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SAME FRAME

Sagas and Movies

Speech delivered on the occasion of Professor Clover's acceptance of an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Iceland, October 2nd 2015

When Sveinn Yngvi [Egilsson, Professor of Icelandic literature and Head of Íslensku- og menningardeild 2014–16] and I agreed that my talk today should be a casual one explaining the relation of my two fields, film and medieval, I breathed a sigh of relief. Largely because it's something I've had to think about and have even spoken about once before, on orders from my colleagues, at my retirement in 2007. I tried then, and will try again here – though in a very different way, for the obvious reason that you are a very different audience, an audience of whom not just some of you know what the *Íslendingasögur* are, but all of you. What a pleasure.

I met sagas and film in the same year: 1959. It was in San Francisco, where I'd come to college with the plan of studying music. My third night there, I decided to go to a movie. I'd seen only a handful of movies in my life up to then, so going to "the cinema" seemed like a cool, city thing to do. I lived just two blocks from the Surf Theater, a well-known art-film venue (though I didn't know that at the time). The film I saw was Ingmar Bergman's *Smultronstället (Wild Strawberries).* I found it bewildering but powerful, and I knew I wanted to see more films like it. And I did – lots. By Christmas I'd seen films by not only Bergman, but Bunuel, Godard, Dreyer, Pabst, and Kurasawa; and I'd met other film buffs with whom I'd go to movies and afterwards to a café for discussion over wine. It was informal education, but education nonetheless.

In the meantime, at school, one of my required courses had to be in literature; I chose a survey of western epic, a course that began with *Gilgamesh* and marched through the *Iliad, Odyssey, Aeneid, Chanson de Roland, Nibelungenlied, Beowulf,* and, finally, *Njál's Saga* (in the old Dasent

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translation). I loved all the readings, but it was *Njáls saga* that bowled me over. I wrote my term paper on it; looked up "Norse Sagas" in encyclopedias; and from libraries got first the *Saga of the Laxdalers*, then *Egil's saga*, then *Saga of the Ere-Dwellers*. I also began reading around in Old and Middle English literature and then in medieval French and German, though it remained the sagas that interested me most.

So I was "doing" film and sagas from 1959 on – sagas as a quasi-academic pursuit, film as serious hobby. It never crossed my mind then that they had anything to do with each other. And they didn't, or at least not in the ways that would later come to interest me.

The following year I moved to Berkeley and there re-started my sophomore year – not in music, but in Scandinavian and Comparative Literature, emphasis on the Middle Ages. I took my B.A. and continued into graduate school, at this point as a single mother of two children. My only time in Iceland was a month in the summer of 1970, with my kids; but that was more for purposes of meeting the place than for study or research. My children loved Iceland, for reasons I'll come back to.

In the autumn of 1971, we moved from Berkeley to Boston, where I had my first job at Harvard teaching Scandinavian literature – from sagas to Strindberg. Within weeks of my arrival, I was approached by the head of the Carpenter Center, Harvard's art museum and home to its Art History Program. The Center, he said, wanted to start giving courses in cinema and I had been recommended as a serious film buff; would I be interested in teaching a course on some aspect of Scandinavian cinema? Sure, I said. (At that time, film was just emerging as an academic subject, and the few people who taught it had little academic training to speak of.) So the Center ordered some films for me to screen in advance, and on the very small basis of that plus some reading, in the fall of 1972 I offered my first film course, on Bergman and Dreyer. In the coming years I added courses in Scandinavian and German silent cinema. And so on. I mention this partly to dispel the idea (I can't tell you how many people have asked me this) that I started out as a medievalist, then got bored with the Middle Ages and, in mid-career, switched to film instead. The record will show that I was teaching both pretty much from day one and continued to do so every year after that. And I'm still working on both.

What did change at some point was the *kind* of cinema I worked on,

which up until the late 70s was European art cinema. But not American movies. Definitely not American movies, which, to the extent I'd seen any, I pretty much scorned as pulp fiction. I wasn't alone in that bias. Nor was I alone in splitting the world of film into two categories. On one side were genre films, typically American, the products of studio committees rather than individual artists; plot-driven and formulaic in both their formal properties and the stories they told. On the other side was (mostly) European art cinema, a tradition more lyric than narrative; more invested in states of mind than in plots; driven more by philosophical implications than by endings; and more formally experimental, drawing attention to a film's individual artistic madeness (a no-no in Hollywood films, which were designed to seem self-telling).

Some of my friends could happily go to an American boxing movie one night and the next night to a French film about a relationship, but most people tilted toward one type or the other. I tilted emphatically toward art cinema – until the later 70s, when, back in Berkeley, I finally backed down and started going to some American movies. And of course the video revolution also enabled a systematic look backwards at the longer history of American cinema that I'd missed. It was only then that it finally dawned on me that genre cinema is not just failed art cinema, but its own thing with its own aesthetic – not the esthetic of James Joyce or Albert Camus, but an aesthetic a lot like that of, well, my other field, medieval literature.

Medieval literature too is a world of the formulaic. A world of cycles, in which there is seldom an original, a real or right text, but only variants. A world in which texts can be shortened, lengthened, imitated, disguised, sequeled, prequeled, changed from verse to prose or prose to verse, and so on. A world in which texts were more commonly meant to be heard than read. A world in which authors' names are mostly unknown to us—not just because they may be lost, but because they may not have mattered that much to begin with. Even when we have authors, as in the case of Gottfried or Chretien, it's not exactly clear what that means when the texts in question are yet another *Tristan* and yet another *Perceval*.

The notion of authorship sits no less uneasily in the world of modern genre cinema, and for much the same reason. This too is a world of retellings – of copies of copies of copies. What is film noir but a cycle? Ditto the western, the backstage musical, the romantic comedy, and so on. And

how many thousands of times has Hollywood retold the Oedipus story in one guise or another? Or the Ash Lad tale-type, playable as comedy, western, courtroom drama, musical, gangster, etc? And what are the formulaic protocols of classical Hollywood shooting and editing but a technological version of the system of verbal clichés that enable tradition-based narrative more broadly? It's no surprise that when Hollywood started advertising its movies as "a film by John Ford" or "a Howard Hawks film," it often had less to do with auteurism than with the studios' cynical wish to appeal to art-film audiences, who, like European filmmakers, were bent on "transforming film history into a cult of personality," as André Bazin put it. But Hollywood films were primarily the products not of auteur-directors, but of studios – of committees, in a word. And yet those committees could make some pretty good films. It was Bazin who, in 1957, famously wrote that "the American cinema is a classical art...so why not then admire in it what is most admirable – i.e., not only the talent of this or that filmmaker, but the genius of the system."

In a not-so-different way, I think, the genius of the sagas is also the genius of a system – a system of telling that stands alone in European letters. I'm inclined to think that Snorri had to do with the making of *Egils saga*, but in something like the way that Howard Hawks had to do with making of the film *The Big Sleep*: operating firmly within a set of stock protocols, but with personal touches, and emphases, here and there. I think Howard and Snorri could have an interesting conversation about creating what has been called "art in a closed field" – for the prose "field" of the sagas is indeed a closed one.

So: upside-down as it may seem, it was studying medieval literature that taught me how to understand American genre cinema—to "get" it, to appreciate it on its own terms. So starting in the early 80s (I was back in Berkeley by then), my film teaching shifted from art cinema to genre cinema: mainly film noir and detective narrative more generally; horror movies; and courtroom dramas – plus occasional lectures in others' courses on the musical and the western.

But it's the northern subset of medieval literature that became my specialty; so the question narrows to one of the common ground between Hollywood genre movies and Norse-Icelandic literature, especially but not only the *Íslendingasögur*. Of course the sagas have a number of the formal

characteristics of both medieval literature and genre film that I enumerated earlier. But they are also *thematically* allied with Hollywood cinema in some striking ways.

I turn now to four of the thematic nodes that have occupied me on both the medieval and the film fronts: revenge; trials; the frontier or terra nova origin story; and, of course, gender.

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Of these, revenge is the most blatant. We all know how the workings of honor and vengeance play out in sagas — how systematically, richly, and intelligently the sagas parse not just bloody confrontations, but lawsuits and all manner of political and social encounters. I think of the sagas as treatises on getting even.

Much the same can be said of American genre films overall. There are the obvious, hard-revenge genres: action, gangster, war, and so on. And then there are soft-revenge movies, in which a character gets morally even, or socially or politically even. Soft revenge runs the entire gamut of American cinema, from bio-pics and musicals and courtroom dramas to romance and even melodrama. Many of these are films that don't seem on the face of it to be revenge stories, but if you look past the surface plot to the underlying logic, you'll almost always find a getting-even template. I'd go so far as to say that the getting-even template is a *sine qua non* of American cinema.

One of my favorite movie lines is spoken by Clint Eastwood's Dirty Harry in the movie of that name. "Revenge," Harry says, "is the oldest motivation known to mankind." Getting-even stories, soft or hard, are indeed old, and they are also widespread, perhaps universal. Wherever the Cinderella tale-type is (almost everywhere), a revenge plot is. Which brings me to another Hollywood quote, this one from Alfred Hitchcock in the 1950s: "If you want to make movies for the world, make movies in America; America is a nation of foreigners." Add Hitchcock to Dirty Harry and you get something like this: "If you want to make movies for the world, make getting-even stories; revenge is universally intelligible, a kind of a cross-cultural bottom line."

This is why I've put at least one saga on the reading list of just about every film course I've ever taught. I switch around, but it was commonly

Njála in my course on the courtroom drama, *Laxdaela* when I lectured on the western, and *Gísla saga* when I did film noir and detective thrillers. (And I put the sagas in for two reasons: first, to get the students to see how deep-seated certain narrative patterns are; and second, because I think everyone should read a saga.)

One chapter in my book on exploitation horror cinema is *called* "Getting Even," about the cycle I refer to as rape-revenge films. The standard rape-revenge movie has someone from the city come to the country and there be sexually violated by local people in some appalling way; and then, after a period of thoughtful convalescence, the victim rises to take appropriately appalling revenge – by maiming, castrating, and/or murdering the violators. (There are psychoanalytic and socio-economic dimensions to all of this, but I won't go into those here.)

The "Getting Even" chapter is the one I found easiest to write, for the simple reason that I had a deep fund of knowledge to draw upon for the forms, logic, and esthetics of revenge — a fund called the *Íslendingasögur*. In the book manuscript I submitted, "Getting Even" had a lot of references to sagas in the footnotes. But the Press nixed what they called these "irrelevant footnote essays," and that was that. Still, some readers recognized the medieval subtext, and some reviews even mentioned it.

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Now to another form of getting even: trials. I'm currently working on a book titled *The People's Plot: Trials, Movies, and the Adversarial Imagination,* which is about how the Anglo-American trial has given rise and shape to some of the most characteristic features of (especially) American cinema. What connects this book to the sagas is its point of departure: the premise that where the adversarial trial is, certain forms of public attention and entertainment will be.

A comparison of two scenes will make the point. The first scene you know: it's from the burning trial in *Njáls saga*, and is Eyjólfr's advice to his client Flosi.

> "You are to transfer your chieftaincy to your brother Thorgeir, and attach yourself to the constituency of the chieftain Askel Thorketilsson of Reykjardale, in the North Quarter. If your opponents

> don't hear of this, they will probably make a fatal error, by pleading the case in the East Quarter Court instead of the North Quarter Court. This is a possibility they will overlook, and a Fifth Court charge can be lodged against them for pleading in the wrong court."

Lest this jurisdictional maneuver seem quaint, consider the second scene, this one from the American TV series *Law & Order*. A young Russian-born man has been arrested for a mob-related crime in Brooklyn, part of New York City. What the prosecutor really wants, though, is the name of the mob boss, so to that end, he offers the young mobster a deal: if he'll reveal the boss's name, the prosecutor will give him "full immunity in New York County to anything he testifies to." The young guy's defense lawyer, also Russian-born, repeats the offer: "Full immunity to anything my client testifies to in New York County." They strike a bargain, whereupon the prosecutor places the young man under arrest. His astonished lawyer protests: "There's a deal in place! No prosecution in New York City!" To which the prosecutor replies, "In New York *County*. That's *Manhattan*. I never gave you immunity in Brooklyn. That's *King's* County." And then, turning to the young man, "Next time, get yourself a better lawyer, son." (Yes, things like that really do happen in the Anglo-American trial; in fact, this episode is based on a real-life case.)

These two scenes serve to remind us that the early Icelandic trial and the Anglo-American trial are "runnin af sama rót," as Þorleifur Guðmundsson Repp observed in the 1830s. That is, they are descended from the primitive adversary process that obtained throughout western Europe before the rise of Christian monarchies, which, once they got established, adopted Roman-canonical procedure – except for England, which alone in Europe stuck to the basics of the adversarial structure, which it eventually planted in all its colonies, including mine. Thus the two great procedural systems of the Western world, which I'll call Roman and Anglo for short.

Some legal historians find the distinction exaggerated, especially insofar as the two systems have grown more alike, especially in the last century. Other perhaps more culturally-inclined scholars continue to find the distinction compelling. I'm with them.

Much has been written on the nature of the Anglo and Roman trials — especially that of the Anglo trial, which seems to want more explaining than the Roman system of the Continent, the processes of which tend to seem self-evident. It's been said that the difference between Anglo and Roman trial process echoes the difference in classical Greece between the sophists (like Protagorus) and the philosophers (like Aristotle and Plato). The Anglo trial has also been called a "proof" system, as opposed to the Roman trial's "truth" system. The Anglo system is also said to have no authority beyond its own process, but rather to be "manifestly dependent on human argument and without any existence outside human argument." And it goes without saying that the proof-system trials have a lot of theatrical value. In the sagas, we see people attending trials, reacting to them, talking about them, judging the lawyers' performances, and so on. Those spectators look a lot like Anglo "courtwatchers" – members of the public who just go to trials, different people for different reasons. They too talk about the proceedings, judge the lawyers' performances, and so on – both in conversation and in courtwatcher meetings, courtwatcher newsletters, courtwatcher blogs, and the like. And saga trials and Anglo trials have some obvious commonalities: both stage a confrontation between two parties, each with its own advocate; both select a "jury" via a process of challenges; and both have a rigid turn-taking format and are formalistic in the extreme.

I can think of only one of the *Íslendingasögur* proper that has no trial, and that is the very short *Þorsteins saga hvíta*. The rest have at least one and often two or more – sometimes several. How many trials that adds up to, I don't know, but it's a lot; trials are clearly central to the saga enterprise. And the drama of the trial doesn't begin and end in court with the formal pleadings. The causal event – a killing, say – is also narrated, before and as it happens, with close attention to who the witnesses were, or, if it wasn't a public or admitted killing, then what indirect or circumstantial evidence there might be. There are even CSI's (crime-scene investigations, like that at Bergþórshváll after the burning) and forensic tests (like that of chapter 49 of *Njála*, in which Hallgerðr's cheese wedges are fitted into a neighbor's mould to prove theft). I would go as far as to say that the methodical recording of facts, evidence, and proof — not in some primitive sense, but exactly as those things are defined in the modern era—is part of the sagas' operating system.

It's also the case that even saga scenes quite distant from actual lawsuits can have the quality of legal exchanges. The dialogue in the York episode of *Egils saga* between Queen Gunnhildr and Arinbjörn sounds for all the world like a colloquy between prosecution and defense. Even dinner conversations can sound lawyerly in the sagas. Or business transactions. Or women's gossip. In *Ljósvetninga saga* we see a mock trial as household entertainment. (A mock trial is one in which ordinary people act out imaginary court scenarios. Even in my rural high school, doing mock trials was a requirement in social studies classes.) The sagas show us a world in which even children can be figured as imitating trials. In *Njála* we see boys playing a game in which one says "I'll be Mörðr and divorce you from your wife." To which another replies "Then I'll be Hrútr and invalidate your dowry claim." As Gisli Sigurðsson reminds us, the sagas suggest that young boys were expected to learn the law, tutored by legal experts.

One could say that what's been called the Anglo trial's "peculiar epistemology" also amounts to a kind of cultural operating system. That's what Alexis de Tocqueville thought (though he didn't use the term "operating system"). A French historian and thinker, Tocqueville went to the U.S. in 1830 to study the workings of democracy there. His two-volume ethnography devotes a long and crucial section to the cultural force of the American legal system. Mainly because of the institution of the jury, he thought, that system had "penetrated beyond the walls" of the American courtroom out into the very "bosom of society," affecting all classes and all manner of political and cultural life, right down to "the games of schoolboys." Think of that: Icelandic saga kids and nineteenth-century American kids both playing trial-games.

The reason Tocqueville was so struck by the "trialness" of American culture is that it wasn't that way at home in France – or, for that matter, the rest of the Continent. My own research into trial *movies* suggests that, to a considerable extent, this remains the case. Here's a statistic: in film alone, U.S. production alone, and the sound period alone (ca. 1930 on), I've so far found close to 1800 titles of explicit trial films, as opposed to the low hundreds from the same period in Continental Europe – a ratio of roughly 8:1.

And that's just film. There's also a long Anglo tradition of popular courtroom novels and theater, as well as television series like *Perry Mason*,

Law & Order, and dozens of others, going back for decades – not to speak of *Court TV* (which televised complete live trials), reality judge shows, board games, card games, cyberjuries, courtwatching, and on and on. I might also suggest that what Continental trial movies there are, tend to have a different shape and a different point. They're more likely to be wrong-decision stories or wrong-man stories (martyr narratives of a sort), as opposed to the acephalous combats of the standard Anglo trial movie, which is typically about outwitting and one-upping the opposition in an effort to convince us, the jury, of one or the other position beyond a reasonable doubt.

But it's not plot types that interest me here so much as it is the fact that the Continental trial has not been particularly generative in the entertainment system, whereas the adversarial jury trial is a veritable machine for the manufacture of popular story, throwing off shadow forms of itself wherever it is found – notably in the U.S., something that Tocqueville would probably have related to the fact that of the world's jury trials, more than 80 percent are American. (Actually, that figure may be growing smaller because of the increase in plea bargaining—but that's another story.)

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I turn now from trials to the movie western. Movie westerns routinely open with the arrival of settlers from somewhere back east to somewhere on the western frontier – a terra nova. These settlers have come by horse-drawn wagons or railroads, depending on when and where.

Movie westerns are about life before effective law enforcement. Their world is one of poaching, cattle-rustling, vigilante actions, and outlawry; and of feuds that start small but grow larger, involving more and more people. Even when there was a sheriff in the vicinity, he was usually weak. For better or worse, the settlers tended to govern themselves. Also like other frontiers, the American west was long on men and short on women, and this too is thematized in the films. And then there is the relationship between settlers and the native Americans — sometimes good, sometimes bad, sometimes very bad. I never cease to be amazed at the congruence of some of those western stories with the Icelandic tales of encounters with the *skrælingar* in the New World.

The Hollywood western has largely faded, but lest you think it was a minor phenomenon, I note that in the thirty years between 1930 and 1960 there were over 2000 westerns made, and that they featured some of the biggest stars of the era. The similarities between westerns and Icelandic sagas have been noted by others. I myself have neither written nor given courses on the western, though I sometimes gave lectures on that subject in colleagues' courses; and in my undergraduate courses on Old Norse-Icelandic Literature I routinely showed at least one western film in connection with the *Íslendingasögur.*

It's worth remembering that among the audiences for the movie western, which got going seriously in the 1930s, were the original settlers' children and grandchildren. I'm one of the latter. My mother's parents came west (separately) as young people in 1909, via railroad for part of the way and horse-drawn wagons the rest. They were homesteaders – people to whom the federal government had given grants of free land. (Between 1852 and 1936, over 1.5 million such grants were given out.) The locations and borders of these homesteads were of course recorded by hand and deposited in the National Archives in Washington, D.C. It's hard not to think of these manuscript records as a kind of latter-day *Lándnámabók.*

My grandparents' grants were in the desert wilderness of eastern Oregon – pretty bad land. They didn't know each other before they came to Oregon; they met there and soon married. They were followed out west by several siblings and even my grandfather's parents. So my own grandparents (who died when I was in my late twenties) were first-settlers in the wild west; and in later family gatherings, they and their siblings told stories that my parents, my brothers and I, and even my children listened to 50, 60, 70 years later. Those stories had to do with happenings in their area: property disputes, cattle-rustling, outlaws, a lynching, struggles over water, and so on.

After five years they'd had enough of the desert. So they moved by horse-and-wagon about a hundred kilometers south, over the border into northeastern California – high-mountain country, but with fertile meadows. The only problem there was Mt. Lassen, an active volcano that acted up periodically, including the very next year, in 1915 (a century ago this year), when there was a major eruption. When it happened, my grandfather was off working about 30 kilometers west and my grandmother was

alone on the ranch, hearing and watching and feeling this volcano gather force over the hours and days. Finally, to quote her, "I took my rifle, saddled my horse, and rode over to where I knew Charlie was, because I didn't want to die alone." When in later years they sat around telling stories about the pioneer days, this was one of my grandmother's classic contributions. (And for the record, before I wrote this down, I double-checked it with my great aunt, and she said I had it right.)

I myself grew up on one of the family ranches in that general vicinity, and in later years I would bring my children there regularly to visit their grandparents and great-grandparents. I said earlier that my kids loved Iceland, and here's a big reason why: they loved discovering that there was some other place in the world that looked and felt (and smelled) so like their own Mt. Lassen – with its steaming, bubbling pools of mud and of water, and lava-beds everywhere.

So what does all this shamelessly autobiographical detail have to do with the relation of sagas and cinema in my work (beyond the presence of the occasional western film on my course list)? Not a whole lot. But as I say, one of my first reactions on reading the sagas was one of recognition of the frontier origin story. And it also made me think that this species of origin story, ancestral migrations to new-world frontiers, almost demands to be remembered, retold, and, in one way or another, recorded. The American western stories were most certainly recorded: in oral tales, memoirs, traveller's reports, novels, western novelty shows, movies, songs, and the like. We all know the forms in which the stories of Icelandic settlement were recorded.

As for the eruption of Mt. Lassen, the only possible connection I can make to my topic today is that when I started studying Old Norse in 1963, and first ran across the word "hraun" and looked it up, I knew exactly what it was.

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My last topic is gender, on which I worked in both the film and Norse fronts for about ten years. My interest began on the Norse side, in 1982, when, in the course of reviewing a book on *níð* and masculinity in early Iceland, I found myself resisting the author's presumption of distinct and opposite male and female roles – the separate-spheres account. But what,

then, was the model? I did a lot of re-reading of the texts and eventually came up with what, I realize in retrospect, was a project statement for work I would do in the coming years.

To the extent, I wrote in that book review, that there was a social binary in early Iceland as represented in the texts we have, it was between strong and weak – the strong including able-bodied free men and the exceptional woman, and the weak including slaves, old men, most women, and children. What informs the Norse material is, then, not so much a male-female dichotomy as a strong-weak continuum on which gender is only one of several operative considerations. This model implies a single standard of behavior, a system that that largely privileged the male but was at the same time "a system in which, because the strong woman was not inhibited by a theoretical ceiling above which she could not rise, and the weak man not protected by a theoretical floor below which he could not fall, the potential for gender overlap in the social hierarchy was always present." That the sagas are manifestly fascinated with overlap scenarios is a point on which I think we would all agree.

My research in the following years took up tropes in which that logic was on display: the maiden warrior tradition; the whetting and lamenting tradition as it played out over gender lines; the legal provision to the effect that for certain purposes, brotherless daughters could become legal sons—and so on. I wrote an article and then another and was starting to imagine a book on the subject when two things happened.

One was that I discovered exploitation-horror cinema and realized that this world too was governed by a strong-weak continuum that was on constant and flamboyant display. (By exploitation horror I mean films like slasher, rape-revenge, and occult movies of the lowest, trashiest sort—not Hollywood movies, but what are sometimes called no-budget or garage movies, the kind that showed at midnight in really bad theaters; were seen mostly by boys and young men; and were not reviewed or publicly discussed and were thus unknown to most adults, including film reviewers, film theorists, even many filmmakers.) I was stunned by the first slasher movie I saw – of course by its shock effects, but also by the way it upended standard industry practices and film-theory truisms about gendered audience identification.

The second thing that happened about then was that I met my Berkeley

colleague Thomas Laqueur, a historian of science, and we realized we were working on related issues – I on the things I just mentioned, he on a history of theories of sexual difference as articulated in medical treatises from the Greeks to the twentieth century. We traded work and ideas. From him I learned that the idea of opposite sexes did not emerge in the medical literature until the late 1700s with the discovery of the human egg, the ovum; and that before then, male and female sex organs were thought of as outside and inside versions of the same apparatus – which under certain conditions could slide back and forth. Laqueur called this the "one-sex" or "one-flesh" model, as opposed to the later "two-sex" or opposite-sex model. (This work came out as *Making Sex* in 1990.) The Norse materials seemed to me to reflect the one-sex model of the early world – hardly surprising. Likewise the exploitation horror I was looking at – for it became clear to me, as it is clear to others, that "low" culture continues to play the one-sex or one-flesh game right down to the present day. It's as though trash culture never got the news about the sexes being opposite.

So it was that I found myself working on two books at the same time: one medieval and one on film, and both inspired by the same basic idea. So for the next eight years I interlaced medieval and modern manifestations of this complex, seeing some 200 movies and publishing three articles on the Norse side and one article and one book on the film side.

And what became of the book on medieval gender? Therein lies a tale that bears directly on my assignment today, and I'll tell it by way of an ending.

The film book, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*: *Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, came out in 1992. A couple of months after it appeared, I was contacted by Nancy Partner, a medievalist at McGill University, who said that she'd been asked by the Medieval Academy of America to put together a special issue of the journal *Speculum* on women in the Middle Ages. For it, she wanted something by me. It sounded crazy, she said, but she wanted me to rewrite, in Norse terms, any chapter of *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*. I started laughing (mainly because I couldn't believe she'd read the book), but she was serious. And I got what she meant, because she also knew my essays on gender in the Norse world and had put two and two together.

Which is how I came to write, for that issue of *Speculum*, the article

"Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and *Power* in Early Northern Europe." That essay is not, however, a rewrite of any part of the film book; it shares that book's underlying premise, but if it's a summary of anything, it's of the book I had in mind to write on Norse gender. And then, once I'd written this summary article, "Regardless of Sex," I felt I'd pretty much said, though in abbreviated form, what I had to say, and decided to let the project stand there.

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And I think I'll let this talk stand here. I hope I've made some sense of the intellectual connection between my two fields – how they've fed each other and fed off each other, whether the issue is revenge, trials, settler origins, or gender. It's not been easy to be in two fields – not least because it's not easy to be in two departments, with all that entails. But I wouldn't have had it any other way. My main response, at this point in my life, is gratitude: that UC Berkeley allowed and even blessed my split arrangement; that my two departments put up with it; and finally, that at least some people in both scholarly communities found the results interesting. It's 56 years since I first gave myself to *Njáls saga*, and the idea that *this* community has seen fit to honor me in this way means more to me that I can say. I thank you so much.

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