in the Commonwealth period, the Sturlungar family had laid claim to almost every district in Iceland, and Skagafjörður became the physical center of the struggle to complete the process.[69] The first of two major battles in Skagafjörður took place in 1238 at Örlygsstaðir. Sturla, Sighvatur's son, had amassed troops in the west of Iceland, and then marched across Vatnskerð to Skagafjörður. En route, chapter 133 of *Íslendingasaga* tells us he picked up support from the people of Miðfjörður.[70] Then his father arrived with troops from Eyjafjörður, in total over 1000 men. They took over the rich farmlands on the southeastern side of the central valley, near the farms of Víðivellir and Miklabær. Meanwhile, forces opposed to the Sturlungar in the south gathered up a force of over 1600 men and began marching north. The resulting battle, in the early morning of August 21, 1238, saw the death of both Sturla and Sighvatur, along with dozens of others, while the forces of Kolbeinn and Gizurr were largely uninjured.[71]

a growing field, see Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, and Sara Young, eds. *A Companion to Cultural Memories Studies* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010). For applications of this theory to Old Norse studies, see Pernille Hermann, "Concepts of Memory: Approaches to the Past in Medieval Icelandic Literature," *Scandinavian Studies* 81 (2009): 287–308.

69 Árni Daníel Júlíusson and Jón Ólafur Ísberg, eds. *Íslandssagan í máli og myndum*.

70 Guðni Jónsson, ed. *Sturlunga saga* (Haukadalsútgáfan, 1953), vol. II, 324.

71 Jón Johannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*, trans. Haraldur Bessason (Winnipeg: University of Minnesota Press, 1974), 252

18 years later, another son of Sighvatur's, Þórður kakali, returned to Skagafjörður for an attack on Kolbeinn and his successor, Brandur. Jón Johannesson summarizes the subsequent events thus: "Þórður finally gathered his followers and advanced into Skagafjörður, where Brandur and his men stood ready to oppose him. The armies, numbering over 1200 men, met at Haugnes on the southern bank of the river Djúpadalsá on April 19, 1246, and there they fought the fiercest battle ever to take place in Iceland."[72] This battle site came to be known as Róðagrund according to the marker erected there in memory of the 110 fatalities, 70 of whom were men from Skagafjörður. In addition to these two dramatic clashes, Skagafjörður remained the center of political intrigue all the way until 1264, as vividly described in Sturla Þórðarson's account, including the burning at Flugumýri.[73]

Carefully noting place-names in *Þórðar saga hreðu* with an ear to how they might relate to the Sturlungaöld events does yield some intriguing possibilities for how fourteenth- and fifteenth-century audiences may have made a connection between the saga narrative and the Sturlungaöld history.

There is one skirmish location mentioned in *Þórðar saga hreðu* that also saw unrest during the Sturlungaöld: Flatatunga. There are also parallels between the events: in both cases, a group of local people who see men gathering to battle arrive to stop the bloodshed. In Sturla Þórðarson's contemporary record,[74] Sighvatur had gathered up 600 men and positioned himself at Flatatunga, and Kolbeinn the Younger was preparing to move in on Sighvatur there. But when the troops met at Flatatunga, "gengu stórbændr ór Eyjafirði ór liði Sighvats ok enn nökkurir af liði Kolbeins ok leituðu um sættir í milli þeira" ['leading men from Eyjafjörður who were part of Sighvatur's troops and some from Kolbeinn's side {from Skagafjörður} came together to arrange a truce'].[75] In the account of events

72 Ibid., 261.

73 Úlfar Bragason argues in fact that the entire narrative structure of *Íslendingasaga* is "intended to focus the attention of the listener/reader specifically on two events in the story …: the battle of Örlygsstaðir, and the burning of Flugumýri." Úlfar Bragason, *Ætt og saga: um frásagnarfræði Sturlungu eða Íslendinga sögu hinnar miklu* (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2010), 296.

74 "Íslendingasaga," in *Sturlungasaga*, chapter 98.

75 Ibid., 244.

at Flatatunga found in *Þórðar saga hreðu*, we find Þórður and Özurr about to battle for the second time when men from the area intervene and break up the fight. Although the details of the troop composition and movements are not similar, it is the only skirmish in the saga broken up by men from the area, rather than by Þórður's foster son, Eiður Skeggjason. That, combined with the overlap in place-names, may suggest some influence by the Sturlunga events on the saga.

Another instance comes in regard to the place-name Miklabær. There are two farms of that name in Skagafjörður: one the place where Sighvatur was killed during the battle of Örlygsstaðir; the other the home of Ólöf, the widow who marries Þórður at the end of the saga, and the farm where Þórður stays during much of the saga. Ólöf's farm Miklabær is in Óslandshlíð, whereas the farmstead where Sighvatur was killed, also called Miklabær, is in central Skagafjörður, about a dozen kilometers south of Miklabær á Óslandshlíð. Both farms are in Skagafjörður, but Þórður's farm is on the northern end of the valley, near Hjaltadalur, whereas the other one is in the more populated central valley. For an audience familiar with both places, hearing the farm name Miklabær may have caused temporary confusion that would have required extra effort on the part of the audience to comprehend which farm is being referenced. The reason Ólöf's farm has the descriptive appellation of "á Óslandshlíð" may well have been to distinguish it from this more southerly Miklabær. For listeners aware of the bloodshed at the other Miklabær, the saga would have invited in the events of the Sturlungaöld while ironically also distancing the saga, both geographically and historically, from those traumatic events.

This sort of "negative map" was also noted above, in that the Complete version of *Þórðar saga hreðu* is noticeably missing any reference to places in the central area of Skagafjörður; and it was suggested that this was a pull towards Hólar. But it could simultaneously also be a push away from the violent sites of the Sturlungaöld.

Another example of the saga working to evoke and then redirect memories of the Sturlungaöld might also be found in the skirmish when Þórður spares Özurr for the first time on his way home from Kálfsstaðir. That ambush takes place, as the text says, after Þórður "nam staðar nær Viðvík, þar sem heitir Garðshvammr, skammt frá bænum í Viðvík" ['arrived close

to Vidvík, a place called Garðshvammur, close to the farm at Viðvík'].[76] That the text repeats twice that this encounter is taking place near Viðvík does bring the audience's attention to the place-name as such. And this place-name does echo another place-name involved in the Örlygsstaðir battle: Víðivellir. While not identical names as in the case above, there is a poetic resonance between them, which the audience would likely have noticed given the native Icelandic skaldic poetic rules that emphasize initial consonants and the repetition of consonants. There is also similarity in that Þórður's battle is near the farm, not at the farm, which is also the case with Örlygsstaðir vis-á-vis Víðivellir.

And one could also point to the character of Özurr, the chieftain in Skagafjörður who relentlessly pursues Þórður but is otherwise unknown from any other saga or source. In chapter 6 of the saga, he is introduced as Özurr from Grund, but later in the saga he is identified as Özurr from Þverá. Both of these farm names are very common in districts throughout Iceland. Interestingly, however, a major chieftain of the Sturlungaöld, Sighvatur, after taking over the goðorð of his son, moves to Grund in Eyjafjörður, and later there is a battle at a farm nearby to Grund, Þverá in Eyjafjörður. It is possible that the audience of the saga, when hearing the farm names Grund and Þverá associated with a chieftain, would have first thought of Grund in Eyjafjörður. Such mental gymnastics may appear to us unlikely, but because Özurr is a fictional construct, not known from any other source or saga, an engaged local audience would have little else to link him with than a real chieftain with whom he has certain parallels, including relentlessness in obtaining his objective.

These oblique and tenuous textual references, combined with a virtual blackout of the geographic area associated with the events of the Sturlungaöld, present a very intriguing possibility. Perhaps what we see in the Complete version of the saga is an example not of cultural memory being created, but of directed cultural forgetting.[77] The process of remembering is always accompanied by the need to forget; it is a selective

76 "Þórðar saga hreðu," 201.

77 For a discussion of social forgetting, see Elena Esposito, "Social Forgetting: A Systems Theory Approach," in *Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. Erll et al., 181–190. For a discussion of the role of landscape in dealing with social trauma, see Elizabeth Anderson et al., *Memory, Mourning, Landscape*.

editing of history.[78] By directing the audience away from the Miklabær of the Sturlungaöld towards the Miklabær of Óslandshlíð, this popular and widely-circulated version of the saga seems to be suggesting that the events of the Sturlungaöld were an aberration best forgotten. The only event of the Sturlungaöld the saga is willing to allow directly into the saga narrative is the one broken up by peace-abiding local people. For people trying to recover from the trauma of the Sturlungaöld and move on in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, *Þórðar saga hreðu* was likely a useful anecdote.

10. Conclusion

The poor opinion modern scholars have had of *Þórðar saga hreðu* as an example of the *Islendingasögur* genre may well be ameliorated if the saga's intimate relationship to its regional setting is understood. Though all *Íslendingasögur* mention real place-names in Iceland by definition, some sagas, like *Þórðar saga hreðu*, may rely on this to such a degree that the saga loses meaning without that landscape context. Instead, the saga appears vacuous and lacking verisimilitude. As the above analysis suggests, robust academic attention on the interplay between places named in the saga and the interpretation of the saga can add significant nuance and complexity to a text.

Þórðar saga hreðu is surely not the only saga that can benefit from analysis of this sort. Other sagas that lack extensive genealogies but keep most of the action in Iceland may be similarly "landscape-sensitive." As a subgenre, regional sagas could be thought of as those sagas that encouraged the audience to bring into the saga their knowledge of place to complete the hermeneutic cycle.[79] If genealogies encourage the listener to extend the chronology of the saga forward into their present, sagas without extensive genealogies may be relying on the dimension of space rather than time to bridge the fictional world of the saga with the real world of the listeners. That certainly seems to be what the Complete version of *Þórðar saga hreðu* is doing.

And while all *Íslendingasögur* have some relationship with the landscape of Iceland, likely not all sagas manage and mediate that relationship the same way or with the same intensity. Being able to distinguish between sa-

78 Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. K. Blamey and D. Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

79 *Hrafnkels saga* comes to mind as a likely candidate.

gas that engage with issues of place differently would help scholars analyze the various avenues available in this corpus for making meaning. Regional sagas could be understood as those sagas that *need* to be read in the context of their local landscape to be meaningful. Such an understanding might allow scholars to contribute to theoretical concerns outside of saga studies about the relationship between human beings and their environmental milieu, how it has changed over the last 1000 years, and the role of literature in that process.

But classifying *Þórðar saga hreðu* as a Regional saga is not simply an academic exercise. There is also evidence that throughout the life of the saga, the saga tellers and composers themselves may have understood *Þórðar saga hreðu* as a Regional saga, one concerned with defining the identity of residents of the area. The prevalence of key turning points in the saga, like Þórður's speech, taking place at important boundary markers suggests that throughout the transmission of the saga, a relationship between the narrative and the landscape was fostered. The saga tellers over time may have used these prominent and politically important places in the landscape to construct the saga, not so much in a fictional literary sense but rather in an organic anthropological sense. Anyone who walked or rode horseback through Miðfjörður and into Skagafjörður would have had occasion to remember and retell a story or two about Þórður. That the halls and ferry system Þórður is credited with building also were still visible in the landscape into the fourteenth century would have provided additional sites of memory. I would argue that as the saga circulated, Þórður came to function at a level not unlike *landnámsmenn* or others credited with naming, shaping, and enculturating the landscape. By linking his personal narrative with symbolically laden places in the landscape, he became a symbol of that region, more mythical and less of a historical character,[80] which might also explain why the saga originators did not feel the need to make his character particularly complex. If there was less to think about him as a person, his actions in the landscape would get more attention.

Whether or not the various audiences of the saga over time in Northern Iceland understood, in a generic sense, that it was a regional saga is much

80 See Pernille Hermann for the process of mythologizing, "Founding Narratives and the Representation of Memory in Saga Literature," *ARV/Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* 66 (2010): 69–87.

harder to say. The Fragmentary version of the saga, emended by Jón Hákonarson to include extensive genealogies at the beginning and end, suggests that there was some effort to fit the saga into more classical generic conventions and into the political structure of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Perhaps others were satisfied to see it as a simple, happy story about a talented guy. But for residents of the area, the saga was certainly inviting them to draw on their knowledge of landscape and place while listening to the saga. If they were interested in playing that game, the saga would reward them with the pleasure of remembering who they were and where they belonged.

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Í þessari grein er viðfangsefni Þórðar sögu hreðu lýst, einnig varðveislu sögunnar í tveimum gerðum, og viðtökum fræðimanna. Sérkenni gerðanna tveggja eru rædd, einkum ættfræðin í sögubrotinu. Síðan er sagt frá aðferð við að lesa söguna í heild þar sem lögð er áhersla á örnefni og staðfræði í þeim tilgangi að túlka söguna. Aðalrökin eru þau að gagnlegt sé að líta á héraðssögur sem sérstakan sagnaflokk þar sem örnefni og staðfræði eru notuð til að byggja brú á milli sögu og áheyrenda/lesenda. Með því að nálgast Þórðar sögu á þennan hátt, væri unnt að skilja söguna í jákvæðara ljósi en gagnrýnendur oft hafa gert.

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