Narrative Threads: Written Textiles in Old Norse Prose and Poetry

Thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

at the University of Leicester

by

Rachel Balchin

School of English

University of Leicester

February 2021

Narrative Threads: Written Textiles in Old Norse Prose and Poetry

Rachel Balchin

This thesis explores the function and significance of written textiles in the *Íslendingasögur* and a selection of poems from *The Poetic Edda.* This thesis defines 'written textiles' as written representations of textile-making processes, such as spinning, weaving and embroidery, and the material results of those processes, such as clothing. The term 'written textiles' is not an oxymoron: this thesis will show that the etymological and cultural relationship between 'text' and 'textile' is fundamental to our understanding of both.

In contrast to much of the scholarship on Old Norse literature so far, this thesis focuses on the importance of textile terminology in a variety of narrative contexts. It argues that a more nuanced understanding of textiles reveals their function as powerful literary devices that paratactically convey social, cultural, and even emotional significances. This thesis questions a number of cultural assumptions regarding the value of textiles as a practice and how this reflects on those who create them – namely women. It demonstrates how this wider cultural devaluation influences both popular and scholarly reception of medieval women and, furthermore, illustrates how other avenues of meaning have been obscured as a result. As a countermeasure, it suggests that a systematic understanding of textile terminology is required, and explores the potential usefulness of an 'Old Norse vestementary code'. It demonstrates how the Old Norse vestementary code can be used to read the written textiles of the *Íslendingasögur,* while emphasising the importance of narrative context: ultimately, it advocates for an attentive and holistic approach to Old Norse written textiles.

The main contribution of this thesis is the 'stitch act', a new approach to the function of written textiles that draws on the linguistic phenomenon of the speech act. The stitch act is a formalised or ritualistic act of textile-creation – a 'stitch' – that impacts the saga narrative.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not exist if it were not for the support of many people. First and foremost, I am incredibly grateful and indebted to my supervisors, Dr. David Clark and Dr. Ben Parsons, for roughly a decade of teaching, knowledge, guidance and support. Thank you both so much for everything. I am thankful to my examiners, Dr. Philip Shaw and Dr. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir for their valuable insights and discussion during the viva. Thanks go to Dr. Anne Marie D'Arcy and Dr. Philip Shaw, not only for their helpful insights at the beginning of this project, but also for their fantastic research-lead undergraduate courses, which directly influenced my choice to pursue medieval literature at postgraduate level. I would also like to thank the wider faculty from the School of English, particularly Dr. Kate Loveman, Dr. Felicity James, Professor Sarah Knight and Professor Phil Shaw, for always having time to chat. My sincere appreciation goes to Midlands4Cities for funding part of my research and training, and for facilitating my attendance at a number of conferences, where I met many colleagues. In particular I'd like to thank Dr. Rebecca Merkelbach for her knowledge, expertise. kindness and, most of all, her friendship over the past few years, and Dr. Alexandra Makin, who opened my eyes to a world of medieval textile aficionados.

Much love and appreciation go to my 'Leicester family', Issy, Matt, Nicola, Richard, Jennifer, Teresa, Alice, thank you for sharing in all of the highs and lows of PhD life. To Crystal and to Kelsi, real-life 'warrior women', thank you: I'm both glad and lucky to have shared this journey with you both. I am also deeply thankful to Angela, for friendship and knitting and a shared dream for the future. Special thanks go to my oldest friend, Zoe, for reading early chapter drafts and casting her expert eye on all things structure. I know that when we were at school and avoiding PE to the best of our ability, neither of us could have imagined this future, but I'm grateful all the same.

To my dear husband Scott: mathematician, chef and comedian extraordinaire. Absolutely none of this would have been possible without him. He knew I was a researcher before I did and patiently waited for me to catch up. His seemingly infinite love, support and encouragement – especially during write-up in the middle of a global pandemic – meant that I made it across the finish line. Thank you.

Some will not see this thesis. Mr. P., thank you for being my first mentor and for seeing something in me. Medieval literature is not photography, but you seemed fine with that the last time we spoke. And Floki, the best and worst of rabbits, who chewed through many early drafts, contributed the most elegant prose when he sat on the keyboard and, with much reluctance, allowed me to be in the same room as him.

Finally: in the 1980's my mum, Suzanne, found herself in a trench on the site of Stafford Castle's archaeological dig, as part of a Thatcherite return-to-work scheme. The youngest daughter of a miner, she did not find much happiness in school, leaving before she was able to complete her final exams. Up until that time, Stafford Castle was considered to be an eyesore, and not the site of important local history that it is now known to be. During her time on the project, Suzanne worked her way from fieldwork at 150m above sea level to become the small finds manager, eventually co-curating a local exhibition in one of Stafford's other historical landmarks, the Ancient High House. Suzanne did not go on to pursue a career in archaeology, although she did take part in a summer school at Oxford University when I was two years old. No; my incredible, intelligent mum, who got her GCSEs when I was studying for mine, and who graduated from her undergraduate English degree two years before I did, was instead a brilliant parent to me and Dan, my funny and kind younger brother. My path through further, higher and post-graduate education was anything but a given, but she has always been my rock and my cheerleader. This thesis on textiles and power in medieval literature is for her.

Table of Contents

Introduction[1]

This thesis explores the function and significance of written textiles in Old Norse prose and poetic texts, mainly from the *Íslendingasögur* and *The Poetic Edda.* 'Written textiles' simply refers to written representations of textiles and textile-making processes, as opposed to real, material textiles. These issues will be investigated by means of a two-pronged approach. The first establishes the importance of a nuanced understanding of textile terminology within its narrative context. I will demonstrate that Old Norse terminology pertaining to clothing, fabrics and textile-making processes has, so far, received inadequate scholarly attention. This critical shortcoming has in turn caused scholarship to overlook the ways in which textiles function as narrative and emotive devices, as well as sites of interpersonal relationships and expressions of identity. In order to remedy this oversight, this thesis takes as its model the 'vestementary code' from Roland Barthes' *The Fashion System*, an experimental semiological methodology that explores the meaning of 'real' fashion in mid twentieth-century fashion magazines.[2] Barthes' vestementary code serves as a model for my own Old Norse vestementary code, which I use as a critical tool to analyse the broader semiological meanings of Old Norse textile terminology. This thesis will show that by paying more attention to textile terms, it is possible to uncover a more nuanced understanding of ambiguous interactions, events and displays of emotion in the *Íslendingasögur*.

The second line of inquiry, which runs concurrently with the first, approaches written textiles from a cultural and material perspective. First, it examines some of the culturally contingent reasons why textiles have received so little attention beyond certain disciplinary boundaries, and why even within those boundaries, the attention they *have* received is problematic. Second, it looks at the long-established relationship and etymological interplay between 'textile' and 'text'. I will demonstrate that while on the surface it may seem that there is a wide

[1] This thesis was largely written up and edited during the COVID-19 pandemic, so access to resources was limited to what was available online and digitally. As a consequence, some of the footnotes will be missing specific page details.
[2] Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System,* trans. by Matthew Ward and Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2010).

conceptual gulf between material and written textiles, this division is merely the result of an artificial cultural hierarchy. However, while the main focus of this thesis is on written depictions of clothing and textiles in literary sources, rather than material culture from the archaeological record, written textiles cannot be separated from their material counterparts. I will show that the relationship between text and textile, referred to by Victoria Mitchell as 'the textuality of thought and matter', has a significant impact on how we should understand the written textiles of the *Íslendingasögur*.[3] As I will argue, such impact is most evident in a phenomenon that I have called the 'stitch act', a material counterpart to the linguistic event, the 'speech act'.[4]

In this introduction I will first discuss the corpus selected for analysis – the *Íslendingasögur* and a selection of texts from the *Poetic Edda.* In order to illustrate some of the challenges of working with Old Norse literary textiles, I will then provide an overview of the cultural context surrounding the *Íslendingasögur* and review their scholarly reception. Next, I will describe the processes of spinning and weaving – both production techniques at the heart of this thesis – before going on to explore how textiles in the *Íslendingasögur* have been approached thus far. This will be followed up with a brief overview of the structure and content of this thesis.

Primary Texts

The *Íslendingasögur* (the *Sagas of Icelanders*) is a generic term which encompasses approximately forty full-length narratives (as opposed to the much shorter *Íslendingaþættir,* the *Tales of Icelanders*). Like much early medieval literature, the *Íslendingasögur* are thought to have their origins in oral tradition. They were first written down in the vernacular (Old Norse) during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but they recount stories of people and events from the Viking Age some three hundred years before.[5] Similarly, there is evidence to suggest that eddic

---

[3] Victoria Mitchell, 'Textiles, Text and Techne' in *The Textile Reader,* ed. by Jessica Hemmings, (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 7-13, pp. 6, 11.

[4] J. L., Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, The William James Lectures, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

[5] The accepted date range is c. 870–1030 AD. See Heather O'Donoghue, *Old Norse Icelandic Literature: A Short Introduction*, Blackwell Introductions to Literature, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 23; c.f., Robert Kellogg, 'Introduction' in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders Including 49 Tales*, (5 vols.), Viking Age Classics Series ed. by Viðar Hreinsson, Terry Gunnell, Keneva Kunz and Bernard Scudder, (Reykjavík, Iceland: Bókaútgáfan Leifur Eiríksson, 1997), I., pp. xxix–lv, p. xxx.

poetry was also composed and recited prior to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which was when they were also recorded in writing.[6] While much of the extant eddic poetry survives in two anthologising manuscripts, the 'Codex Regius' (c. 1270) and the *Snorra Edda* (c. 1220), there are also many surviving examples incorporated into certain saga narratives, particularly the subgenre of saga known as *fornaldarsögur*.[7] As will shortly be discussed, unlike the 'typical' *Íslendingasögur,* the *fornaldarsögur* are set in a prehistoric, legendary past.[8] However, unlike skaldic verse (which is generally used to recount the deeds of the living or recently deceased), eddic verse covers more ancient themes, such as pre-Christian mythic figures like Óðinn, and the legendary heroic figures of an 'Ur-Germanic' past.[9] Margaret Clunies Ross observes that 'old-style poetry was thought appropriate to stories about the prehistoric age, in contrast to the more recent narratives, which were largely authenticated by skaldic verse.'[10]

These legendary associations must be taken into consideration when, on the rare occasion, eddic verse appears in the *Íslendingasögur.*[11] Carolyne Larrington maintains that while there is generally 'no room' in the 'realist and anti-heroic' *Íslendingasögur* for heroic grandiosity, eddic verse can often demarcate supernatural – or otherwise unusual – phenomena.[12] As will be discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, heroism of the kind at work in eddic verse is

---

[6] Margaret Clunies Ross, 'The transmission and preservation of eddic poetry' in, *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia,* ed. by Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn and Brittany Schorn, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 12-32, p. 12. It should be stipulated here that 'writing' here refers to the Roman alphabet and the vernacular Old Norse. Much older runic inscriptions exist – see Clunies Ross, p. 12.

[7] Ibid., pp. 28-30; Carolyne Larrington, 'Eddic poetry and heroic legend', in *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 147-172.

[8] Clunies Ross, 'The transmission and preservation of eddic poetry', pp. 28-30, p. 28. For more on the generic significance of different poetic forms and modes, see Massimiliano Bampi and Sif Rikhardsdottir, 'Introduction' in *A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre*, ed. by Massimiliano Bampi, Carolyne Larrington and Sif Rikhardsdottir, (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020), pp. 1-14, pp. 6-7, and Clunies Ross, *Skáldskaparmál: Snorri Sturluson's ars poetica and Medieval Theories of Language*, The Viking Collection 4 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1987), p. 22. For an exploration of mode and genre as relates specifically to skaldic or eddic poetry, see Erin Michelle Goeres, 'Skaldic Poetry – A Case Study: The Poetry of Torf-Einarr', and Larrington, 'Eddic Poetry – A Case Study: *Sólarljóð*', in *A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre,* pp. 229-244 and 245-258 respectively.

[9] Clunies Ross, 'The transmission and preservation of eddic poetry', pp. 28-30; Larrington, 'Eddic poetry and heroic legend', p. 148.

[10] Clunies Ross, 'The transmission and preservation of eddic poetry', p. 28. See also p. 18.

[11] Larrington, 'Eddic poetry and heroic legend', p. 167.

[12] Ibid.

simultaneously idealised and critiqued in some narratives of the *Íslendingasögur* and – to some extent – within the poems themselves.[13] As just one example, themes of personal honour, vengeance and loyalty within conflicting lateral relationships are as predominant in the *Íslendingasögur* as they are in a collection of eddic poems that are editorially known as the 'Sigurðr cycle'.[14] The relationship between the *Íslendingasögur* and history is not straightforward.[15] However, a narrative preoccupation with the matters of daily existence transforms the legendary into the quotidian. Heroic themes and values are present but disguised as the mundane; as I will discuss in Chapter Four with regards to Guðrún's stage management of Kjartan's downfall, significant deeds can easily lose their grandiosity when presented through the lens of daily farm work.[16]

This important detail is also true for textiles and textile-related labour. The poems of the 'Sigurðr cycle' depict textiles and textile-production in a non-straightforward manner, particularly at the intersection of the heroic ideal (as explored above) and gender performance.[17] On the one hand, engagement with textile-making practices can be interpreted as maintaining modern hegemonic gender norms (as opposed to Viking Age or medieval norms), such as when Guðrún embroiders a tapestry while she grieves for Sigurðr.[18] On the other hand, the same modern gender norms associated with textile-production are weaponised and used against – although ultimately rejected – by traditional heroic figures, such as the valkyrie, Sigrdrífa/Brynhildr.[19] The potential association between textile tools like the drop-spindle, with weapons, battle, and fate can also

---

[13] David Clark, *Gender, Violence and the Past in Edda and Saga*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 17-45, 89-116.
[14] Narrative and thematic parallels have been observed between the 'Sigurðr cycle' and *Laxdæla saga*. See: Ursula Dronke, 'Narrative Insights in *Laxdæla saga*', in Mary Salu and Robert T. Farrell, (eds.), *J. R. R. Tolkien, Scholar and Storyteller: Essays 'In Memoriam',* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 120-137, as cited in Clark, *Gender, Violence and the Past*, p. 92.
[15] Kellogg, 'Introduction', pp. xli–xlv.
[16] Jonna Louis-Jensen, 'A Good Day's Work: *Laxdæla saga,* ch. 49' in *The Cold Counsel: Women in Old Norse Literature and Myth,* pp. 189-199.
[17] This will be covered in greater detail in Chapter One of this thesis.
[18] *Guðrúnarkviða Ǫnnor,* XIV-XVIII, 51-68. All primary quotation is derived from *Poetic Edda,* searchable electronic text of Gustav Neckel (ed.), *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern,* rev. Hans Kuhn, 5th edn. (Heidelberg, 1983), http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etcs/germ/anord/edda/edda.htm [accessed 16th June 2020]. Unless otherwise stated, translations by Carolyne Larrington, *The Poetic Edda,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)
[19] *Helreið Brynhildar,* I, 1-4; *Sigrdrífumál,* prose, 11-14.

be seen in the poem *Darraðarljóð,* which occurs in *Brennu-Njáls saga* 157.[20] Although the *Íslendingasögur* typically use skaldic poetry (with the exception of the subgenre *fornaldarsögur* and some other late examples) *Darraðarljóð* is eddic in theme, content and meter (*fornyrðislag*).[21] I will discuss *Darraðarljóð* in detail as part of my exploration of the stitch act in Chapter Four of this thesis.

The technical, thematic, cultural, and even narrative connections between eddic poetry and a number of texts from the *Íslendingasögur* create an intertextual literary 'world'.[22] It is therefore necessary to examine both forms of textual output in order to achieve a fuller understanding of the literary function of textiles. As I will explore in this thesis, influences of the way in which textiles and textile-production are treated in eddic poetry can be detected in the function and representation of textiles in the *Íslendingasögur.* With this in mind, I will now turn to the selected primary texts that form the corpus for analysis. While I go into detail about the methodology for investigating written textiles in literary sources in Chapter Two, it would be beneficial to here discuss the selected corpus, and the ways in which the individual texts relate to each other. The decision to include a text or not was predicated on the presence of Old Norse textile vocabulary. However, most of the *Íslendingasögur* and a large number of the legendary poems from the Codex Regius make references to textiles, even if it is as innocuous as the simplex *klæði* (cloth). In order to create a manageable corpus for analysis, and also to distinguish between authenticating details and more significant textiles (see below), I combined this terminology-led approach with a close reading of the contexts in which the textile terms appeared. The title of this thesis begins with 'Narrative Threads', therefore I focussed on textile terms that related in some way to events of narrative significance. In this thesis, such moments are defined by their narrative consequences. For example, in the eddic poem *Guðrúnarkviða Ǫnnor,* Grímhildr sets aside her textile work and initiates the next phase of the

[20] Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, (ed.)*, Brennu-Njáls saga* 157, Íslenzk Fornrit 12 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1954), pp. 454-458. Icelandic naming conventions mean that after the initial full reference, further references will be made to first name only.
[21] Larrington, 'Eddic poetry and heroic legend', p. 167. More specifically, *Darraðarljóð* recollects imagery from both eddic and skaldic poetry, however the usefulness of the division between eddic and skaldic poetry has lately come under scrutiny. See Bampi and Sif, 'Introduction', pp. 1-14, p. 2.
[22] See sub-section, 'Introducing the *Íslendingasögur*' in this introduction for more on the complicated nature of the 'saga world'.

narrative, the marriage between Guðrún and Atli (see Chapter One).[23] In the above mentioned *Darraðarljóð,* it is suggested through imagery and sequencing of events that the process of weaving can be connected to battle and fate, both of which influence the course of saga narrative. However, significant textiles do not only appear in heroic or legendary contexts: weather as part of the socially significant ritual of gift exchange between poets and kings, wearing one's best out in public, or as just one aspect of the daily, routine labour required for survival, textiles often make an appearance at moments of serious narrative consequence. While the significance of certain garments or textile-creation may not be immediately apparent – as is the case with the cloak known as *Gunnlaugsnautr* in *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* – it can certainly be traced, like a warp thread on a loom, from textile term to narrative consequence.

My textile-led approach to the *Íslendingasögur* and *Poetic Edda* had an unexpected effect on the corpus of texts analysed in this thesis. The term *Íslendingasögur* is a modern categorical construction, a convenient grouping of texts that share similar styles, forms, conventions and themes, suggested by earlier, antiquarian scholars.[24] Although genres of Old Norse literature are not straightforwardly anachronistic (as there is evidence to suggest that medieval compilers and audiences also adhered to or subverted certain generic codes), the historical, literary and culture values attributed to certain genres is a twentieth century imposition.[25] As Massimiliano Bampi and Sif Rikhardsdottir observe, 'it is an uncontroversial fact that some genres – especially within the saga corpus – became canonised… primarily as a consequence of an ideologically oriented view of their respective aesthetic and cultural values.'[26] They go on to argue that even within the *Íslendingasögur,* which is one of the 'most praised and acclaimed genres… some texts have long been considered as a sort of gold standard against which the quality of other works, attributed to the same genre… should be measured and assessed.'[27] The canonisation of genres, and even of certain texts within a genre, leads to (for example) the privileging of particular character types

[23] *Guðrúnarkviða Ǫnnor,* XVII, 63-68.
[24] Bampi and Sif, 'Introduction' in *A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre*, pp. 2, 5.
[25] Ibid., pp. 2-5.
[26] Ibid., p. 4.
[27] Ibid.

(such as the 'inciting woman', as I discuss in Chapter One) or modes of gender performance (hegemonic 'saga' masculinity, as briefly examined in Chapter Three).[28]

Allowing the occurrence of textile terminology to shape the corpus has meant that, in some instances, there is more to say about texts which are not 'gold standard' than those considered to be exemplary (as per traditional, now contested, scholarship).[29] While this approach to textile vocabulary in Old Norse literary sources is not new (see discussion of Anita Sauckel's work below), it is worth highlighting, not least because it has inevitably led to the omission or elision of texts that would normally appear in a thesis about the *Íslendingasögur.* For example, in Chapter Three I explore in detail the significance of cloaks and gift exchange in *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds,* but have less of a reason to discuss Hallfreðr's fellow – and more popular – hero-poet, Egill. This does not mean that there are no textile references in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar,* neither do I suggest that those textiles are insignificant. Rather, in following the occurrence of textile terminology, it has been possible to examine relatively understudied texts within the *Íslendingasögur* from a different perspective. In this way, the discussion in this thesis will shed new light on the memorable and innocuous events of the sagas, with textiles acting as both lens and guide. Before I go into detail about medieval textile-making processes or the study of literary textiles in Old Norse literature, I would first like to highlight some of the unique challenges posed by *Íslendingasögur,* some of which are natural to the texts themselves, others of which have arisen over decades of critical engagement.

Introducing the *Íslendingasögur*

Scholarly reception of the *Íslendingasögur* has varied over the centuries. Heather O'Donoghue argues that the combination of naturalistic prose, interactions with real historical figures and the recognisable humanity of the characters belies their literariness.[30] They were treated as straightforward historical accounts until, as

[28] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words and Power,* The New Middle Ages Series, (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 6; Gareth Lloyd Evans, *Men and Masculinities in the sagas of Icelanders,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
[29] Bampi and Sif, 'Introduction' in *A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre*, p. 4.
[30] O'Donoghue, *Old Norse Icelandic Literature,* pp. 22–60.

O'Donoghue puts it, 'doubts about their veracity set in […] so that sagas were deemed completely useless as historical sources.'[31] It is now accepted that the *Íslendingasögur* are most productively approached neither as overt fiction or history, but rather as hybrid, quasi-historical and quasi-literary texts in which 'fictionality' serves an important function. Scholars must, 'try to identify fictionality – not just by default, that is, consigning what cannot be true to the category of fiction, but, more subtly, by recognizing the fictionality of what might nevertheless plausibly have happened – a plausibility which may actually be part of the author's inventive skills'.[32] Similarly, Margaret Clunies Ross observes that recent scholarship on the *Íslendingasögur* has shifted, 'from an older attitude that sought to classify sagas as either history or fiction, but not both, to an approach that allows the two creative impulses, historical and fictional, to coexist in any text in a variable relationship, both within a single text and between texts'.[33]

The relationship between individual texts presents a consistent and coherent 'world', which further complicates how they relate to history. Robert Kellogg reminds us that:

> The *Íslendinga sögur* describe a world so particular, interesting and consistent from saga to saga that it has not been in the least absurd to apply the point of view and methods of the social sciences – of history, anthropology, sociology – to an understanding of this fictional world and in the course of doing so to imply an identity between an actual time in the past and the settings of the sagas […] It is not always easy to remember that the verisimilitude of the sagas is, in the final analysis, an aspect of their narrative art. They present a mental version of a world, not the actuality itself.[34]

One of the major obstacles in discovering the fictionality of the sagas is their narrative style, which is more closely aligned – stylistically speaking – with non-fiction chronicles than with other, more obviously literary texts.[35] Their objective style is, however, just that: a style. Clunies Ross observes that 'realism' is a rhetorical trope and does not guarantee that a text reflects reality.[36] Similarly

---

[31] Ibid., p. 36.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Realism and the Fantastic in Old Icelandic sagas', *Scandinavian Studies* 74 (2002), 443–454.
[34] Kellogg, 'Introduction', pp. xli–xlii.
[35] O'Donoghue, *Old Norse Icelandic Literature,* p. 36.
[36] Clunies Ross, 'Realism and the Fantastic'.

elements of the 'fantastic' do not necessarily mean that a text is not engaged with reality.[37] She goes on to say that, 'literary subjects that involved the non-material world were […] frequently and seriously treated in Old Icelandic texts, and we cannot always perceive a clear difference in literary mode in the treatment of phenomena that have an obvious material manifestation in contrast to those that do not'.[38] The 'fantastic' and 'non-material' here refers to a host of non-human characters like revenants, giants, and supernatural and fatalistic female beings. It also includes human characters that occupy a liminal space on the outskirts of social acceptability, such as *berserkir*, outlaws and magic practitioners.[39] The consensus is that, far from making the *Íslendingasögur* 'useless' as sources for understanding Viking Age Icelandic society, these 'fantastic' elements convey a wealth of social and cultural significance that may not have survived in a more straightforwardly historical format. Rebecca Merkelbach observes that, as literary texts, the *Íslendingasögur,* 'reflect (and reflect on) the time of their composition and, at the very least, the beginnings of their transmission, and they address concerns and anxieties of the society and the culture that created them'.[40] She goes on to argue that monsters – specifically revenants, *berserkir*, outlaws and magic users – are a tool used by saga authors and audiences to address social and cultural anxieties.[41] These anxieties are not specific to any historical moment, a fact which enhances both the humanity of the characters as well as the ease with which late medieval and even modern audiences find empathy with them.[42] So, while the inclusion of supernatural, 'non-material' characters is 'inherent to the story-world' of the *Íslendingasögur*, these elements are incorporated neither unproblematically nor without reason.[43]

This thesis treats the individual texts of the *Íslendingasögur* as works of literature that reflect social and cultural history. While the 'world' of the sagas is cohesive and analogous to what is known about Viking Age Iceland, they are still literary and cultural products. I will therefore argue that written textiles are more

[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Rebecca Merkelbach, *Monsters in Society: Alterity, Transgression, and the Use of the Past in Medieval Iceland*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), p. 3.
[40] Ibid., p. 2.
[41] Ibid., p. 3.
[42] Ibid., p. 2; O'Donoghue, *Old Norse Icelandic Literature*, p. 24.
[43] Merkelbach, *Monsters in Society,* p. 2.

than just authenticating details that contribute to the overall 'verisimilitude' and 'realism' of the *Íslendingasögur.*[44] Rather, written textiles function similarly to that of the supernatural or monstrous elements discussed above. By applying Barthes' vestementary code to the textile terminology of the *Íslendingasögur,* I will show that a wide range of cultural values and significances are projected on to, and conveyed by, written textiles, thereby making them important literary and narrative devices.[45] Just as the 'story-world' of the sagas is related to an historical reality, so too are textiles. While the main focus of this thesis is written representations of textiles, their literary representation is rooted in material and physical culture. I will now describe the various textile-making processes that feature prominently in the *Íslendingasögur* and other Old Norse genres of literature, namely the poems from the *Poetic Edda.*

Viking Age Textiles and Technology

Until the advent of mechanised industry, cloth production was made possible only by a series of laborious physical processes.[46] Wool production alone involved the rearing of sheep and rooing (plucking) their fleeces, cleaning, sorting and grading fibres, spinning, dyeing, weaving, sewing, as well as fabric treatments such as fulling, felting or, as in the case of sails, greasing, a process which made them water and wind proof.[47] The life-cycle of a textile or garment did not end there, however; they would have required care and maintenance, holes would need darning or

---

[44] C.f., Anita Sauckel, *Die Literarische Funktion von Kleidung in den* Íslendingasögu*r und* Íslendingaþættir. Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanishen Altertumskunde 83, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), p. 3.

[45] This will take place across Chapters Two and Three.

[46] Cloth and clothing production still requires hard labour, even today. While the Industrial Revolution mechanised much of cloth production (and indeed, was largely motivated by the need to produce more cloth in order to feed an expanding global network of economic growth and the slave trade), labour was – and is – still required in producing raw materials. That labour, as well as general production, eventually moved 'offshore', resulting in the current colonialist model of the fast-fashion industry. For more on the rise of cotton and the global textile industry, see Giorgio Riello and Prasannan Parthasarathi, (eds.,) *The Spinning World: A Global History of Cotton Textiles, 1200–1850,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Kassia St Clair, 'Solomon's Coats: Cotton, America and Trade' in *The Golden Thread: How Fabric Changed* History, (London: John Murray, 2018) pp. 157-180; Dana Thomas, *Fashionopolis: The Price of Fast Fashion and the Future of Clothes,* (New York, NY; Apollo, 2020).

[47] Maren Clegg Hyer and Gale R. Owen-Crocker (eds.,) 'Woven Works: Making and Using Textiles', in *The Material Culture of Daily Living in the Anglo-Saxon World*, (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2011), pp. 157-84; Else Østergård, *Woven into the Earth: Textiles from Norse Greenland,* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2009), pp. 37-60.

patching repeatedly until there was no longer an 'original' item, but a composite. Eventually the state of a garment or textile would be irreparable, in which case it was recycled, embarking on a new life entirely removed from its original purpose, in which the above processes would be enacted again and again until the fibres completely disintegrated.[48]

Weaving technology is, of course, much older than the Viking Age.[49] Through a combination of archaeological evidence and even material practices that have continued in certain communities as recently as the twentieth century, we know that threads were created through spinning fibre on a drop-spindle, and most weaving was accomplished on a warp-weighted loom.[50] A drop-spindle is simply a stick that is weighted with a spindle-whorl, which could be a round piece of heavy material, such as stone or bone, with a hole in the centre.[51] Drop-spindles could be top or bottom-weighted and came in a variety of sizes and weights, depending on what fibre was being spun and how fine or coarse the intended thread needed to be. Available fibres at the time included wool, linen, silk, hemp and nettle.[52] Both fibre preparation and spin direction also played a significant role in the resulting thread. In wool-spinning, for example, smoothly combed wool would result in a dense, strong thread which would be used as warp threads, while uncombed fluffy wool would lead to a lighter, airer thread suitable for the weft.[53] Spin direction simply refers to whether the spindle is spun clockwise or counter-clockwise, resulting in what textile archaeologists have called 'z' and 's' spun threads.[54] Once spun, these threads could be left as 'singles' or plied with other

---

[48] See how the theory of 'object biography' and the concept of an object's 'life' and 'after-life' can be applied to the study of textiles – specifically embroidery – in Alexandra Lester Makin, *The Lost Art of the Anglo-Saxon World: The Sacred and Secular Power of Embroidery,* Ancient Textiles Series 35, (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2019), pp. 16, 24-28. See also Igor Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Biography of things: commoditization as process', in *The Social Life of Things: commodities in cultural perspective,* ed. by Arjun Appadurai, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 64-91.
[49] For a comprehensive overview of textile-production in a Northern European context, see L. Bender Jørgensen, *North European textiles until A.D. 1000,* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1992).
[50] Østergård, *Woven into the Earth*; Anne Holtsmark, 'Vefr Darraðar', *Særtrykk av Maal og Minne* 2 (1936), 74-96.
[51] Østergård, *Woven into the Earth,* pp. 45-52; Hyer and Owen-Crocker, 'Woven Works'; Penelope Walton Rogers, *Cloth and Clothing in Early Anglo-Saxon England, AD 450 – 700,* (York: Council for British Archaeology, 2007), pp. 24-25.
[52] Walton Rogers, *Cloth and Clothing,* pp. 11-15; Bender Jørgensen, *North European Textiles.*
[53] Walton Rogers, *Cloth and Clothing*; Hyer and Owen-Crocker, 'Woven Works'; for a contemporary practitioner's guide to spinning, see Abigail Franquemont, *Respect the Spindle: Spin Infinite Yarns with One Amazing Tool* (Loveland, CO: Interweave Press, 2009).
[54] Walton Rogers, *Cloth and Clothing,* pp. 64-67.

threads to create thicker and stronger yarns. Different combinations of 'z' and 's' spun threads had different influences on the end result – for example, a combination of too many individual threads spun in the same direction would result in a kinky yarn with a propensity to curl up against itself.[55] Different spin directions could be used to create beautiful visual effects in the final weave. Furthermore, threads could be left in their natural shade or dyed using a number of different natural dye-stuffs, such as madder or woad.[56]

The warp-weighted loom consisted of two upright poles held together by a third horizontal pole across the top (see Figure 1). There was a mobile cross beam (A) that could be rotated, and this was where the starting edge of the fabric would be attached; as the fabric filled the loom, the beam could be rotated so that the cloth was wound up around it, similar to a modern bolt of cloth. There were brackets attached to the two upright poles, which held the heddle rods (B). Warp threads (G) would hang from the cross beam and be tensioned around one or more heddle rods, some to the back and some to the front. This created a shed which could then be moved in order to create different patterns in the weave – the more heddle rods there were, the more complicated a pattern could be. Tied to the end of the warp threads were weights of varying materials (E). These weights kept the threads straight and taught, which was absolutely vital to the overall quality of the end product. Working thread (weft thread) (F) was woven into the warp with the aid of a shuttle (D), and compressed upwards using a weaving batten/sword (C) in order to create density in the fabric. A related technique is tablet weaving, which produced narrow bands of repeating geometric patterns that were used to reinforce seams, decorate hem lines, and even to begin weaving on a warp-weighted loom.[57]

The material and physical nature of textiles is very important to the way in which we interpret written textiles, and vice versa. For example we are able to identify individual parts of the loom because of the poem *Darraðarljóð*.[58] I will

---

[55] Østergård, *Woven into the Earth,* fig. 14, 'schematic presentation of the spinning and twining of a cable', p. 45; c.f., Franquemont, *Respect the Spindle.*
[56] Walton Rogers, *Cloth and Clothing,* pp. 21, 37, 62-77; Østergård, *Woven into the Earth,* pp. 61-63.
[57] Walton Rogers, *Cloth and Clothing,* pp. 86-97; Østergård, *Woven into the Earth* pp. 104-106; for a visual representation of the 'tablets', see also p. 113, fig. 84.
[58] *Njáls saga* 157, pp. 454-458.
C.f., Østergård, *Woven into the Earth,* p. 53; Holtsmark, 'Vefr Darraðar', p. 75.

discuss the significance of physical and material processes of textile-making and its relationship with literary depictions in detail in Chapter Four of this thesis. For now it is enough to say that text and textiles – the written and the material – are fundamentally connected across etymological, conceptual and cultural levels of significance. The etymological connection can be seen in the Latin *textus* ('texture, tissue, structure')[59] and *texere* ('to weave, braid, construct').[60] It is possible to discuss both the structure or construction of a narrative in the same way that we might consider the structure and construction of a garment. Furthermore, both story and fabric can be described as 'textured', either in terms of evocative narrative details or the tactility of a surface. A related sense of meaning can be found in the Old Norse *saga,* 'what is said', 'utterance', 'oral account', and also in *þáttur,* which carries the meaning of 'section', 'portion', 'short story', as well as 'thread'.[61] Kellogg observes that while *saga* relates to modern English 'say', there is no direct translation.

[59] 'textus', Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short (eds.), *A Latin Dictionary,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1879, reprnt., 1933), http://clt.brepolis.net.ezproxy3.lib.le.ac.uk/dld/pages/QuickSearch.aspx [accessed 4th Feb 2018]. Hereby referred to as 'Lewis and Short'.

[60] 'texere', R. E. Latham, D. R. Howlett and R. K. Ashdowne, (eds.), *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, (Oxford: The British Acadamy, 1975-2013) http://clt.brepolis.net.ezproxy3.lib.le.ac.uk/dld/pages/QuickSearch.aspx [accessed 29th October 2019]. Hereby referred to as 'DMLBS'.

[61] 'Saga' 1.i, *Ordbog over det norrøne prosaprog*, ed. by Aldís Sigurðardóttir et. al., http://onpweb.nfi.sc.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o66076 [accessed 30th July 2020]. Hereby referred to as *ONP*; 'þáttr', 1., 3, *ONP,* http://onpweb.nfi.sc.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o89243 [accessed 30th July 2020].

The Anatomy of the Warp-Weighted Loom

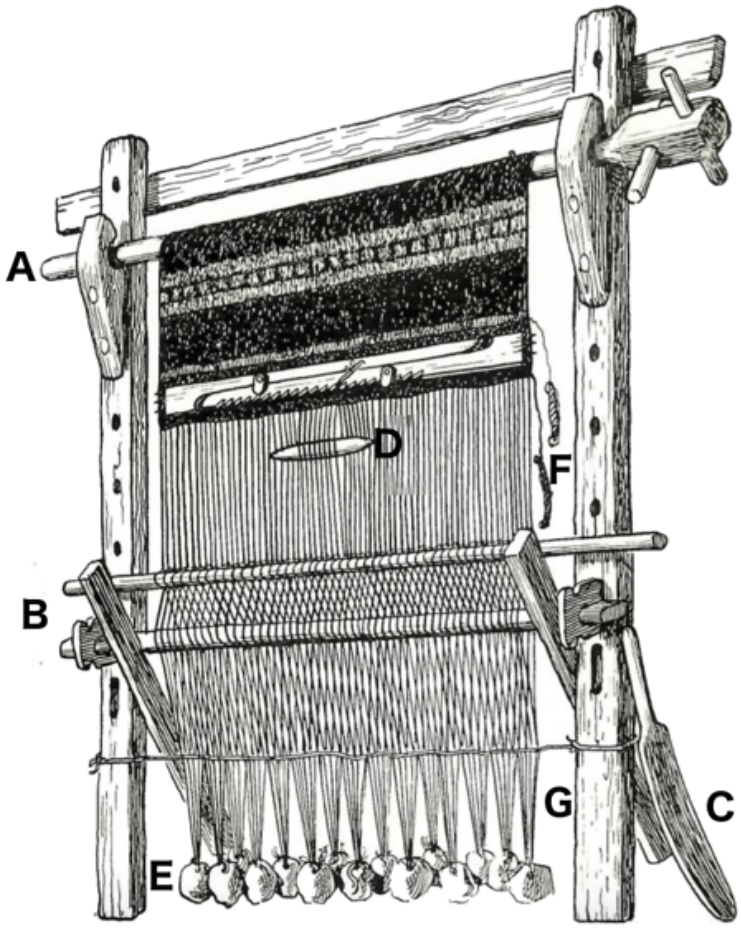

Figure 1: Warp-Weighted Loom

Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, (ed.), *Brennu-Njáls Saga*, Íslenzk Fornrit, XII, (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1954), pp. 454 – 458.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Cross beam	Heddle rods	Weaving batten	Shuttle	Loom weights	Weft thread	Warp Threads

Rather, '"story", "tale" or "history" would usually come close. Some combination of the three would come even closer'.[62] Similarly, there is no direct translation for the connection between text and textile. Mitchell calls this relationship 'the textuality of thought and matter', which evokes a sense of tactile words and formative fibres. I will also refer to this symbiotic relationship as the 'text-textile complex', and show that the materiality of textiles and textile-production plays a vital role in a number of saga narratives, in the form of the stitch act.

Scholarly Approaches to Textiles in the *Íslendingasögur*

As noted above, the study of early medieval textiles has largely been the remit of archaeology.[63] Very little has been done in terms of literary or textual studies, especially with regard to Old Norse language and culture. This is not quite the case in the related field of Old English literary and textual studies. Gale Owen-Crocker and Maren Clegg Hyer, among others, have greatly influenced the interdisciplinary study of textiles in medieval written sources, specifically Old English and Latin, as I will explore in Chapter One. The same chapter will also argue that this lack of attention is partly due to the imposition of modern culture and gender norms. With the exception of a few shorter studies and Anita Sauckel's monograph, *Die Literarische Funktion von Kleidung in den* Íslendingasögu*r und* Íslendingaþættir, textiles in Old Norse sources have been largely ignored. Sauckel's work is the first extended study, and is foundational to this thesis. It is an excellent and thorough overview of how textile terminology can function in a literary capacity as opposed to a material or archaeological one, and is an exemplar of how literary textiles can be approached in the *Íslendingasögur.* She demonstrates how textiles can be imbued with a range of different significations, and how those significations can be incorporated into the already well-known social and cultural parameters of the sagas, such as the function of clothing as a status symbol at social gatherings.[64] Furthermore, Sauckel also observes a lack of wider, more general approaches to

---

[62] Kellogg, 'Introduction', p. xxxi.
[63] Although the later middle ages is often a subject for economic historians, see P. J. P. Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire, c. 1300 – 1520*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), and John Munro, 'Medieval Woollens: Textiles, Textile Technology and Industrial Organisation, c. 800 – 1500', in *The Cambridge History of Western Textiles,* 2 vols., ed., by David Jenkins, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), I., pp, 181-227.
[64] Sauckel, *Die Literarische Funktion von Kleidung,* pp. 17-25.

textiles in Old Norse literary contexts, arguing that even when textiles are considered, it is only within a very narrow remit.[65] She suggests that part of the reason for this is that descriptive details of textiles and clothing have long been thought irrelevant to the saga narrative. She argues that despite a broad interest in clothing in the neighbouring disciplines of medieval studies, such as anthropology and archaeology:

> Bereits frühere Forschergenerationen sahen in der beschriebenen Bekleidung reine Schmuckelemente: so etwa Hans Kuhn, der zu Beginn der 1970er Jahre die Kleidung für einen "Zusatz, der des erzählten Hergangs wegen unnötig"
>
> ('Earlier generations of researchers already saw purely decorative elements in the clothing described: for example, Hans Kuhn, who at the beginning of the 1970's considered clothing to be "an addition that was unnecessary because of the story told"').[66]

In contrast to this approach, Sauckel examines clothing and textile terminology from over fifty sagas and *þættir,* all of which are collected into a glossary, as well as a thematic index of textual examples at the end of her monograph.[67] She defines 'literary function' (*Signalfunktion*) as: 'in erster Linie […] eine durch die Kleidung ausgedrückte erweiterte soziale und psychologische Figurencharakterisierung' ('primarily […] an expanded social and psychological characterization expressed through clothing').[68] She also suggests that saga authors purposefully used clothing to express inner states and enable narrative foreshadowing, thus naturally incorporating these elements of realism into the 'typical' saga style.[69] This thesis will take a similar approach in Chapters Two and Three, but will go further in exploring how textile terminology interacts with the

---

[65] Ibid., p. 4. Sauckel refers here to Kirsten Wolf's analysis of *blár* in, 'The Color Blue in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature', *Scripta Islandica* 57 (2006), 55-78); Gesa Snell, 'Der höfischen Züge - insbesondere die Kleidungsbescreibung - als Stilmittel in der *Laxdœla saga*' in *Arbeiten zur Skandinavistik: 13. Arbeitstagung der deutschsprachigen Skandinavistik 29.7-3.8.1997 in Lysebu (Oslo),* ed. by Paul Fritz, Texte und Untersuchnungen zur Germanistik und Skandinavistik 45, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 249-247; and Anna Zanchi, 'Melius abundare quam deficere': Scarlet clothing in *Laxdœla saga* and *Njáls saga, Medieval Clothing and Textiles* 4 (2008), 21-37.

[66] Sauckel, *Die Literarische Funktion von Kleidung,* pp. 1-2, citing Hans Kuhn, *Das alte Island,* (Düsseldorf: Diederichs, 1971).

[67] Sauckel, *Die Literarische Funktion von Kleidung*, pp. 6, 152-222.

[68] Ibid., p. 5.

[69] Ibid.

established social and cultural norms of the *Íslendingasögur*, via the Old Norse vestementary code and the text-textile complex.

Sauckel examines how clothing interacts with three specific categories: social distinction, gender and emotional expression. However, as already discussed, the individual narratives of the *Íslendingasögur* were only first written down in the thirteenth century, meaning that they are just as much records of the social and cultural mores of the later medieval period as they are of the Viking Age. Furthermore, interrogation of past cultures inevitably leads to insights about the present. The way in which we interpret early medieval societies often also reveals our own cultural norms.[70] This is particularly relevant to the study and reception of Viking Age textiles and their later medieval literary counterparts. While Sauckel is careful to navigate the material and cultural discrepancy between the Viking Age narrative setting and the thirteenth-century authorship of the *Íslendingasögur,* she does not engage as critically with the latter, specifically with regards to the supposed relationship between textiles and femininity.[71] In comparison to other aspects of early medieval culture portrayed in the *Íslendingasögur* (such as kingship, legal proceedings, etc.,) and despite the necessity of textile-production for survival and economic gain, textiles have received very little attention. While Sauckel suggests that this is due to a misunderstanding of their *Signalfunktion*, I argue that one of the reasons behind this popular and scholarly elision is rooted in modern cultural discourse regarding gender roles. Despite a growing body of scholarship dedicated to the 'recovery' of medieval women, there is still a tendency to measure saga women (and, indeed, historic women) against a barometer of

[70] This is particularly true of Viking Age culture, which has been repeatedly co-opted by extreme political groups and ethno-nationalists, and used as a means of authority and authentication for their extreme prejudice and violence. The most recent, high profile case (in a long line of high profile cases) occurred on 6th January 2021, when various extreme right groups coordinated an attack on the United States Capitol in an attempt to thwart the formalisation of Joe Biden's election win. One of the most prominent participants was a man dressed in the costume of an Óðinnic/Native American shaman, whose body was adorned with tattoos that are known hate symbols, including the valknútr and Yggdrasil, the 'world tree' of the Norse cosmos: '"QAnon Shaman" Jake Angeli charged over pro-Trump riots', https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-55606044 [accessed 5th February 2021]; See the Anti-Defamation League's 'Hate on Display' database of hate symbols https://www.adl.org/hate-symbols [accessed 5th February 2021]. While this thesis does not engage directly with white supremacy, or even with race as critical tool, it does interrogate other assumptions which play an important function in perpetuating the myth that the Viking Age was a time of white hypermasculine violence.
[71] Sauckel, *Die Literarische Funktion von Kleidung,* p. 2.

masculinity.[72] In other words, women of the past are seemingly only worthy of study when their behaviour or activities align with masculine interests and values.[73] Traditionally 'feminine' tasks, such as weaving or other textile-related work, are overlooked and undervalued because of this.[74] Chapter One will show that one of the reasons for this omission is a lack of critical interrogation of biologically essentialist gender roles. Conversely, Sauckel maintains an uncritical approach, observing that in the *Íslendingasögur*:

> In den mittelalterlichen Gesellschaft Islands spielte die Produktion von Kleidung eine wichtige Rolle. Tätigkeiten wie Spinnen, Weben und scließlich die Herstellung ganzer Kleidungsstücke zählten zum Aufgabenbereich der Frau, während die Männer fertige Erzeugnisse auf Handelsfahrten verkauften. Frauen übten demnach innerhalb des Hofes, *fyrir innan stokk*, die Kontrolle aus, während der Mann, *fyrir útan stokk* seinen Arbeiten nachging.
>
> ('Clothing production plays an important role in Iceland's medieval society. Activities such as spinning, weaving and finally the manufacture of entire garments were part of the women's job, while men sold finished products on trade trips. Women therefore exercised control within the court, *fyrir innan stokk,* while the man went about his work *fyrir útan stokk* [outside the court]').[75]

She goes on to analyse the connection between scenes of textile-production and magic, a theme which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four of this thesis. Sauckel suggests that even though there are a number of instances in which women characters use textile-making processes to perform acts of magic, 'dabei bleiben die zauberkundigen Frauen ihrer weiblichen Rolle stets treu und führen Aufgaben innerhalb der ihnen angestammten Tätigkeitbereiche aus' ('the women who know magic always remain true to their female role and carry out tasks within their traditional areas of activity').[76] She further suggests that this 'natural' role encompasses a woman's love for a particular man and for her family.[77] Again,

---

[72] This will the subject of Chapter One of this thesis.

[73] An interesting and recent example of this preconception in action is the now infamous 'female warrior grave' Bj 581 in Birka, Sweden. Further discussion will take place in Chapter One of this thesis.

[74] Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Archaeology: Contesting the Past*, (London: Routledge, 1999); Roszika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: The Women's Press, 1984, reprint 1986 and 1989).

[75] Sauckel, *Die Literarische Funktion von Kleidung,* p. 97.

[76] Ibid., p. 100.

[77] Ibid., pp. 128-130.

while the *Íslendingasögur* portray women and textiles in conjunction with emotions that can be identified as love, this is not their only purpose. As will be explored throughout this thesis, there are just as many examples of women using textiles as part of their incitement to vengeance, or even of directly weaponizing textiles for themselves. Over the past thirty years or so, much of the scholarship dedicated to medieval women, medieval textiles, and the relationship between the two has had a tendency to conflate them with essentialised femininity, therefore Sauckel is not the only critic to maintain this socially constructed and culturally pervasive connection. While it is true that Old Norse literary sources portray women who engage in textile-making practices in a positive light, thereby implying social approval, this thesis will demonstrate that there is not always a straightforward connection between textile-making and benign, 'normative' femininity.

Thesis Structure

As a thesis topic, 'textiles' might seem nebulous, but this is by design. Sauckel's observation that the study of textiles in Old Norse literary contexts has, so far, been focussed on particular 'vestementary phenomena' still rings true.[78] While Sauckel's work is more general in nature than the studies she refers to, it has still been necessary to revisit certain areas. The brief discussion above already indicates that more work is needed regarding textiles and gender, but the same is also true for how written textiles function as literary devices in saga narrative. Sauckel demonstrates that textiles do indeed play an important role in the *Íslendingasögur* and *Íslendingaþættir,* whereas this thesis is concerned with both *why* and *how.* By necessity, then, this thesis covers a broad range of ideas, theories and approaches, all of which are fully explored in each of the relevant chapters. Although every chapter introduces new critical material, it also grounds each new concept by using it to perform a close reading of the primary literature.

This thesis is divided as follows. Chapter One focuses on cultural interpretations of textiles and textile-making. It reviews how textiles have been received in scholarship so far and highlights the imbalanced and uncritical

[78] Sauckel, *Die Literarische Funktion von Kleidung*. p. 4.

attention paid to the 'special relationship' between textiles and women. This chapter analyses femininity as a temporally unstable category which influences the ways in which medieval literature and culture are interpreted. It suggests reasons why textiles are considered synonymous with femininity, and femininity with women. It also explores how these assumptions influence scholarly and popular perceptions of both textiles and women, and how that has affected the way in which Old Norse written textiles are interpreted.

Chapter Two establishes the need for a systematic approach to Old Norse textile terminology, and makes a case for adapting Barthes' vestementary code. In order to illustrate what the Old Norse vestementary code could look like, this chapter also functions as a case study for two Old Norse textile terms, *kápa* and *kufl,* and explores the narrative contexts in which they appear. *Kápa* and *kufl* both refer to the same type of garment, a cloak with either a cowl or hood attached to it. Both garments also appear in a key chapter of *Gísla saga Súrssonar,* when Gísli swaps his cloak for that of his servant in order to evade detection. The proposed Old Norse vestementary code enables a much closer examination of this scene and highlights how paying attention to textile terminology deepens our understanding of the social and cultural landscape of the sagas.

Chapter Three expands on the methodology established in Chapter Two by looking at a wider selection of Old Norse textile terms that are all cognate with the modern English 'cloak'. This chapter explores why 'cloak' is an insufficient translation, and discusses the differences in meaning which are lost in this oversimplification, drawing on a number of textual examples from *Laxdæla saga, Njáls saga, Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds, Kormáks saga* and *Grettis saga.* Furthermore, this chapter explores how the Old Norse vestementary code can be applied to already established social and cultural theories surrounding gift-giving, and suggests further potential applications in the study of saga masculinity and saga emotionality.

Finally, Chapter Four picks up the threads from Chapter One regarding women and textiles, turning instead to investigate how the materiality of textiles and textile-making processes influence and intervene in saga narrative. Despite the *Íslendingasögur's* narrative, cultural and sociological realism, depictions of textile-making processes like spinning and weaving are uncommon. Considering how

integral these tasks were to personal and economic survival, this scarcity bears further investigation. Building on the work of Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, whose redefinition of power in the sagas has provided new insight into how we approach female characters across the wide generic breadth of Old Norse prose narratives, I suggest a new theoretical approach to the study of written textiles. This theory, the stitch act, draws on the linguistic phenomenon of the speech act, in which a formal utterance has the ability to influence the world in some way. Similarly, the stitch act is a formalised or ritualistic act of textile-creation (a 'stitch') that affects the saga narrative. This phenomenon is best seen in Old Norse literary representations of fate, where weaving and spinning occur in 'supernatural' contexts. This chapter will show that textile-making and fate in both the *Íslendingasögur* and the heroic poems of the *Poetic Edda* are deeply entangled, and that the success of this motif is due to the fundamental relationship between 'textiles' and 'text'.

Definitions

'Viking Age' refers to the historical period of time encompassing the mid eighth to early eleventh centuries.

'Saga Age' (*söguöld*) refers to the constructed 'world' in which the narratives of the *Íslendingasögur* take place. The date range begins just before the settlement of Iceland in 870AD and ends around 1030AD

'Saga society' is a literary construct and refers to the social organisation of the *Íslendingasögur.*

'Literary textiles' or 'written textiles' refers to written depictions of textiles in a medieval literary (as opposed to documentary) text.

'Text-textile complex' refers to the complex etymological, cultural and conceptual relationship between 'text' (that which is written or spoken' and 'textile' (that which is material).

Chapter One: Textiles, Femininity, Power

Scholarship in both textile studies and the study of medieval women has, so far, treated the relationship between them as something natural, essential or innate. It is a widely held belief that the making of textiles is not only a woman's 'job', but also an essential part of her nature; this chapter seeks to disrupt that connection. As I will discuss, literary and material evidence from the early medieval period depicts a complex relationship between women and textiles, yet the problematic association between sex, gender and labour persists. This chapter will show that the supposedly 'natural' connection between women and textile-making practices has its roots in the social and cultural construction of a specific, modern iteration of femininity, one that has been used to perpetuate and justify the myth of patriarchal superiority in the literary and historical medieval past. The division of certain skills, labour and personal qualities into the categories 'masculine' and 'feminine' has, to borrow a term from Judith Butler, 'congealed' over the centuries, leading to the mistaken belief that they are 'natural'.[79]

Before I can begin the process of unpicking the relationship between textiles, femininity and power, it is necessary to distinguish between a number of different concepts to do with gender. It is now generally accepted that gender does not exist on a scale of binary opposition (with 'man' on one end and 'woman on the other), but is rather fluid and multiplicious.[80] It is also performative, as opposed to anything innate or essential.[81] That is, the expected behaviours, traits, and values associated with specific genders are reproduced through conformity to such ideals. The relationship between gender and biological sex is neither straightforward or unproblematic, as gender performance is not restricted to specific bodies.[82] The study of early medieval gender occurs on as broad a spectrum as gender itself.[83] This is due, in part, to the fact that the term 'medieval' is used to describe a broad

[79] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble,* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990, reprint 2008), p. 45.
[80] David Clark and Jóhanna, referring to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet,* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), in 'The representation of gender in eddic poetry' in *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia,* ed. by Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn and Brittany Schorn, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 331-348, p. 332.
[81] Butler, *Gender Trouble.*
[82] Clark and Jóhanna, referring to Butler, *Undoing Gender*, (London: Routledge, 2004), in 'The representation of gender in eddic poetry', p. 332.
[83] Clark and Jóhanna, pp. 332-333.

temporal and geographical range. Gender performance – that is, conformity or non-conformity – is informed by social and cultural norms. It can therefore be quite specific to individual social groups, even if those groups share temporal and/or geographical space.[84] The current shape of Old Norse gender studies is greatly enhance by the reults of gender studies of parallel cultures.[85] However, Old Norse literary sources depict a broad range of gender performances that enhance or subvert medieval gender norms (both to interesting effect), as well as performances that blur various social boundaries.[86]

---

[84] At the same time, these individual groups may have some gender ideals in common – for example, Germanic lord-retainer loyalty is an ideal rooted in the homosocial bonds between men and their leader during the Roman period, and is also valued by the 'Vikings' and 'Anglo-Saxons', as can be seen in literary evidence. For further exploration of this topic, see Clark, *Between Medieval Men: Male Friendship and Desire in Early Medieval English Literature,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[85] It has been necessary to consider gender research which is not always specific to Old Norse/viking contexts. With this caveat in mind, the following is an incomplete list of works which have, to varying degrees, influenced this chapter on gender: Ármann Jakobsson, 'Masculinity and Politics in *Njáls* saga, Viator 38 (2007), 191-215; Patricia A. Belanoff, 'Women's Songs, Women's Language: *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Wife's Lament*', in *New Readings of Women in Old English Literature*, ed. by Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 193-203; Vern L. Bullough, 'Transvestites in the Middle Ages', *American Journal of Sociology* 79 (1974), 1381-1394; Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture*, Cambridge History of Medicine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); David Clark, 'Undermining and En-Gendering Vengeance: Distancing and Anti-Feminism in the *Poetic Edda*' *Scandinavian Studies* 77 (2005), 173-200; *Between Medieval Men; Gender, Violence & the Past in Edda & Saga,* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2012); Carol Clover, 'Maiden Warriors and Other Sons', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 85 (1986), 35-49; 'Hildigunnr's Lament' in *Cold Counsel: The Women in Old Norse Literature and Myth,* ed. by Sarah M. Anderson and Karen Swenson, (Abingdon: Taylor and Francis, 2013) pp. 15-54; 'Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe', *Representations* 44 (1993), 1-28; Helen Damico, 'The Valkyrie Reflex in Old English Literature', in *New Readings* (1990), pp. 167-190; Evans, *Men and Masculinities*; Christine Fell, Cecily Clark and Elizabeth Williams, *Women in Anglo Saxon England and the Impact of 1066,* (London: Colonnade Books, 1984); Allen J. Frantzen, *Before the Closet: Same-Sex Love from* Beowulf *to* Angels in America, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Judith Jesch *Women in the Viking Age,* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1991); Gilchrist, *Gender and Archaeology*; Jenny Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society,* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995); *Old Norse Images of Women,* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words and Power,* The New Middle Ages Series, (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); *Valkyrie: The Women of the Viking World,* (Bloomsbury Academic: London, 2020); Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society,* trans. by Joan Turville-Petre, (Odense: Odense University Press, 1983); William Ian Miller, 'Choosing the Avenger: Some Aspects of the Bloodfeud in Medieval Iceland and England', *Law and History Review* 1 (1983), 159-204; *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in saga Iceland* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990); *Humiliation and Other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort, and Violence*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993, repr. 1995); Andrew P. Scheil, 'Somatic Ambiguity and Masculine Desire in the Old English *Life of Euphrosyne', Exemplaria* 11 (1999), 345-361; L. John Skulte, '*Freoðuwebbe* in Old English Poetry', in *New Readings (*1990), pp. 204-201; Marie Louise Stig Sørensen, *Gender Archaeology,* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

[86] Clark and Jóhanna, pp. 333-338.

When looking specifically at Old Norse femininity, we are presented with dynamic – and often contradictory – images. For example, the eddic poem *Hávamál* cautions against deceptive, untrustworthy, and self-serving women.[87] However, as David Clark and Jóhanna argue, there are lines in *Hávamál* that 'create a more balanced, if equally jaundiced, picture of all humans as fallible, manipulative, and deceitful.'[88] At the same time, women are presented as not only wise, but obliged to share their wisdom with men: 'women's advocacy of caution is both common and vital: men who do not pay heed to their advice generally fare badly.'[89] Other themes that are commonly associated with femininity include motherhood and sexuality, both of which are presented in contradictory terms.[90] Furthermore, the picture is just as complex for masculinity, although focussed work in this area has only recently begun.[91] Clark and Jóhanna observe that '[g]ender and sexuality have come to seem more like questions that concepts, and the fact that they are so fiercely debated says something about their fundamental importance for us at this point in history.'[92] Furthermore, they argue that, 'there is… no uncontested place from which to begin an analysis of gender in eddic poetry [and sagas]'.[93] This is especially relevant here, as it suggests that any approach to gender will have a

---

[87] *Hávamál,* LXII-CII. All primary quotation is derived from *Poetic Edda,* searchable electronic text of Gustav Neckel (ed.), *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern,* rev. Hans Kuhn, 5th edn. (Heidelberg, 1983), http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etcs/germ/anord/edda/edda.htm [accessed 16th June 2020]. Unless otherwise stated, translations by Carolyne Larrington, *The Poetic Edda,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[88] Clark and Jóhanna, 'The representation of gender in eddic poetry', p. 336.

[89] Ibid., p. 344.

[90] Ibid., pp. 341-342.

[91] Ibid., pp. 333-334. The *Íslendingasögur* demonstrate that masculinity is as varied as any other category of identity, intersecting with sexuality, physical and mental ability, social and economic status, homosocial bonds, age and race, all of which are examined by Gareth Lloyd Evans, *Men and Masculinities in the Sagas of Icelanders,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). I am in agreement with his statement that, '[b]y seeing women and femininities as in need of critical study – but not men and masculinities – femininities are seen as constructed and false, while men and masculinities are privileged as somehow real and authentic. Masculinities, of course, are as much a product of social construction as femininities.' p. 8. See also discussion regarding the 'naturalisation' of the masculine in Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, (London: Penguin, 1993), pp. 93-117. For an interrogation of the relationship between masculinity and the biologically male body, see J. Halberstam, *Female Masculinity,* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998). In order to fully explore the relationship between textiles and gendered identities, it would be necessary to interrogate the intersections between the aforementioned categories and gender in all of its complexity of expression – see Butler, *Gender Trouble*. As such, the discussion here has been limited to women and femininity because, as this chapter shows, there is a deeply entrenched social and cultural association between women and textiles, whereby one is always understood as a signifier of the other.

[92] Clark and Jóhanna, 'The representation of gender in eddic poetry', p. 332.

[93] Ibid., pp. 331-348.

'point of view'. That is to say, the examination of gender will be biased in some way, depending on the positionality of the examiner and their social and cultural environment. The significance of this positionality cannot be overstated because it is the tension that exists between Old Norse femininity as depicted in Old Norse literature, and how that femininity has come to be interpreted in later scholarship, that sits at the heart of this chapter.

It is only possible to build on what has come before, and while the study of Old Norse genders has progressed well beyond the structuralist nature of second wave feminism to embrace plurality, fluidity, and trans ideologies, the same cannot yet be said of how the interplay between textiles and gender (specifically femininity) is viewed.[94] As I will shortly explore in detail, textiles in both medieval and modern contexts are often interpreted through the lens of a very specific iteration of traditional, nineteenth-century femininity, in which value judgements and moral values are projected on to the labour of textile production (in this case, embroidery) so that the boundaries between hegemonic gender performance and textiles are rendered almost invisible. As a consequence, textiles became synonymous with a domestic, maternal, and submissive type of femininity. This phenomenon may have been solidified during the nineteenth century but it also endured throughout the twentieth century, and can still be detected in both popular and scholarly thought today.

With this being said, the following terms and definitions are used throughout: femininity will either be identified as 'Old Norse', which will refer to femininity as depicted in Old Norse literary sources (as discussed above), or as 'modern', which is how femininity is regarded by later critics. 'Modern' femininity will generally encompass traditional values and hegemonic gender norms from the nineteenth century onwards, which have affected how Old Norse femininity has been viewed and interpreted. The term 'normative' indicates the enactment of a dominant type of femininity that is widely accepted by contemporaneous society 'as femininity', against which all other models of femininity are compared (otherwise known as 'hegemonic'). Conversely, 'subversive' femininity refers to any aspect of gender performance that does not comply with the expectations of

[94] Ibid., pp. 333-338.

normative femininity. When subversive Old Norse femininities are being discussed, it refers to the subversion of modern gender expectations that have been projected onto Old Norse subjects, and not to the subversion of Old Norse gender norms themselves. Literary sources present a complex and contradictory account of Old Norse gender, which is further complicated by the context of Christianisation and manuscript transmission.[95] It is not the aim of this chapter to identify specific Old Norse gender norms or the subversion thereof, although it is necessary to be cognizant of – and attentive toward – them. Rather, this chapter seeks to discover where ideals of modern femininity have perhaps obscured or occluded meanings in Old Norse literary texts that go beyond what can sometimes be reductive, gender-based interpretations.

Textile-work is just one of the many qualities that comprise what Roszika Parker has shown to be the social construction of modern normative femininity. These 'norms' have been inscribed onto the bodies of real women and literary female characters. As a consequence, when either women or textiles are the subject of focussed study, one is taken to always signify the other, because the received understanding of what it means to make textiles, and what it means to be a woman, congeal into the mistaken idea that femininity, textiles and women are one and the same. This is not to suggest that there isn't a connection between textiles and women in the early medieval period, or that this connection didn't exist before or continue after. Rather, in drawing attention to the problems associated with definite categorisations of femininity, this chapter will demonstrate that – once deconstructed – the complex and nuanced relationship between the modern femininity of Old Norse scholarship, Old Norse femininity, and textiles, allows for an improved understanding of early medieval women, the female characters of the *Íslendingasögur* and textiles that moves beyond a binary gender system. This is also successful in challenging the cis-normative, patriarchal narrative that dominates how the early medieval period is currently perceived. This intervention allows for a more nuanced picture of medieval women and textiles than has, thus far, been seen.

[95] Ibid., p. 339.

Early medieval literary depictions of women and female characters engaged in – or associated with – Old Norse *hannyrðr* (pl. *hannyrðir,* 'handiwork') are rare. As is the case with depiction of gender, the picture that these sources present is complex; textiles and textile-work are shown to be both liberating and restrictive. A similar tale can be found in the material and archaeological evidence, although in this instance I argue that any restriction that results from women's relationship with textiles is purely interpretative. Rather than assume that depictions of women in close proximity to textiles are examples of normative modern gender performances, the following will examine the interactions between textiles and femininity as depicted in early medieval literature as a means to discovering significances that go beyond gender. It will interrogate our modern understanding of the relationship between textiles and modern normative femininity, and how that understanding has come to influence the way in which women and textiles have been interpreted in Old Norse literature, specifically the *Íslendingasögur.* The examples that I will discuss demonstrate that there is no fixed meaning which can be attributed to textiles, especially if that meaning is in any way related to gender norms (both Old Norse and modern), because those norms are also ever-evolving. The broader, cultural significations of textiles as conceived of by thinkers of the nineteenth century and beyond – domesticity passivity, etc., – can be used as a narrative device against women, but this does not necessarily mean that it is always successful. I argue that women in Old Norse literature use textiles and textile-creation as opportunities to exert their agency in a way that challenges our modern expectations of what it means to make textiles. Due to modern perceptions of what it means to make textiles, however, their resistance and/or subversion generally goes unnoticed, both in wider secondary criticism. When we interrogate our assumptions, both of what femininity means and what it means to enact femininity, it becomes clear that the modern cultural expectations surrounding textiles and femininity are not present in Old Norse literature. This is not to suggest that there are no strict gender norms at work within the *Íslendingasögur,* but rather that those norms are not so easily mapped alongside those in existence today.

I will first unpack modern normative femininity and how came to be associated with domestic textile-making practices. This discussion will centre on

embroidery, but the conclusions are applicable to weaving and other textile-making practices not considered here. I will explore how these qualities and skills have been mapped along other social and cultural markers of inferiority and projected on to the bodies of women (both real and fictional) in order to maintain patriarchal dominance. Although this connection between normative femininity, textile-making and social, gendered, and cultural inferiority is older than the Victorian period, it is the time in which the association became more concretely expressed.[96] However, this nexus of complicated ideas and relationships between concepts does not find such straightforward presentation in Old Norse literary sources. As I will discuss in this chapter, although there are examples of contempt for female characters that have been mapped on to textile-making practices, there are also examples that complicate and undermine the association. Given the scarcity of resources and laborious physical processes required to create textiles, in addition to the status accorded to individual garments in Old Norse literary sources, it is reasonable to assume that members of Old Norse society respected at least certain textiles as valuable commodities. This suggests that, just as with gender, Old Norse attitudes towards textiles and textile-making are ambivalent. The connection between textile-making and value judgements about Old Norse femininity and gender performance are sperate issues that have become conflated in modern scholarship. I argue that there is no clear boundary between normative and non-normative femininity that can be identified through engagement with textile-making practices in Old Norse literary texts. Next, I deconstruct the association between the biologically female body and textile-making practices, partly as an attempt to separate that which has been erroneously connected, but also as a countermeasure against the exclusion of early medieval trans narratives. This leads me to discuss who from the early medieval period is studied and why; for example, certain female characters receive the majority of scholarly attention above others, highlighting a deeply entrenched gender bias which privileges hetero-patriarchal normative interpretations of primary literature, social and cultural practices, labour and archaeological remains. In order to demonstrate how pervasive this is, I will briefly critique how ideals of modern femininity have forged

[96] Roszika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine,* (London: The Women's Press, 1984, reprnt. 1986, 1989, rev. 1996), pp. 17-39.

a natural, biological association between women and textiles, and how this has influenced the archaeological interpretation of Viking Age, gender non-conforming burial sites, concluding that masculine-coded subjects, objects and behaviours receive the majority of scholarly and popular attention. After this wider context has been explored, it will then be possible to examine Old Norse femininity and its relationship with *hannyrðir* (which is interpreted here as meaning any kind of textile-making activity, ranging from embroidery to weaving and anything in-between), as depicted in a selection of eddic poems. The cultural values at work within the *Íslendingasögur* are partly influenced by those of the *Poetic Edda.*[97] As I discussed in the introduction to this thesis, personal honour, kinship, loyalty and vengeance drive legendary figures such as Sigurðr, Brynhildr and Guðrún. These same themes are often explored in the narratives of the *Íslendingasögur.* For example, parallels have been observed between the poems of the Sigurðr cycle and *Laxdæla saga,* particularly in relation to characterisation and plot.[98] The various intertextual connections that exist between eddic poetry and the *Íslendingasögur* can also be detected in the ways in which textiles are presented, making them useful sources for depicting attitudes towards women and textile-work. I will then illustrate how textiles can be used to engage critically and meaningfully with the women of the *Íslendingasögur* by exploring the narrative implications of Steingerðr's refusal to sew Kormákr a shirt in *Kormáks saga.* I will show how textiles can be used as a means of exerting personal and narrative agency, particularly for those characters – women like Steingerðr – who are believed to possess none whatsoever.

---

[97] David Clark, *Gender, Violence and the Past in Edda and Saga,* p. 90, citing Magnus Olsen, 'Gísla saga og heltediktningen', in Johs. Brøndum-Nielsen et. al., (eds.), *Festskrift til Finnur Jónsson, 29. Maj 1928* (Copenhagen: Levi & Munksgaard, 1928), 6-14 and Guðbrandur Vigfússon, '*Excursus III.* On the Traces of Heroic Poems to be Found in the Icelandic Family Tales (Islendinga Sögur)', in *Corpus Poeticum Boreale: The Poetry of the Old Northern Tongue from the Earliest Times to the Thirteenth Century,* 2 vols., ed. and trans. by Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Frederick York Powell, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1883), II., pp. 501-8.

[98] Clark, *Gender, Violence and the Past,* p. 92. See also A. C. Bouman, *Patterns in Old English and Old Icelandic Literature,* (Leiden: Universitaire Pers Leiden, 1962), pp. 133-147, and Ursula Dronke, 'Narrative Insight in *Laxdæla saga*', in Mary Salu and Robert T. Farrell (eds.), *J. R. R. Tolkien, Scholar and Storyteller: Essays 'In Memorium',* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 120-137. See also Margaret Clunies Ross, 'The transmission and preservation of eddic poetry' and Carolyne Larrington, 'Eddic poetry and heroic legend', in *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia* in, *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia,* ed. by Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn and Brittany Schorn, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 12-32, at p. 13, and pp. 147-172.

Textiles and Femininity

In her book-length exploration of women, femininity and embroidery, Roszika Parker wryly observes: 'when women embroider, it is seen not as art but entirely as the expression of femininity. And, crucially, it is categorised as a craft.'[99] It would be something of a comfort to believe that the association between embroidery and femininity is merely a reflection of the bias in modern society's approach to idealised gender performance.[100] However, as Parker's book goes on to show, it is actually the result of centuries of practical, cultural and spiritual 'inculcation'.[101] 'Femininity' is defined by Parker as a 'lived identity' either embraced or resisted by those it is ascribed to.[102] This is in contrast to the 'feminine ideal', which is the historically evolving concept of what women should 'be', and the 'feminine stereotype', a collection of attributes, norms and values which are inscribed onto the bodies of women and, 'against which their every concern is measured.'[103] In the context of this thesis, the term 'femininity' is closer in meaning to Parker's 'feminine stereotype', simply because the focus here is literature rather than social, 'lived' histories. 'Normative femininity' is understood here as relating to the dominant feminine ideal as conceived by social and moral commentators of the nineteenth century: obedience, self-containment, passivity and servility.[104] Indeed, much of how we think of women and textiles in Western culture is rooted in Victorian social and cultural values:

> The tenacity of the Victorian reading of this history [of medieval embroidery] is largely due to the way it meshed with nineteenth-century ideologies of femininity. Twentieth-century concepts of femininity are still deeply imbued with Victorianism. Throughout the nineteenth century there was an elaboration of femininity – a rigid definition of women and their role. Amongst the cluster of characteristics which constituted the feminine ideal was included a natural propensity to embroider. The rediscovery of

---

[99] Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, p. 5.
[100] There is sadly not enough room to discuss the impact of fast fashion, capitalism and media influence which has also contributed to a complete lack of understanding or appreciation for the skill required to make cloth and clothing, all of which are significant in forming a social and cultural understanding of what is of 'importance' in academic study. For an introduction into making as praxis and resistance, see Amy Twigger Holroyd, *Folk Fashion: Understanding Homemade Clothes,* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017); for an overview of the global fashion industry and its many humanitarian and environmental problems, see Thomas, *Fashionopolis.*
[101] Parker, 'The Inculcation of Femininity', in *The Subversive Stitch*, pp. 82-109.
[102] Ibid., p. 4.
[103] Ibid., p. 4.
[104] Ibid., 'Eternalising the Feminine', pp. 17-39.

> medieval embroidery was coloured by the nineteenth-century notions of women's essential nature and embroidery as essential to women.[105]

The nineteenth-century notion that women had a 'natural propensity to embroider' bears a similarity to another, contemporaneous development in psychoanalysis. Specifically, in his lecture on femininity, Sigmund Freud said of women that they:

> have made few contributions to the discoveries and inventions in the history of civilization; there is, however one technique which they may have invented – that of plaiting and weaving. If that is so, we should be tempted to guess the unconscious motive for the achievement. Nature herself would seem to have given the model which this achievement imitates by causing the growth at maturity of the pubic hair that conceals the genitals. The step that remained to be taken lay in making the threads adhere to one another, while on the body they stick into the skin and are only matted together.[106]

For Freud, the primary motivating factor behind women's 'invention' of weaving was shame because they did not have a penis. Weaving forms a denser fabric than the 'matted' pubic hair, thus conceals a woman's 'lack' more effectively.[107] We now understand gender to be largely a set of socially constructed values which are enacted repeatedly until they give the appearance of being innate.[108] However, the idea that weaving – and by extension, other textile-related pursuits – was connected to women in such an intimate, biological and essential way still persists in modern scholarship, as I will shortly discuss.

However, there is another facet of personal identity which has led to the devaluation of embroidery, and thus women. Parker remarks that embroidery is not considered as 'art', but rather definitively as 'craft'.[109] This distinction is significant because society holds 'fine art' and 'literature' in high regard while 'craft' is considered to be less sophisticated and less important. She rightly comments that there is very little difference – broadly speaking – between creating

---

[105] Ibid., p. 18.
[106] Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity' in *The Essentials of Psychoanalysis,* ed. by Anna Freud, trans. by James Strachey, (London: Hogarth, 1986, reprnt. 2005).
[107] For a thought-provoking analysis of the relationship between Freud's psychoanalytic treatment, textiles, and the nineteenth century textile industry, see Liliane Weissberg, 'Ariadne's Thread', *MLN No.3., German Issue: Literature and the Sense of Possibility/ Der Möglichkeitssinn von Literatur* (2010), 661-681.
[108] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 5, 46.
[109] Parker, *The Subversive Stitch,* p. 4.

an image from oil paint or silk threads in terms of skill, only medium, therefore it is necessary to look to cultural values in order to understand the origins of this dichotomy.[110] She observes that the pursuit of fine art was reserved for the upper classes of society, and while it is true that there were women who attained success in a number of fine art mediums, those women do not feature prominently in the social consciousness.[111] Furthermore, the purpose of art (paintings, sculpture, even poetry) was to stimulate the higher faculties, while items of craft were considered more functional, which denies the possibility that everyday objects can be functional as well as decorative, and also suggests that the effects of observing fine art is reserved for a privileged few.[112]

The division between art and craft is a socialised concept, drawn along established class-boundaries; the cost of art materials and the time and training required is a barrier which only wealth can overcome.[113] Yet the same can also be said of craft, particularly delicate metalwork and textiles. Although not an exhaustive list of expensive and time-consuming mediums considered to be 'craft' rather than art, the raw materials used in metalwork and textiles – precious ores and stones – are extremely costly from the outset.[114] The level of skill and expense, as well as the time required to pursue 'art' or 'craft' is relatively equal, which suggests that the dichotomy between the two stem from additional, socially constructed hierarchies. Certainly as just observed in the case of textiles – weaving, embroidery, tapestry, lace-making etc. – there is a range of gender-based ideals and value-judgements which are projected onto both creator and created

---

[110] Ibid., p. 5.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.
[113] 'Craft' is not exempt from class-based boundaries. For example, there was a growing distinction between the middle class pursuit of 'hand crafts', such as knitting and hand-sewing, and 'machine work', such as professional dress-making on the newly invented sewing machine. See Weissberg, 'Ariadne's Thread', pp. 661-664.
[114] A further connection exists between metalwork and textiles during the middle ages, which operates on a material and technical level: precious metals and gems were incorporated into embroidery (for example, *opus anglicanum),* while metalwork techniques shared names with embroidery (such as 'interlace'). This relationship is most evident in the Old English Exeter Book *Riddle 36*, and is explored in detail by Megan Cavell, *Weaving Words and Binding Bodies: The Poetics of Human Experience in Old English Literature*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), pp. 47-67. See also Karen Bek-Pedersen, *The Norns in Old Norse Mythology*, (Edinburgh, Dunedin, 2011), p. 120, n. 77 for further discussion on the relationship between textile and metal work. For a comprehensive overview of early medieval embroidery from an archaeological and practical perspective, see Alexandra Lester-Makin, *The Lost Art of the Anglo-Saxon World: The Sacred and Secular Power of Embroidery,* Ancient Textiles Series 35 (Oxford; Oxbow Books, 2019).

object, which leads to an overall devaluation of skill, as well as of cultural and economic worth.

It is problematic to uncritically accept (and then perpetuate) the idea that textiles are *only* within the remit of women, that this association means that textiles are unimportant, or that the presence of textiles or textile-making activities is *always* indicative of modern gender and class values. In the context of nineteenth-century England, for example, Parker illustrates how embroidery came to be associated with women and, in turn, became a symbol of domesticity, modesty and the 'feminine ideal', which is in itself not a fixed category.[115] She also demonstrates that by classing embroidery as 'craft', there are very few opportunities for elevation, either of the skill or the women who practice it. As a consequence, those more dominant in social capital – usually men, although this is also not a straightforward category – are able to occupy the prestigious and public spheres of 'art'.[116] While the temporal scope of her study does not reach back as early as the ninth and tenth centuries (which is the period in which the narratives of the *Íslendingasögur* are set, if not the period during which they were recorded in writing), the logic of her methodology and findings are applicable here. With that being the case, this chapter aims to address the prevailing yet inaccurate notion that the categories 'woman' and 'femininity' are synonymous, and that both are connected to textiles and textile creation in a biologically essential way.

---

[115] Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, p. 4

[116] There is not enough space to discuss the category of 'man' and masculinity in relation to textiles as both material object and cultural practice. The *Íslendingasögur* demonstrate that masculinity is as varied as any other category of identity, intersecting with sexuality, physical and mental ability, social and economic status, homosocial bonds, age and race, all of which are examined by Gareth Lloyd Evans, *Men and Masculinities in the Sagas of Icelanders,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). I am in agreement with his statement that, '[b]y seeing women and femininities as in need of critical study – but not men and masculinities – femininities are seen as constructed and false, while men and masculinities are privileged as somehow real and authentic. Masculinities, of course, are as much a product of social construction as femininities.' p. 8. See also discussion regarding the 'naturalisation' of the masculine in Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, (London: Penguin, 1993), pp. 93-117. For an interrogation of the relationship between masculinity and the biologically male body, see J. Halberstam, *Female Masculinity,* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998). In order to fully explore the relationship between textiles and gendered identities, it would be necessary to interrogate the intersections between the aforementioned categories and gender in all of its complexity of expression – see Butler, *Gender Trouble*. As such, the discussion here has been limited to women and femininity because, as this chapter shows, there is a deeply entrenched social and cultural association between women and textiles, whereby one is always understood as a signifier of the other.

Returning to the medieval period: while it is true that saga society operated within a clearly delineated set of rules governed by the intersectional mandates of class, wealth, gender, sexuality and ability, it is also true that a subset of texts from the *Íslendingasögur* recount narratives centred on rule-breakers. That is, in these specific texts, we gain an understanding of medieval Icelandic social norms precisely because characters such as Grettir, Gísli and Egill do not follow those rules, and each of their tales is a record of the consequences. The same can be said of the norms governing gender performance, as the recent increase in dedicated study of Old Norse gender suggests. Yet despite the general agreement among scholars that gender in the *Íslendingasögur* is complicated, performative and governed by a variety of social rules which are subject to change according to personal or legal circumstances, there is *also* a general acceptance that textile-pursuits are, without exception, representative of modern normative femininity. As such, female characters within the sagas who take part in textile-related activities are summarily dismissed as unremarkable. As Jóhanna remarks: 'Medieval Icelandic literature presents many intriguing characters but a limited selection of these has come to represent the standard image of "Old Norse Women" in previous scholarship, from which generalizations about women's lived existence in Old Norse society as a whole have been made'.[117] Furthermore – and as a consequence – textiles and textile-related activities have equally been dismissed due to the fact that they are 'feminine' and thus of no interest or value. While this is no longer the case, with a growing interest in medieval textiles leading to subject-specific journals, monographs and even research institutes dedicated to furthering our understanding, there is still an overall acceptance that textiles are encoded with modern normative femininity.[118]

---

[117] Jóhanna, *Women in Old Norse Literature,* p. 7.

[118] The study of medieval textiles is interdisciplinary in nature and blurs the boundaries between theory and praxis; for example, see Makin, *The Lost Art of the Anglo-Saxon World.* Makin is a professional embroiderer trained at the Royal School of Needlework, London, specialising in medieval techniques. She is currently producing an exact replica of a section of St Cuthbert's maniple in order to answer 'questions around the networks needed to gather the materials together, working process including organisation and level of training… timings, materials and their working qualities, as well as the sensory and physical engagement of the embroiderer with the work.' Makin, 'Cuthbert Recreation Project' posted 20th November 2019, https://alexandramakin.com/2019/11/20/cuthbert-recreation-project/ [accessed 3rd August 2020]. The forthcoming discoveries which will arise from this work will increase our understanding and appreciation of medieval embroidery, and will hopefully contribute to the uplifting of embroiderers and their practice in the eyes of other medievalists. Expertise can be

Separating Textiles from Femininity, and Femininity from Women

When scholars focus solely on textiles in the medieval period, there is also a tacit acceptance that textiles are synonymous with both women and modern femininity, which is then mistakenly understood to represent Old Norse femininity. In some instances it is even possible to detect the echoes of the essentialised, biological connection between women and textile-production that was suggested by Freud. For example, in her discussion of the origins and literary analogues of the *nornir*, Karen Bek-Pedersen asks the question, 'why [is] fate […] so decidedly and consistently portrayed as female – either represented by female figures or associated with feminine types of work'?[119] She then goes on to explore the association of supernatural female figures with dark and humid places, such as the *nornir* with *Urðarbrunnr*, the well at the base of *Yggdrasill* from which wisdom and knowledge can be drawn.[120] Her subsequent analysis traces the association between the *nornir* and related female figures with places beneath the ground, as represented in various poetic and literary contexts.[121] She then reaches the crux of her argument when she turns to focus on the *dyngja,* which she defines as 'a certain building or room where women would do women's work, *particularly textile work*'.[122] The existence of the *dyngja* is supported by both literary and archaeological evidence. Else Østergård discusses the material remains of textile-production (loom weights, etc.,) which were concentrated together in the same

found beyond the walls of academic institutions, with practitioners and re-enactors etc. As such, the following is an incomplete list of academic scholarship, and does not include references to societies and individuals working without institutional affiliation. See Gale Owen-Crocker, *The Lexis of Cloth and Clothing Project* http://lexissearch.arts.manchester.ac.uk/ [accessed 3rd August 2020], which is a database of medieval clothing and textile terminology that draws on a wide variety of primary sources, not all of them textual; *Medieval Clothing and Textiles*, ed. by Robin Netherton and Gale Owen-Crocker (2005 – current), which is a journal dedicated to the latest research from various disciplines which find themselves within the remit of this growing field. Owen-Crocker has also written extensively about the Bayeux Tapestry, available as a collected edition, *The Bayeux Tapestry: Collected Papers,* (Ashgate: Variorum, 2012). Her monograph, *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England,* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1986, rev., 2004) is an interdisciplinary exploration of changes in dress and visual culture, reflecting on its wider cultural significance. She also co-edited *The Encyclopedia of Medieval Dress and Textiles of the British Isles, c. 450 – 1450,* ed. by Owen-Crocker, Elizabeth Coatsworth and Maria Hayward, (Leiden: Brill, 2012), which has been an essential resource for this thesis. See also The Centre for Textile Research in Copenhagen https://ctr.hum.ku.dk/ [accessed 3rd August 2020] which hosts a number of researchers dedicated to textiles in the Viking Age https://ctr.hum.ku.dk/research-programmes-and-projects/ctr-networks/cloth-cultures-in-and-beyond-the-viking-age/ [accessed 3rd August 2020].

[119] Bek-Pedersen, *The Norns,* p. 73. Jóhanna also observes this association in *Valkyrie,* p. 85.

[120] Bek-Pedersen, *The Norns,* pp. 91-95.

[121] Ibid., pp. 97-105.

[122] Ibid., p. 106. Emphasis my own,

location of a settlement site in Norse Greenland, while in *Gísla saga Súrssonar* 9, the *dyngja* is explicitly mentioned as the location where Auðr and Ásgerðr make clothes and chat.[123]

It is a material and cultural fact that the *dyngja* is a place where women performed their work. Furthermore, there are supernatural, even magical connotations attributed to the *dyngja,* some aspects of which will be explored in the Chapter Four in relation to *Darraðarljóð.*[124] As Bek-Pedersen has observed, the *dyngja* exists on two 'levels': 'one is that of human social conventions, and the other is a symbolic interpretation not explicitly present'.[125] However, Bek-Pedersen's ensuing argument is problematic in the extreme, due to the fact that she associates textile-work (spinning, weaving, etc.,) and the *dyngja* with the biological processes of the womb and childbirth: 'the *dyngja* and the womb are akin to each other as secret, feminine spaces wherein things are generated'.[126] She goes on to illustrate her point with an example from *Orkneyinga saga*, when Eðna presents Sigurðr with the raven banner which he later clutches as he dies on the battlefield of Clontarf – the banner which supposedly brings death to the one who bears it, as described in *Njáls saga*.[127] Eðna makes reference to her basket of wool, saying that she would have kept Sigurðr there but for the fact that fate had already decided his path.[128] Bek-Pedersen argues that:

> Being inside the wool basket can be likened to being inside the *dyngja,* and this can be done in two ways: firstly, the *dyngja* is a protective but also confining environment, fit for women and children but not for grown men […] Secondly, the wool basket contains wool that is as yet untreated; it is a

---

[123] *Gísla saga Súrssonar* 9*,* in *Vestfirðinga sögur,* Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson (eds.), Íslenzk Fornrit 6 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1943), pp. 3-118. Ásgerðr asks Auðr to cut a shirt for her husband, Þórkell, which leads to them discussing her affair with Vésteinn, all which is overheard by Þórkell himself, leading to the cycle of slayings and revenge which end with Gísli as an outlaw. Further discussion of *Gísla saga* will take place in Chapter Two of this thesis.
[124] Bek-Pedersen, *The Norns,* p. 109.
[125] Ibid.*,* p. 111.
[126] Ibid., p. 110. See also Mirjam Mencej, 'Connecting Threads' *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* 48 (2011) 55-84 https://www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol48/ [accessed 27th April 2020].
[127] Bek-Pedersen, *The Norns,* p. 110**;** *Orkneyinga saga,* in Finnbogi Guðmundsson (ed.), *Orkneyinga saga* 11, Íslenzk fornrit 34 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1965), pp. 3-300 at pp. 24-25**.** *Njáls saga* 157, p. 451.
[128] 'Ek mynda þik hafa lengi upp fætt í ulllaupi mínum, ef ek víssa, at þú myndir einart lifa, ok ræðr auðna lifi, en eigi, hvar maðr er kominn…' ['I would have nurtured you for a long time in my wool basket, if knew that you would live forever, but it is fate which rules life, and not where a man happens to be…']. *Orkneyinga saga,* 11, pp. 24-25; translation by Bek-Pedersen, *The Norns*, p. 110.

> mass of potential but is still without shape or order. In this way it is like the womb where human beings are put together.[129]

It is true that there is a connection between spinning and conception in Christianity, with the Virgin Mary often being depicted as spinning at the Annunciation, or with other textile implements in iconography.[130] It is also true that Bek-Pedersen is looking at fate as specifically feminine, or represented by 'female work', so it stands to reason that she concentrates on this particular function of the biologically female body. Whether knowingly or not, this line of reasoning is essentialist because it assumes that every woman has a womb, or that anyone who has a womb is, in fact, a woman.[131] Furthermore, in asserting that there is a deep symbolic connection between the production of textiles and the production of children, Bek-Pedersen reinforces post-medieval gender norms, where femininity and textiles are synonymous with maternity, domesticity and subservience. As has been highlighted by Parker, this association is a result of social and cultural values rather than any innate quality of the textiles themselves.[132] Therefore, Bek-Pedersen's assertion that textile-production during the early medieval period was closely associated with – if not analogous to – conception and childbirth is part of a centuries-long inculcation of femininity and textiles which suggests that a woman's primary purpose is the reproduction and nurturing of children, something which is not straightforwardly present in Old Norse literary sources. [133]

Going forward, it is vital to separate textiles from the social construction of femininity. The two concepts have been conflated, and as a consequence they both suffer. As has been explored in third-wave feminist and, more recently, queer

---

[129] Bek-Pedersen, *The Norns,* pp. 110-11. Sauckel observes a social category that I do not discuss in this thesis, *die Narren* ('fools'). She identifies a further sub-category of fool, the *kolbítr,* who is characterised by remaining at home rather than going out to find their fortune: 'Bei ihm handelt es sich um einen jungen Mann, der anstatt Heldenaten zu volbringen, jedwede Form von Arbeit ablehnt und stattdessen faul im Haus vor dem Feuer liegt', [He is a young man who, instead of doing heroics, rejects any form of work and lazily lies in front of the fire instead.' Sauckel, *Die Literarische Funktion von Kleidung,* p. 60. Eðna would rather her son stay at home than engage in heroics. Her preference brings to mind echoes of the *kolbítr* motif, especially because of her directly evoking domestic (as opposed to heroic) work.
[130] Ibid., pp. 111-13; Mencej, 'Connecting Threads', pp. 67-69.
[131] For an excellent analysis of how we might approach Old Norse gender models without being trans-exclusionary, see Evans, *Men and Masculinities,* pp. 10-15, particularly at pp. 13-14.
[132] Parker, *The Subversive Stitch,*, pp. 17-39.
[133] Clark and Jóhanna, 'The representation of gender in eddic poetry', pp. 341-342.

theorist discourse, encoding the 'female' or 'male' experience on to specific set of physical characteristics is problematic, due to its adherence to a biological essentialism which does not differentiate between sex and gender.[134] It is now accepted in gender scholarship that any one individual 'performs' their gender in accordance with – or defiance of – socially governed conventions and expectations.[135] In other words, this position acknowledges that an individual's identity is comprised of more than just their biological attributes, i.e., the presence or absence of primary or secondary sex characteristics, or their ability to conceive a child. Neither 'masculinity' or 'femininity' is anchored in biology. As a consequence, gender is no longer considered to be divided across a binary system, with 'men' on one side and 'women' on the other. Rather, it is now accepted that gender exists on a spectrum of manifestation and expression, allowing for the voices of trans, non-binary and gender-nonconforming individuals to gain traction within hegemonic discourse, both popular and scholarly.

There has always been more than one way to enact masculinity and femininity; however, with the critical tools which have become available to us as a result of the past four decades of feminist and Queer theorist discourse, we now have a greater awareness of how to approach gender and sexuality in Old Norse literature. For example, Carol Clover explores how, under certain circumstances, provisions were made for women to act as proverbial sons within the Old Norse legal system.[136] In the law code, *Grágás,* there are details of different levels of kinship in relation to a slain individual, and how the ordering and process of payment or collection of the death-price should go, according to an individual's kinship category.[137] The standard procedure revolves around male relations, but it is also possible for a woman to 'become' a son, in the case where there are no surviving (or eligible) men:

> Not only is the daughter of a sonless, brotherless, and fatherless man expected to fill the genealogical breach, but also she is expressly said to do so *as a son* and even – since the clause specifically applies only to the

[134] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* Halberstam, *Female Masculinity.* For contextualisation of – and approaches to – trans/intersex identities in the Middle Ages, see Ruth Evans, 'Gender does not equal genitals', *postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* 9 (2018), 120-131.
[135] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* pp. xv, 45, 190.
[136] Clover, 'Maiden Warriors and Other Sons'.
[137] *Grágás: Islãndernes lovbog I fristatens tid,* ed. by Vilhjálmur Finsen (Copenhagen: Breling, 1852; rpt. Odense: Odense Universitestsforlag, 1974), I, as quoted in Clover, 'Maiden Warriors', p. 46.

> unmarried – as a "maiden". That the practice is of some antiquity in Scandinavia is suggested by the presence of similar statutes in the early Norwegian laws.[138]

In additional to legal codes, there is also literary evidence of women 'becoming' men in order to pursue lifestyles otherwise inaccessible to them. Clover notes that Hervör of *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* is, 'the most elaborately drawn functional son in Norse literature, but she is by no means the only one'.[139] Hervör is boisterous and violent in her youth, eventually changing her name to Hervarðr and embarking on viking raids.[140] In the context of women becoming functional sons, the key narrative moment of the saga occurs when Hervarðr breaks into the tomb of their father and initiates a verse-dialogue with the reanimated corpse of Angantýr, with the aim of claiming inheritance rights over his sword, Tyrfingr.[141] Although Angantýr is resistant at first, he eventually relinquishes the sword to Hervarðr who, after 'returning' to the needle and to the name Hervör, bestows it upon her own son.[142] Clover states that in her role as functional son, Hervör protects the direct line of male inheritance and acts as a 'genetic conduit' between Angantýr and the sons he never had.[143] While Clover's analysis is pyscho-legal in nature, it shows how attitudes toward gender were flexible in an early medieval Norse context.[144] Despite strict social and legal codes surrounding gender and gender performance – to the point where, as Jóhanna observes, crossdressing was punishable with three years of lesser outlawry – early medieval Icelanders recognised that while a norm was necessary, it was also sometimes necessary to move beyond that norm.[145]

Therefore, while it is true that spinning, weaving and other types of needlework were tasks that women undertook, it is unclear whether the

---

[138] Clover, 'Maiden Warriors and Other Sons', p. 46.
[139] Ibid., p. 40.
[140] Ibid., p. 37. Clover cites the dual-language edition by Christopher Tolkien (trans. and ed.), *Saga Heiðreks konnungs in vitra/ The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise,* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1960).
[141] *Saga Heiðreks/ The Saga of King Heidrek,* 3, pp. 13-19.
[142] Ibid., 4, pp. 21-22.
[143] Clover, 'Maiden Warriors and Other Sons', pp. 39-40.
[144] In another ground-breaking article, 'Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe', Clover presents her model of Old Norse gender, based on Laquer's 'one-sex' model. Although at the time it was a significant contribution to Old Norse gender studies, it has been recently been suggested that it is an adaptation of binary 'male-female' gender models. See Evans, *Men and Masculinities,* pp. 10-15.
[145] Jóhanna, *Valkyrie,* p. 87.

relationship between Old Norse normative femininity and textiles is as well-defined and as essentialised as critics like Bek-Pedersen suggest. For example, in her study of women in Anglo-Saxon England, Christine Fell argued that the presence of the Old English suffix *-stre* in nouns such as *seamstre* ('seamstress') and *crencstre* ('crank operator') is indicative that, regardless of how roles in the textile industry developed during the later medieval period in England, they originally belonged to women, even though there is no correlation between grammatical and biological gender in Old English.[146] Gale Owen-Crocker and Maren Clegg Hyer incorporate cross-disciplinary approaches in their analysis of medieval textiles, drawing on archaeological methods and evidence to convey the very real, material significance that textiles had on society, specifically women.[147] In order to illustrate the connection that women had with textiles in the context of Anglo-Saxon culture, they pay close attention to the language used to discuss inheritance in the will of King Ælfred. They conclude that the kennings *wæpnedhealf/sperehealfe* and *spinlhealfe* ('weapon' or 'spear' half and 'spindle' half respectively), were used synecdochally to denote the male and female heirs in his will. They suggest that this is proof of a definitive connection between women and textiles/textile-production in the collective consciousness, a connection which is further supported by the wealth of material evidence discovered in early medieval burial sites across the British Isles and the Germanic North.[148] In their work there is an emphasis placed on the connection between women and textile-production, possibly as a means of countering the prevailing idea of the early medieval period as a violent, male-dominated landscape. While it is true that the connection exists, it is worth exploring the extent, and supposed universality of its application. It is also worth questioning whether it is still relevant to conceive of textile-production in terms of binary gender norms, i.e.: textiles are feminine material and cultural outputs which are held in opposition to masculine material and cultural outputs. How useful is it to maintain an essential – even biological – connection between

[146] Fell, Clark, and Williams, *Women in Anglo Saxon England*, p. 41; Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson, *A Guide to Old English* 6th edn., (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), p. 17, § 12.
[147] Hyer and Owen-Crocker, 'Woven Works'.
[148] 'The Will of King Alfred' in *Select English Historical Documents of the Ninth and Tenth* Centuries, ed. by F. E. Harmer, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), as quoted in Hyer and Owen-Crocker, p. 181.

women and textile-making? More importantly, what can be gained from disrupting that connection?

The Devaluation of Femininity in Old Norse Literature and the Early Medieval Archaeological Record, or: Who is Interesting and Why?

Scenes of textile-production are not common occurrences in the *Íslendingasögur*; rather, characters usually make use of the end-product in gift-exchange or communication, as will be discussed in the following chapters. Value judgements regarding the 'femininity' of textile-pursuits in the sagas and the early medieval period in general draw on modern cultural associations of what it means to weave or sew. Furthermore, this narrow definition of normative femininity means that there is little room for analysis to move beyond the archetypal. Jóhanna argues that, while archetypes are a result of generic constraints, there is a problem in saga scholarship with privileging certain genres above others, which gives the illusion that the women depicted within the favoured genre were the most resonant with an early medieval audience.[149] Here she also makes reference to the work of Jenny Jochens and her work on women of the Viking Age, which has influenced this area of scholarship since its publication toward the end of the twentieth century.[150] According to Jochens, the women of the *Íslendingasögur* can be divided into four categories: Prophetess/Sorceress, Avenger, Warrior Woman, and Whetter.[151] As Jóhanna observes, however:

> Although there is much critical value in this model, influenced by the second-wave feminist agenda to identify and combat the ways in which patriarchal power structures oppress women, it also entails certain problems. Female characters that gain agency without stigma and thus do not fit into its paradigms of women – either as idealized shield-maidens or scapegoated victims of the patriarchy – are largely excluded from analysis, and thus their possible meanings are not accounted for […] the classification into only four groups thus also runs the risk of erasing nuances between different representations [of the same 'type' of woman across different narratives].[152]

---

[149] Jóhanna, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, p. 6. Without question, the genre most privileged by scholars is the *Íslendingasögur,* due to its 'canonisation' (in Jóhanna's words) by 19th and 20th century scholars, see p. 7. See also Massimiliano Bampi and Sif Rikhardsdottir, 'Introduction' in *A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre*, ed. by Massimiliano Bampi, Carolyne Larrington and Sif Rikhardsdottir, (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020), pp. 1-14, pp. 4, 8.
[150] Jenny Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society,* and *Old Norse Images of Women*.
[151] Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society.*
[152] Jóhanna, *Women in Old Norse Literature,* p. 7.

By placing artificial boundaries around the female figures of the *Íslendingasögur,* scholars project and reinforce the very patriarchal order of which Jochens was critical. In looking beyond the limitations of post-medieval expectations of femininity and gender performance, Jóhanna expands our scholarly horizons and demonstrates the myriad ways that women and 'femme' figures exert their agency, exercise power, and generally thrive within a society where, to be accused of femininity was the highest insult, even if you were a woman.[153] For Jóhanna, 'power' follows Max Weber's definition where an individual or group impose their will within a social relationship, regardless of whether or not the imposition is met with resistance.[154] With this definition in mind she goes on to show that, while western, patriarchal societies consider power to be usually associated with action and violence – both stereotypically masculine traits – there are actually many ways to impose one's will without them.[155] In this way, Jóhanna is critical of how we, as a scholarly community as much as a global society, unconsciously privilege what is perceived to be masculine while devaluing that which is perceived to be feminine. As a consequence, the significance of 'feminine tasks' such as weaving is reduced, leading to a lack of attention, general dismissal, or misunderstanding within secondary criticism.[156] Even Jóhanna suggests that when women such as Hervör give up their life as a 'man' they, 'hasten to pick up their needle […] this signifies to the audience that female normativity, and thus the status quo, has been restored after a temporary lapse'.[157]

The same issues also arise in archaeology. The traditional approach to gender in archaeology shows that osteologically sexed males are buried with weaponry, while osteologically sexed females are buried with more decorative

---

[153] Jóhanna, *Valkyrie*, pp. 10, 45.
[154] Jóhanna, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, pp. 8 – 9. See also Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology (Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie)*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, 2. Vols. (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1978) I: p. 53.
[155] Of course 'masculinity' – and Old Norse masculinity in particular – is encompassed by more than just agency and violence. For a detailed discussion of how we might approach masculinity in the sags see Evans, *Men and Masculinities,* p. 10-26, at pp. 25-26.
[156] An example of this type of critical mishandling (in relation to *Darraðarljóð*) will be explored in Chapter Four.
[157] Jóhanna, *Women in Old Norse Literature,* pp. 30 – 31.

items, as well as tools for textile-production.[158] This process is known as 'attribution' and is problematic because it reflects the social and cultural norms of the analyst rather than of those of the period under investigation.[159] For example, one reason why medieval textile fragments are found in 'female' graves more than 'male' may be because of the presence of brooches, as the survival of textiles often depends on proximity to certain metals.[160] Thus the contact between pin and textile is more prevalent in 'female' graves than 'male', simply because brooch pins were a practical necessity in early medieval feminine attire.[161] Therefore, while the archaeology seems to support the connection between *spinlhealfe* and women – a connection that Hyer and Owen-Crocker argue was prevalent within the Anglo-Saxon cultural consciousness – in reality it merely creates more ambiguity.

As Marie Louise Stig Sørensen argues, however, it is too simplistic to accuse traditional archaeological analysis of ignoring women or the question of gender, as society is often understood through its gender roles.[162] Rather, it is our evolving understanding of gender as non-binary, fluid and separate from biological sex which now challenges the validity of traditional approaches.[163] For instance, the existence of 'cross-gendered' early medieval burials belies the notion that it is possible to attribute fixed gendered meanings onto material objects.[164] For example, graves 33, 93 and 96 in Buckland, Kent (dated mid-to-late sixth century) potentially contain biological women buried with full swords.[165] The distinction between a full sword and sword-like items is important, as women were often buried with sword-shaped amulets, as well as weaving-swords (sword-beaters).[166] However, the presence of a sword in the grave of an individual who has been

---

[158] For an analysis of the origins and problems of rendering gender 'visible' in the archaeological record, see Gilchrist, *Gender and Archaeology,* pp. 41 – 3; Stig Sørensen, *Gender Archaeology,* p. 27.
[159] A prime example of this can be found in Walton Rogers, *Cloth and Clothing*, pp. 198 – 9.
[160] Ibid., pp. 50 – 60, at p. 58.
[161] Ibid., p. 58. It is also worth mentioning that the material evidence is scare, not to mention the various shifts in mortuary practices. See Walton Rogers, p. 49 for more detail.
[162] Stig Sørensen, *Gender Archaeology,* pp. 25 – 6; c.f. Jóhanna, *Women in Old Norse Literature.*
[163] Ibid., p. 27.
[164] The same is also true for other categories of identity, such as ethnicity and culture.
[165] Poor bone preservation means that this interpretation is not conclusive. Grave 96 is a double burial, containing a biological man and woman, although it has also been interpreted as being two men. Sue Brunning, *The Sword in Early Medieval Northern Europe. Experience, Identity, Representation,* Anglo Saxon Studies 36 (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2019), pp. 94-5; Vera I. Evison, *Dover:The Buckland Anglo-Saxon Cemetery,* Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England Archaeological Report 3 (London: 1987), pp. 225-6, 238, 239.
[166] Brunning, *The Sword,* p. 94, n. 65.

(tentatively) identified as a biological woman does not immediately indicate that the individual participated in combat.[167] In fact it is generally accepted by archaeologists that the presence of a sword, regardless of osteological sex, is not even indicative of a 'warrior' burial.[168] In other words, the category of 'warrior' does not rely necessarily on the ability to wield a sword, opening the definition to broader socio-cultural parameters.[169] This redefinition of what it means to be a 'warrior' has broadened the interpretative scope of a gender-nonconforming Viking Age burial. The osteologically female individual in grave 581 in Birka, Sweden, was buried with a sword and other 'male' accoutrements. She/they may have possessed warrior-like characteristics, or was accorded a level of respect that likened her/them to someone with 'warrior' status. It is also quite unlikely that she/they took part in martial combat.

While it is not within the remit of this thesis to comment on the merits of the recent archaeological analysis surrounding the individual buried in Birka 581 (popularly-known as the 'Viking Warrior Woman'), some of the themes and questions raised about the reality of 'women warriors' bear significance on how we, as a scholarly community and members of western society, read and respond to textiles, textile-work, and textile-workers.[170] The academic and popular reception to the 'proof' that women could be warriors in the Viking Age is a clear

---

[167] Ibid., p. 96; see also Jóhanna, *Valkyrie,* pp. 61-2.

[168] Brunning, *The Sword,* p. 8, citing Heinrich Härke, 'Early Saxon Weapon-Burials: Frequencies, Distributions and Weapon Combinations', *Weapons and Warfare in Anglo-Saxon England,* ed. by Sonia Chadwick Hawkes, (Oxford: Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, 1989), pp. 49-61; '"Warrior Graves"? The Background of the Anglo-Saxon Burial Rite', *Past and Present* 126 (1990), 22-43; 'Changing Symbols in a Changing Society: The Anglo-Saxon Burial Rite in the Seventh Century', *The Age of Sutton Hoo: The Seventh Century in North-Western Europe,* ed. by Martin O. H. Carver, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1992), pp. 149-65; 'Swords, Warrior-Graves and Anglo-Saxon Warfare', *Current Archaeology* 16 (2004), 556-61.

[169] Brunning, *The Sword,* pp. 145-147.

[170] For the report in question, see: Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson, Neil Price, et. al., 'A female Viking warrior confirmed by genomics', *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 164 (2017), 853-860; 'Viking warrior women? Reassessing Birka chamber grave Bj. 581', *Antiquity* 93 (2019), 181-198. For an assessment of the evidence prior to Bj. 581, see: Leszek Gardela, '"Warrior Women" in Viking Age Scandinavia? A Preliminary Archaeological Study', *Analecta Archeologica Ressoviensia* 8 (2013), 273-309; for a flavour of the scholarly debate *as it happened*, see blog posts by Judith Jesch, 'Let's Debate Female Viking Warriors Yet Again' (2017), http://norseandviking.blogspot.com/2017/09/lets-debate-female-viking-warriors-yet.html [accessed 10th June 2020], and Howard M. Williams, 'Viking Warrior Women: An Archaeodeath Response Part 1' (2017), https://howardwilliamsblog.wordpress.com/2017/09/14/viking-warrior-women-an-archaeodeath-response-part-1/ [accessed 10th June 2020]; for assessment as part of an academic monograph, see Brunning, *The Sword*, pp. 9, 108-9, 147, and Jóhanna, *Valkyrie,* pp. 58-60, 63-4.

example of how medieval women are perceived to be of interest or value *only* if they occupy a perceived masculine role.[171] It is also further evidence to support Jóhanna's critique of what has so far been a narrow, gender-biased definition of power.[172] There are a number of plausible explanations for why a osteological woman was buried with weapons, game pieces and horses in the mid-to-late tenth century. Jóhanna questions whether we can be sure that the individual was 'socially female', and discusses the likelihood that they could, in fact, have existed on the spectrum of transgender identities, something that is obviously quite difficult to definitively prove.[173] However, in drawing the conclusion that the deceased was a 'warrior woman', Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson, Neil Price et al. preclude any alternate interpretations, as well as possibilities as yet to be conceived, in favour of reinforcing the narrative which maintains that societies in the early medieval north reflect our own hetero-normative and patriarchal structures. This is true even for the 2019 'reassessment' article. Hedenstierna-Jonson, Price et al. admit that other readings are possible but simultaneously shut them down: 'while we understand [a transgendered reading] in the context of contemporary social debates, it should be remembered that this is a modern, politicised, intellectual and Western term, and, as such, is problematic (some would say impossible) to apply to the people of the more remote past'.[174] Furthermore, in Price's most recent monograph, he maintains that, while scholars must remain open to complexity, he also argues that 'if scholars are prepared to claim that even a single male-bodied individual buried with numerous weapons can be gendered as a man and interpreted as a warrior […] then they must be prepared to come to the same conclusion if the sex determination is different'.[175] Although this maintains a veneer of academic integrity and equality on the basis of archaeological evidence alone, it achieves the opposite effect. Price maintains that, however rare, 'there really were female warriors in the Viking Age'.[176]

---

[171] Jóhanna, *Valkyrie,* p. 59.
[172] Jóhanna, *Women in Old Norse Literature,* pp. 8-9.
[173] Ibid., pp. 59-60.
[174] Hedenstierna-Jonson and Price, et. al., 'Viking Warrior Women?' p. 191.
[175] Neil Price, *The Children of Ash and Elm: A History of the Vikings,* (London: Allen Lane, 2020), pp. 326-330 at p. 329.
[176] Ibid., p. 330.

It is important to remember that these views have been met with criticism, thus the opinions of the authors are not universally shared across the discipline of medieval studies.[177] However, considering the impact this result has had on the discussion of gender roles and identities during the Viking Age within academia and the public eye, as well as the prevalence to favour popular depictions of women in warrior roles within the media, it would be remiss not to engage with it critically.[178] With the scale of this impact in mind, Hedenstierna-Jonson, Price et al.'s resistance to broadening the scope for interpretation beyond 'warrior woman' is telling. Birka 581 was considered spectacular even before this discovery, and in defence of their conclusion, Hedenstierna-Jonson, Price et al. question why it is that, in the long history of archaeological excavation and reporting, experts have not questioned the site's status as a 'warrior burial' until the individual was revealed to be a biological woman.[179] While this is a valid question, it may be more useful instead to ask: could it be that that the interest generated by the discovery only exists because of – to borrow a useful term from Brunning – the 'male flavour' of the resting place? After all, this is not the first instance of an osteological women buried with a wide array of luxury items.[180] Furthermore, 'cross-gendered' burials in which osteologically sexed men are interred with 'female' goods, such as the individual found in grave 9 at the Viking Age site of Vivallen, Sweden, have not generated anywhere near as much public or academic interest.[181] The existence of linen textile in Vivallen 9 is remarkable, given the rarity of textile survival; furthermore, it is this linen, alongside a number of beads, a needle case, and other items of jewellery which leads Price to suggest that the man was buried clothed as a Nordic woman, while the 'male' items have Sámi origins, concluding that the

[177] The grounds for such critique is not always rooted in the issue of gender – see above, n. 67 regarding the separation of swords and 'warrior' identities.
[178] Of the more recent depictions of viking warrior women, the most high-profile is likely to be Lagertha from The History Channel's serialised historical drama, *Vikings* (2013). Although she is first depicted weaving at her loom, it is her role as a warrior that is most arresting for today's audience.
[179] Hedenstierna-Jonson and Price et. al., 'Viking Warrior Women?', p. 192; c.f., Jóhanna, *Valkyrie*.
[180] I am referring to the remains of two women discovered in what is now known as the Oseberg Ship Burial. A useful overview of the history and interpretation of the burial site can be found in Per Holck, 'The Oseberg Ship Burial, Norway: New Thoughts on the Skeletons from the Grave Mound' *European Journal of Archaeology* 9 (2006), 185-210.
[181] Price, *The Viking Way: religion and war in late Iron Age Scandinavia,* (Uppsala: Aun. 31, 2002), pp. 271-272; see also Inger Zachrission and Verner Alexandersen, *Möten i gränsland: samer och germaner i Mellanskandinavien,* (Stockholm, Sweden: Statens Historiska Museum, 1997).

'cross-dressing' and 'sexually transgressive' aspects of this burial are indicative of a shamanic identity in life.[182] Birka 581 and Vivallen 9 are both examples of 'cross-gendered' graves which can be dated to the Viking Age, and yet one is unknown beyond scholarly circles, while the other is seen to 'prove', 'confirm, or 'recover' the existence of women warriors.

The difference between the wider reception of these two burials is indicative of the systemic social and cultural bias that privileges that which is perceived to be 'masculine' above all else. Despite the caution and awareness that most archaeologists have in connecting lived identity with material items, there is still – conscious or not – a positive bias towards what traditional methods consider to be masculine, such as the weapons, horse, and game pieces uncovered in Birka 581. Just as in recent saga scholarship where there has been a disproportionate amount of attention dedicated to a particular 'type' of female character, eliding the significance of female characters who manage to avoid the trappings of misogynistic stereotypes, so too is there a disproportionate focus on recovering what is perceived to be 'masculine' history and culture, even when the evidence for that history is inscribed on the body of an osteological woman. Rather than allow for the possibility that Viking Age and medieval society was less patriarchal or gender-normative than so far assumed, it is somehow more acceptable to champion a narrative that is largely unsupported (or at least, not straightforwardly so) by contemporaneous written, visual and material sources.

So far this chapter has examined how a specific iteration of femininity that promotes domesticity, self-containment and obedience – referred to here as 'modern normative femininity' – came to be associated with domestic textile-making practices. Parker has shown how, in the nineteenth century, embroidery became an essential feature of social, cultural and moral conceptions of femininity, the feminine ideal and the feminine stereotype. The influence of nineteenth-century thought on modern social structures has been lasting, as evidenced by the fact that in scholarship on medieval textiles, the association of women with modern femininity (which is also accepted as Old Norse femininity) and textile-making practices is still considered to be innate. Although re-imagined as a mode

[182] Price, *The Viking Way,* p. 172.

of female empowerment, Karen Bek-Pedersen's argument that spinning and weaving are akin to the supposedly nurturing and procreative powers of the womb is reminiscent of Freud's suggestion that women invented weaving in order to create a more effective disguise for their lack of a penis, by weaving or plaiting their pubic hair. Not only do we now understand the relationship between sex, gender and identity to be neither fixed or innate, but we also understand that a womb does not always indicate a woman. Like femininity, 'womanhood' is largely socially constructed; the same can be said of the 'innate' relationship between women and textiles.

This chapter has also explored why certain iterations of femininity or womanhood are considered to be more important than others. Jóhanna tangibly demonstrates that the female characters who receive the majority of scholarly attention above others are 'exaggerated' in some way, as 'scapegoated victims of the patriarchy', or as 'idealized shield-maidens' (following Jochens' categorisation). She is critical of this hetero-patriarchal approach, which has prevailed despite its interrogative origins. She argues for an alternative way of interpreting power – what it is, who can access it, the ways in which it manifests – and advocates for an intersectional understanding of women in Old Norse literature. However, the association between women, textiles and modern normative femininity is so prevalent that even Jóhanna views 'needlework' as a punishment upon returning from aberrant feminine behaviour. This is only to be expected, when the importance of men and masculine pursuits is repeatedly reinforced, as can be seen in the academic and popular reception of the Birka 'Viking Warrior Woman', and the non-reception of the man buried with a needle case and some jewellery in Vivallen.

Textile scholarship has, so far, focussed on the relationship between textiles and women in what seems to be an attempt to 'recover' lost, forgotten or ignored voices of the early medieval period, voices which are not so easily found in the few written sources which have survived. Just like women, textiles do indeed speak; however, due to the dominant epistemological structures which underpin medieval studies as a discipline – colonialism, misogyny and cis-hetero-normativity – it is difficult to separate both women and textiles from modern normative femininity. In the attempt to counter the narrative that the early

medieval period was dominated by men and masculinity, textile scholarship has perhaps placed too much emphasis on the connection between textiles and women, without interrogating what is meant by the category 'woman'. Furthermore, in crafting a relationship of exclusivity between particular expressions of gender and material items/practice, scholarship has inadvertently restricted the scope for further inquiry. If the study of textiles is synonymous with the study of women, and women are not perceived to be of equal interest or value compared with men (due to the epistemological structures that govern institutional authorities), it naturally follows that, despite their economic, artistic and cultural worth, textiles are also perceived to be of lesser value compared with 'male' materiality, such as weapons or written texts. What follows is a re-examination of Old Norse femininity and its relationship with *hannyrðir* as depicted in *The Poetic Edda,* before exploring how textiles can be used to read Old Norse femininity and power in *Kormáks saga*.

Poetic Representations of Textiles and Femininity

The historic, material relationship between women and textile-work enables the female characters of the *Íslendingasögur* to negotiate the patriarchal boundaries of their society in such a way that their subversive behaviour often goes unnoticed by critics. As noted by Jóhanna, it is only a select few 'extraordinary' types of women who receive attention.[183] What makes them 'extraordinary' is that they do not behave 'like women' (i.e., they are not 'feminine'), in contrast to women who behave in a way which is perceived to be womanly or feminine (in terms of modern norms) are 'ordinary'. Some elements of this have been explored by Jóhanna and Clover in relation to the *meykongar,* 'maiden kings'.[184] *Meykongar,* while wise, eloquent and able to engage in skilled textile-work, such as embroidery, 'show autonomy by disobeying their fathers, mistreating suitors, and pursuing their own agenda'.[185] Their display of agency is not in keeping with the expectations of women which is championed in romance (the genre in which *meykongar* typically feature), thus – as Jóhanna puts it – they need to be 'subdued

[183] Jóhanna, *Women in Old Norse Literature,* p. 7.
[184] Clover, 'Maiden Warriors and Other Sons', and Jóhanna, *Women in Old Norse Literature.*
[185] Jóhanna, *Women in Old Norse Literature,* p. 108. C.f., Clark and Jóhanna, 'The representation of gender in eddic poetry', pp. 335-337.

and assimilated' into the appropriate female role.[186] When assimilation is achieved it can often be signalled by a 'return' to the appropriately feminine occupation of embroidery.[187]

The needle as a symbol of appropriate feminine behaviour can be seen in various contemporaneous sources in both Old Norse and Old English. For example there is a passage in the Old English gnomic poem *Maxims I* which is dedicated to the behaviour of lay-women:

> Fæmne æt hyre bordan geriseð;
> widgongel wif word gespringeð,
> oft hy mon wommun bilihð,
> hæleð hy hospe mænað, oft hyre hleor abreoþeð
>
> ('It suits a woman to be at her embroidery; a wandering woman provokes gossip. Often she is accused of moral impurity, men bemoan her, often her face [beauty] fades').[188]
>
> (*Maxims I* A. XXXI-XXXI. 63-65).

It is clear that an audience is meant to directly compare the two women, one of whom behaves appropriately (because it 'suits' her to be at her embroidery) while the other invites gossip and moral impurity for not sitting at her textile-work, traits which are similar to those of idealised modern femininity. An Old Norse example of virtuous femininity enacted through embroidery occurs in the Eddic poem *Guðrúnarkviða Ǫnnor.* Guðrún recounts her tragic story to King Þjóðrekr, recalling that, after Sigurðr's death, she stayed for seven 'half years' with Þóra, daughter of Hákon *goði:*

> Sat ec með Þóro siau misseri,
> dotr Háconar, í Danmorco;
> hon mér at gamni gullbócaði
> sali suðrona oc svani dansca.
>
> Hǫfðo við á scriptom, þat. er scatar léco,
> oc á hannyrðom hilmis þegna,
> randir rauðar, recca Húna,

[186] Ibid.
[187] Ibid., pp. 30-31.
[188] R. W. Chambers, Max Förster and Robin Flower (eds.), *The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry,* (London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Co. Ltd., 1933). Translation my own; for an alternative, open access translation which renders the OE 'bordan' as 'table' rather than 'embroidery', see Aaron K. Hostetter, *Old English Poetry Project,* https://oldenglishpoetry.camden.rutgers.edu/maxims-i/ [accessed 8th November 2017].

hiordrót, hiálmdrót, hilmis fylgio.

Scip Sigmundar scriðo frá landi,
gylta grímor, grafnir stafnar;
byrðo við á borða, þat er þeir bǫrðuz,
Sigarr oc Siggeirr, suðr á Fíoni.

Þá frá Grímildr, gotnesc kona,
hvat ev væra hyggiuð;
hon brá borða oc buri heimti,
þrágiarnliga, þess at spyria,
hverr vildi son systor bota,
eða ver veginn vildi gialda

('I sat with Thora seven half-years,/ Hakon's daughter in Denmark;/ she embroidered in gold for my pleasure/ southern halls and Danish swans./ We also made pictures of men's war-play together,/ and the warriors of the prince on our handiwork;/ red shields, Hunnish fighters,/ sword-warriors, helmet-warriors, the retinue of the prince./ The ships of Sigmund glided from the land,/ fierce wild boar inlaid on the prows;/ we showed in our weaving how they fought/ Sigar and Siggeir, south in Fion./ Then Grimhild learned, queen of the Goths,/ what my state of mind was;/ she stopped embroidering and called to her sons,/ insistently she asked this:/ which man would compensate the sister for her son, who would pay for the slain husband?').

(*Guðrúnarkviða Ǫnnor,* XIV-XVIII, 51-68).

It is significant that in the midst of recounting the murder of her first husband and her coercion into marrying Atli, Guðrún spends four strophes on the subject of *hannyrðir*. From the details that she provides, it is clear that Guðrún and Þóra are embroidering or weaving a tapestry which depicts Sigurðr's origins and exploits.[189] While this can certainly be seen as a grieving and memorialisation process, it is significant that Grímhildr is also shown to be at her embroidery/weaving – or, more specifically, she is shown to put her work aside (*byrðo við á borða*) in order to manipulate her daughter into a new marriage.[190] Within the context of *Guðrúnarkviða Ǫnnor,* textile-work appears to coincide with liminality, periods of time between events in which women are suspended in motion. When Grímhildr ceases her textile-work, this signals the end of Guðrún's

[189] For an idea of what this literary tapestry might have looked like, see surviving early medieval Scandinavian examples such as the Överhogdal tapestries or the Oseberg tapestry fragments.
[190] However, see Clark and Jóhanna for a different, less negative reading of Grímhildr's actions in 'The representation of gender in eddic poetry', p. 342.

liminal state as well as her time at the loom, because her mother becomes – to borrow a term from *Maxims I* – a 'wandering woman', a woman who takes an active role in the shaping of her family's narrative. Furthermore, we do not witness Guðrún at her textile-work after her time in Þóra's hall; there follows instead a narrative of violence, culminating in her murdering her sons by Atli and feeding them to him, before killing him as he lies in bed.[191] While both of these women are at their *hannyrðir*, they perform appropriate feminine behaviour; when they set their work aside, they become agitators, working on behalf of their own motives. However, while Guðrún and Grímhildr seem to adhere to the convention that a sewing needle is synonymous with normative femininity, neither woman is 'normative', and neither are their interactions with textiles.

In another Eddic poem, *Helreið Brynhildar,* Brynhildr has killed herself, supposedly from grief, and is riding her chariot to Hel.[192] Just as with Guðrún in *Guðrúnarkviða Qnnor,* while grief may certainly have played a role, it is a misrepresentation to suggest that it is the only reason, given the heroic themes which are explored in the 'heroic' cycle of poems in the *The Poetic Edda.*[193] During her journey, she encounters a giantess who recounts Brynhildr's actions in life with disapproval:

> Scaltu í gognom ganga eigi
> grióti studda garða mina
> betr semði þér borða at rekia
> heldr enn vitia vers annarrrar
>
> ('"You shall not journey through/ my homestead set with stone;/ it would befit you better to be at your weaving/ than to be going to visit another woman's man"').
>
> (*Helreið Brynhildar,* I, 1-4).

The efficacy of the giantess' insult functions on a couple of levels. The intertextual, cross-generational nature of the narrative known as the 'Sigurðr cycle' means that there are multiple cognates of Brynhildr, making her a 'composite' character built from a number of sources. There are overlaps and conflicts within the cycle of the

[191] See discussion about Guðrún Gjúkadóttir by Clark, *Gender, Violence and the Past,* pp. 17-45.
[192]Andrew Orchard, *The Elder Edda: A Book of Viking Lore,* (London: Penguin, 2011), p. 327.
[193] As discussed by Clark in *Gender, Violence and the Past.*

eddic heroic poems, while some of the narrative 'gaps' of the *Poetic Edda* are supplemented by material from the late thirteenth-century *Völsunga saga.* In the poem *Grípisspá,* which is a summary of Sigurðr's story, Grípir recites a prophecy in which he predicts the course of Sigurðr's future, stating that after slaying Fáfnir he will discover a sleeping warrior (XV, 62-3) whose armour he must cut open so that she may wake up and teach him wisdom. This warrior is a valkyrie called Sigrdrífa, and her role in Sigurðr's story is recounted in *Sigrdrífumál.* Shortly after this, Grípir predicts Sigurðr's first and fateful encounter with Brynhildr (XXVII, 111-14); as Carolyne Larrington observes, *Grípisspá* preserves the distinction between Sigrdrífa and Brynhildr, which is characteristic of the subsequent poems in the cycle.[194] This distinction is collapsed in the later saga when Brynhildr is both the sleeping valkyrie as well as a woman in the court of her foster-father, Heimir.[195] Despite these significant differences, however, there is a consistency in the presentation of Brynhildr/Sigrdrífa's relationship with textiles/textile-making processes, which goes some way in illuminating why, in *Helreið Brynhildar,* the giantess' suggestion that Brynhildr return to her weaving is a clever insult.

On the one hand it could be read as a confirmation that modern norms of femininity are present in Old Norse texts, as it draws on the over-simplified connection between women, femininity and textiles, as explored already in relation to *Maxims I* and *Guðrúnarkviða Qnnor,* acting as a dismissive reminder of a woman's place within the patriarchy (i.e., quietly occupied in domestic labour for the benefit of men).[196] On the other hand, a closer look at the intertextual contexts of this poem provides further illumination. It could be argued that the giantess is alluding to events recounted in *Sigrdrífumál,* when Sigrdrífa/Brynhildr tells Sigurðr how she used to be a valkyrie until she defied Óðinn and chose for herself who should die:

> Sigrdrífa feldi Hiálm-Gunnar í orrostonni. Enn Óðinn stacc hana svefnþorni í hefnd þess oc qvað hana aldri scyldo síðan sigr vega í orrosto oc qvað hana giptaz scyldo'

---

[194] Larrington, *The Poetic Edda,* p. 282, n. 146.
[195] Ibid., p. 172-3.
[196] An utterance of a similarly belittling nature occurs in Homer's *Odyssey,* when Telemachus commands his mother, Penelope, to return to her weaving after she spoke 'out of turn' in, Homer, *Odyssey,* 2 vols., trans. by A. T. Murray, rev. by George E. Dimock, Loeb Classical Library 104 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), I. p. 39.

> ('Sigrdrifa brought down Helmet-Gunnar in battle. And Odin pricked her with a sleep-thorn in revenge for this and said that she would never again fight victoriously in battle and said that she should be married').[197]
>
> (*Sigrdrífumál,* prose, 11-14).

The 'demotion' from valkyrie to wife is interesting on its own, as it operates on the axes of both gender and class ('warrior-class' to 'warrior-adjacent');[198] but the detail which compounds the punishment, adding an extra layer of mockery to the giantess' insult is Óðinn's use of the *svefnþorn* to induce her enchanted sleep. There is some debate surrounding what object is meant by the term *svefnþorn,* ranging from a literal thorn from a rose bush to a spindle.[199] Else Mundal argues emphatically for the spindle interpretation, on the basis of a kenning which occurs in *Sigrdrífumál,* I. 5, *hrafns hrælundir,* 'sharp stick of the raven'.[200] She points out that *hrafn,* 'raven', is a *heiti* for Óðinn, and *hrælundir,* once separated into *hræll* + *undr*, can be interpreted as 'stick of misfortune.'[201] Furthermore, she suggests that here is a connection between *hræl* in *Sigrdrífumál* and *hrælaðr* in the poem *Darraðarljóð* II. 8, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four of this thesis. *Hrælaðr* is identified as a shed rod, although other interpretations have been made.[202] Regardless of the exact form and function of the weaving equipment being alluded to, Mundal demonstrates how a specific iteration of textile imagery – that is to say, textiles and textile-creation as fatalistic, powerful and violent – operates within valkyrie narratives. In *Darraðarljóð,* weaving implements are cognate with weaponry, so there is already a precedent which allows for the

---

[197] Larrington, p. 167; *Völsunga saga* repeats this almost verbatim in chapter twenty, replacing Sigrdrífa with Brynhildr, Magnus Olsen, *Völsunga saga ok Ragnars saga loðbrókar,* (Copenhagen: Kongelige Bibliotek, 1906 – 1908).

[198] For an interesting discussion of warrior class and textiles, see Cavell, *Weaving Words and Binding Bodies,* pp. 15-67.

[199] See Klaus von See, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda,* 7 vols. (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 1997), V, pp. 539, 549 and 550 for more information on the function of the sleep-thorn motif.

[200] Else Mundal, 'Sigrdrífumál Strofe 1', *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi,* 87 (1972), 122-129, p. 128. It is important to bear in mind that 'spindle' is not the only interpretation; Finnur Jónsson favours 'corpse' in *Sæmundar Edda: Eddukvæði,* (Reykjavík: Kostnaðarmaður Sigurður Krístjansson, 1926), pp. 306-315, an interpretation which is repeated by subsequent translators, such as Carolyne Larrington, *The Poetic Edda,* pp. 166, 284, n. 166.

[201] Mundal, 'Sigrdrífumál' pp. 127, 128.

[202] Ibid., p. 128. See Marta Hoffmann, *The Warp-Weighted Loom: Studies in the History and Technology of an Ancient Implement,* (Oslo: Robin and Russ Handweavers, 1964). However it should be noted that Holtsmark attributes the term *yllir* to the shed rod in 'Vefr Darraðar', an interpretation accepted by Elsa E. Guðjónsson in '*Járnvarðr Yllir*: A Fourth Weapon of the Valkyries in *Darraðarljóð?*', *Textile History* 2 (1989), 185-197, as well as by Russell Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace: A Study in Skaldic Narrative,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), at p. 133.

reverse interpretation to exist in *Sigrdrífumál*, where a weapon known as a *svefnþorn* is a textile tool: a spindle.

Unlike in *Darraðarljóð,* however, the textile-weapon does not belong to the valkyrie, but is rather used against her by Óðinn as punishment for her aberrant behaviour. When she exerts her own wishes and chooses for herself which warrior will fall (a choice which goes directly against Óðinn), she is forcibly 'returned to the needle', using an implement related to the ones that she – and other valkyries – are known to weaponize: 'enn Óðinn stacc hana svefnþorni' ('And Odin pricked her with a sleep-thorn') (*Sigrdrífumál* IV. 12). When 'sleep-thorn' is replaced with 'spindle', not only do certain folkloric elements become clear, but it also becomes difficult to maintain the direct correlation between femininity and textiles that has been explored in Old Norse texts so far.[203] For example, Carl Phelpstead observes the reversal of normative gender roles via the means of a *svefnþorn* in *Hrólfs saga kraka*: 'Ólof humiliates Helgi the would-be rapist by penetrating one of his bodily orifices with the (phallic) sleep-thorn.'[204] Ólof is a female ruler, a position which is roughly cognate with the *meykongar* discussed above, although *Hrólfs saga kraka* is a legendary saga rather than a romance. She does not intend to marry, which is of course seen as a challenge by Helgi. In order to overcome him she gets him drunk and stabs him with a sleep-thorn, before shaving his head and packing him off back to his ship, tied in a sack.[205] Understanding the sleep-thorn as a spindle casts this scene in a different light, one where Ólof's ability to overcome her adversary is not solely reliant on the 'masculine' qualities of physical power and tactical cleverness.[206] The spindle-as-weapon undermines the idea that textiles and textile-making are inherently normative in their relationship with femininity, because – as Ólof demonstrates – during a battle of wills, the spindle can be just as effective as a sword in defeating an adversary.

But what about when the spindle's power is turned against a woman? While Óðinn punishes Sigrdrífa (and Brynhildr) by supposedly returning them to a

---

[203] See Mundal, 'Sigrdrífumál', pp. 122-123 and von See, *Kommentar,* p. 539, n.8 for comparisons between the sleeping valkyrie motif and the folk tale 'Sleeping Beauty' (ATU 410).
[204] Carl Phelpstead, 'Hair Today, Gone Tomorrow: Hair Loss, the Tonsure and Masculinity in Medieval Iceland', *Scandinavian Studies* 85 (2013), 1-19, p. 4; See also Jóhanna, *Women in Old Norse Literature,* pp. 110-111.
[205] Guðni Jónsson (ed.,) *Hrólfs saga kraka ok kappa hans* in *Fornaldar sögur Norðulanda,* 4 vols., (Reykjavík: Íslendingasaganaútgáfan, 1954), I., pp. 1-105, pp. 15-16.
[206] Jóhanna, *Women in Old Norse Literature,* pp. 107-133, particularly pp. 112-116.

normative role associated with their biological gender, the valkyrie does not meekly accept his sentence. Just as she resists his wishes regarding which warrior should die, so too does she defy the humiliation intended for her: before Óðinn stabs her with the spindle, she tells him that she has vowed to 'never marry a man who was acquainted with fear' (*Sigrdrífumál,* prose IV. 4 – 5).
Sigrdrífa's/Brynhildr's rejection and dismissal of Óðinn's attempted humiliation raises a number of questions surrounding Old Norse femininity, power, agency and their intersections with textiles. As the narrative of the Sigurðr cycle demonstrates, when the sleeping valkyrie is roused, Sigurðr's tragic fate is placed in the hands of a woman more used to holding a weapon than a spindle, although as already discussed, it is clear that weapons and textile-tools in poetry could be closely associated with one another. Although she will never scout the battlefield as she used to, it does not mean that she will not drag those around her into a cycle of honour, violence and revenge, culminating in her dramatic ride to Hel, where a giantess will tell her, 'betr semði þér borða at rekia' ('it would befit you better to be at your weaving'). Both Brynhildr and her poetic cognate, Sigrdrífa, show that even when a woman is forced to occupy a role reminiscent of modern femininity, symbolised literally and figuratively by a spindle, she can still exert her will and impact those around her, regardless of her involvement with textile-making processes.[207]

Jóhanna has argued that a 'return' to the needle can be interpreted as a 'return' to normative femininity for the *meykongar,* as well as – arguably – other mythic and legendary female characters.[208] However, as my discussion of Sigrdrífa and Brynhildr shows, textile-work is not always synonymous with normativity, gendered or otherwise. While it may seem that women who occupy themselves with textile-production are 'normative' in their *performance* of femininity, as explored in relation to *Maxims I,* there is simply more to it. In *Guðrúnarkviða Ǫnnor,* Guðrún performs her grief by creating a tapestry for three and a half years; during that time she appears to be a grieving widow, but there is a certain element of resistance in her textile occupation because she is able to postpone her eventual

[207] Brynhildr does not entirely reject weaving, as she is depicted creating a tapestry of Sigurðr's deed in *Völsunga saga* 24.
[208] Jóhanna, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, pp. 30-31.

re-marriage. Furthermore her mother, Grímhildr, is also shown to put aside her textile-work, *byrðo við á borða,* by which the poet suggests that, prior to the moment she decides to intervene in Guðrún's life (again), she was occupied by *hannyrðir.* This is of particular interest when interrogating the association between textiles and normative femininity, both Old Norse and modern, because Grímhildr is a powerful matriarch who engineers the marriage between Sigurðr and Guðrún by means of sorcery, causing Sigurðr to forget any promise he made to Brynhildr. Therefore she is, in part, responsible for instigating the events that culminate in his death. Grímhildr and Guðrún are exaggerated heroic archetypes, almost to the point of parody, and yet they both engage in textile-work; it is therefore reductive to suggest that textiles are *always* synonymous with modern normative femininity, because even if scenes of *hannyrðir* provide breaks within the cycle of violence within the Sigurðr narrative, the women who engage in the practice – Guðrún, Grímhildr, Brynhildr and Sigrdrífa – are the same women who enact and maintain that cycle.

Old Norse poetic depictions of female characters and their relationship with textile-work reveal a hitherto unrecognised and unacknowledged complexity. The above examples demonstrate that attitudes towards women and textiles varied. They range from one that is perhaps familiar to a modern audience (because it bears a resemblance to the attitude that has reached us via the Victorians), to others that entirely complicate it. If there is one thing that has been made clear from this discussion, it is that textiles and textile-making have associations which go beyond gender. *Guðrúnarkviða Ǫnnor, Sigrdrífumál* and *Helreið Brynhildar* show *hannyrðir* in relation to Jóhanna's (thus Weber's) model of power. Although far from straightforward, this relationship reveals that textiles and textile-making can be used by a character to impose their will on another, regardless of whether the imposition is successful or not.[209] Weapons and textile-tools are somewhat interchangeable in poetic, legendary and romantic narratives, which suggests that both were viewed as instruments of power.[210] In light of this altered understanding of textiles and textile-making processes in the Old Norse cultural imagination, I will now illustrate how textiles can be used to engage critically and

[209] Ibid., pp. 8-9; Weber, p.53.
[210] This will be further explored in Chapter Four of this thesis.

meaningfully with the women of the *Íslendingasögur.* I will show that it is precisely her connection with *hannyrðir* that enables Steingerðr to assert her personal agency in *Kormáks saga.*

(Not) Sewing Clothes and Personal Agency: Steingerðr Þórkellsdóttir

Kormáks saga was written down in the early thirteenth century, and is widely accepted to be one of the 'poets' sagas', in which a hero-poet gains fame and material wealth in exchange for his verse.[211] Kormákr is introduced to his future love, Steingerðr at the beginning of the saga. After spending some time together, Kormákr returns to his mother's house and, 'bað móður sína gera sér góð klæði að Steingerði mætti sem best á hann lítast.' ('[He] asked his mother to make him fine clothes, so that he might appear to Steingerd in the best possible light').[212] However, while this is a relatively normal request from a son looking to gain a wife, Dalla (his mother) warns that no good can come of Kormákr pursuing Steingerðr. This warning turns out to be true when, two chapters later, he slays the sons of the witch, Þórveig, who avenges them by cursing Kormákr to never be with Steingerðr.[213] This curse hangs in the air until eventually Steingerðr's father, Þórkell, consents to their betrothal, upon which Kormákr's feelings suddenly 'cool', leading him to miss his own wedding day. I do not suggest that the clothes that Dalla (implicitly) makes for her son are responsible for the direction of the saga, but I do wish to highlight that the saga author chooses to foreshadow the ensuing tragic narrative at the exact moment that Kormákr requests new clothes. Dalla acts as a mouthpiece through which this important shift in narrative direction is expressed.[214] This exchange is indicative of the subversive potential of textiles, especially at the intersection between textiles, gender and power, as it further

---

[211] Another of the 'poets' sagas', *Hallfreðar saga,* will be discussed in Chapter Three.
[212] *Kormáks saga* 3 in *Vatnsdæla saga*, Einar Ól., (ed.), Íslenzk Fornrit 8 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1958), pp. 201-302, p. 215.
[213] Ibid., 'Þórveig mælti: "Það er líkast að því komir þú á leið að eg verði héraðflótta en synir mínir óbættir en því skal eg þér launa að þú skalt Steingerðar aldrei njóta."' [Þórveig replied: "There's nothing more likely than that you'll arrange things so that I'm compelled to flee from the district, with my sons unatoned for; but this is how I'll pay you back for it: you will never enjoy Steingerd's love"] *Kormáks saga* 5, pp. 221-222. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are derived from Robert Cook et. al (eds.) and Rory McTurk (trans.), *Kormak's Saga,* in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, 5 vols., (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfan Leifur Eiríksson, 1997), I., pp. 179-224, p. 187.
[214] Women characters also act as a mouthpiece through which social values, destructive or cohesive, can be expressed. See Jóhanna, *Women in Old Norse Literature,* pp. 15-16.

challenges the assumption that textiles are synonymous with modern normative femininity. The result of Dalla's textile-related labour (the new clothes) is important to Kormákr's success in pursuing Steingerðr, otherwise the request would not be mentioned in the narrative. However, instead of forging positive social ties, the co-existence of the warning and the clothing suggests that Old Norse audiences attributed a broader set of values to textiles and textile production than has so far been assumed.[215] The clothes are a material representation of Dalla's prophetic speech, inextricably linked with the discord and strife that she has foreseen. In order to illustrate this further, I will now turn to a similar scene which occurs later on in the saga, where Kormákr requests Steingerðr to make him a shirt.[216] While Steingerðr does not explicitly refuse his request, it is clear from her response that Kormákr has crossed a socially demarcated line. This scene marks a turning point, shifting the narrative focus from two lovers who are kept apart by forces greater than themselves, to Kormákr's futile and one-sided pursuit of a romantic relationship. However, I will also argue that, in framing a key moment of the narrative with the everyday, domestic and supposedly feminine setting of making clothes, the saga author and audience may have been aware of the association between textiles and power that contemporary critics have, so far, not fully explored. Not only does this operate at a narrative level, much like it does with Dalla, but it is also a reflection of Steingerðr's personal agency, something which she is largely assumed not to possess.

When Kormákr and Steingerðr first meet, it is obvious that they share a mutual attraction, as observed by Steingerðr's companion.[217] It is after this initial meeting, which takes place over two days, that Kormákr requests new clothes from Dalla. Her warnings regarding Steingerðr's father, Þórkell, are immediately borne out at the start of the next chapter, which marks the beginning of external forces acting against them.[218] Þórkell enlists the help of Oddr and Guðmundr (the sons of

---

[215] Jane Schneider and A. Weiner, *Cloth and Human Experience,* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989).
[216] *Kormáks saga* 17, pp. 263-265.
[217] *Kormáks saga* 3, pp. 206-215.
[218] "Þórkell spyr nú brátt hvað um er að vera og þykir sér horfa til óvirðingar og dóttur sinni ef Kormákur vill þetta eigi meir festa, sendir eftir Steingerði og fer hún heim" ("Thorkel soon heard how matters stood [between Kormak and Steingerd], and it seems to him that there was a prospect of dishonour to himself and his daughter if Kormak would not make the situation more definite. He sent for Steingerd, and she went home"), *Kormáks saga* 4, p. 216; *Kormak's Saga* 4, p. 184. Jóhanna

the witch, Þórveig) by inciting them to ambush Kormákr. The saga narrator goes on to describe how Þórkell lures his daughter away from the main room and locks her away. When Kormákr locates Steingerðr, she warns him of her father's intentions.[219] From Þórkell's efforts to Steingerðr's warnings, it is clear that she desires Kormákr's advances at this point of the saga, which may go some way to explain why Þórkell instigates a second ambush; the only way to prevent their relationship is if Kormákr dies.

Kormákr survives the second ambush, yet it is this victory in combat that ensures his overall defeat in romance, as it is at this point in the narrative that Þórveig curses Kormákr. He and Steingerðr get engaged anyway, but because of the curse, he does not attend his own wedding.[220] Although we do not learn of Steingerðr's feelings on this matter, it is clear that her father and brother consider Kormákr's behaviour dishonourable, which is why they arrange for her to marry another man, Bersi.[221] The saga narrator emphasises that this arrangement was forced upon Steingerðr, by stating: 'og er þeir komu norður til Þorkels var þegar snúið að boði svo að þar fór engi frétt af um héraðið um þetta mál. Þetta var mjög gert í móti vilja Steingerðar' ('and when they arrived in the north at Thorkel's, the wedding feast had been prepared for in such a way that no news got around the district about this matter. This was very much done against Steingerd's wishes').[222]

Kormákr does not learn of Steingerðr's marriage until it is too late to prevent it. Although he is so angry that he strikes the messenger, he becomes less aggressive when he learns that Steingerðr was not complicit in the arrangement. The significance of this detail will be explored shortly.[223] Following on from this is a series of arguments, negotiations and duels, in which Kormákr tries to win Steingerðr back. It is clear from the fact that Steingerðr marries Bersi 'against her wishes' that she wants Kormákr to involve himself. For example, upon learning from Bersi after the first duel that he – not Kormákr – is the victor, Steingerðr

observes that Þórkell's behaviour is in keeping with that of a parent concerned with the reputation of their daughter *as a reflection of their own social standing* (emphasis my own), Jóhanna, *Valkyrie,* p. 46.

[219] *Kormáks saga* 5, p. 220; *Kormak's Saga* 5, p. 186.
[220] *Kormáks saga* 6, p. 223; *Kormak's Saga* 6, p. 188.
[221] *Kormáks saga* 7, p. 225; *Kormak's Saga* 7, pp. 188-189.
[222] *Kormáks saga* 7, p. 226; *Kormak's Saga* 7, p. 189.
[223] *Kormáks saga* 7, p. 227; *Kormak's Saga* 7, p. 190.

remains completely silent.[224] In fact, as is often the case in this saga, it is more accurate to say that Steingerðr's reaction is non-existent, as the narrative generally bypasses her to focus on Kormákr's actions. Although silence is often conceived as a lack of communication and agency, especially within a society which values speech and action, Kirsten Wolf has observed that although sagas and *Þættir* are 'poor in emotional vocabulary […] this poverty is compensated for by making facial expressions signifiers of emotion'.[225] All non-verbal and somatic indicators have the potential to communicate a wide range of significations.[226] This methodology is particularly useful when attempting to construct the internal worlds of 'quieter' female characters. As can be seen in the example of Steingerðr's 'non-reaction', very little attention is given to them.[227] Therefore, while it is by no means certain that Steingerðr's non-reaction is indicative of her feelings towards Bersi's victory, when we take into account that her behaviour so far has indicated her preference for Kormákr, it is reasonable to assume that her silence can be interpreted as something like disappointment.

Alternatively it could indicate shame or embarrassment at Kormákr's failure, as he is the one she is known to prefer. The idea that she is embarrassed by her ex-lover's behaviour is strengthened when, after a number of rematches, Bersi receives an emasculating injury to his buttocks. It is said that, 'við þessa atburði lagði Steingerður leiðindi á við Bersa og vill skilja við hann' ('as a result of these events, Steingerd conceived a dislike for Bersi and wished to divorce him').[228] Her parting words allude to the reason for her desire to separate: '"Fyrst varstu kallaður Eyglu-Bersi en þá Hólmgöngu-Bersi en nú máttu að sönnu heita Rassa-Bersi"' ('"You were first known as Loop-Eyed Bersi, and then as Bersi the Dueller, but now you may in truth be called Arse-Bersi"').[229] Gareth Evans elaborates on the

---

[224] *Kormáks saga* 11, p. 239; *Kormak's Saga* 11, p. 195.
[225] Kirsten Wolf, 'Somatic Semiotics: Emotions and the Human Face in the Sagas and *þættir* of Icelanders' *Traditio* 69 (2014), 125-145, p. 125; 'Not Spoken: Women and Silence in the Sagas and *þættir* of Icelanders', The 17th International Saga Conference, Háskóli Íslands, 2018.
[226] Regarding silence as emotional manipulation, see Sif Rikhardsdottir, *Emotion in Old Norse Literature: Translations, Voices, Contexts,* Studies in Old Norse Literature, ed. by Sif Rikardsdottir and Carolyne Larrington (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2017), pp. 28, 58, 65 and 94.
[227] However, Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir provides illuminating commentary on silence and non-reactions in the face of a suitor in 'Emotions of a Vulnerable Viking: Negotiations of Masculinity in *Egil's saga*', in *Masculinities in Old Norse Literature,* ed. by Gareth Evans and Jessica Clare Hancock, pp. 146-163, p. 158.
[228] *Kormáks saga* 13, p. 254; *Kormak's Saga* 13, p. 202.
[229] Ibid.

reasons why Steingerðr reacts in this way during his discussion of intersectional masculinities in the *Íslendingasögur.* He asserts that Bersi's injury can be seen as a *klámhögg,* a 'shame-blow'.[230] Drawing on Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, who defines a *klámhögg* as a 'symbolic action with a sexual component, corresponding to that of *nið*', Evans suggests that Steingerðr (and by extension, her wider kinship circle) sees Bersi's injury as a permanent blow to his masculinity.[231] Evans goes on to add: 'although Bersi later goes on to remarry, Steingerðr clearly regards the physical disability as a permanent impediment to his ability to inhabit a dominant masculine position.'[232] In light of this, a case can be made for Steingerðr's aforementioned silence to indicate embarrassment, as the man she has shown preference towards proves to be 'unmanly' when he loses against Bersi.

Steingerðr's silence is ambiguous, and there are few critical tools available to us that would conclusively determine her internal landscape. As Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir observes of Ásgerðr, Egill's object of affection in *Egil's saga Skallagrímssonar*, 'when he asks her to marry him, she does not disclose her opinion but simply refers the matter dutifully twice to her father and uncle to decide. Her failure to express approval when repeatedly given the chance can be taken to indicate that she is not too keen on marrying him, but she does not assert an opposition either.'[233] Brynja suggests that Ásgerðr is similar to the idealised ladies of courtly romance, an object of the hero's feelings and the 'cure' for his lovesickness.[234] However, in light of the discussion which has taken place in this chapter regarding modern and Old Norse femininity, textiles, and power, it is possible to glean a sense of Steingerðr's feelings. Considering her somatic and performative behaviour in the narrative so far, it might be reasonable to assume that she and Kormákr will marry. Her divorce from Bersi is accepted by wider society, and Kormákr has made no promises to other women. Their marriage, of course, does not happen. The saga narrator states that in the same summer that she left Bersi, another suitor arrives called Þorvaldr *tinteinn*.[235] Her family consent to the match, but what is of more significance is that Steingerðr is not explicitly

[230] Evans, *Men and Masculinities,* p. 88.
[231] Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man,* p. 68.
[232] Evans, *Men and Masculinities,* p. 88.
[233] Brynja, 'Emotions of a Vulnerable Viking', p. 158.
[234] Ibid.
[235] *Kormáks saga* 17, p. 264; *Kormak's Saga* 17, p. 207.

against her betrothal to Þorvaldr.[236] This reaction is in stark contrast to how she behaved ahead of her previous marriage. 'Lack of protest' is seemingly different in meaning compared to silence, or even a complete absence of reaction. In this context, then, it can be assumed that 'no protest' is, if not synonymous with assent, then at least analogous to it. Indeed, when compared to the significance attributed to her previous resistance, her lack of protest here speaks volumes.

When Kormákr hears of the engagement and Steingerðr's 'agreement', he pays her a visit, presumably to investigate whether the arrangement is similar to the one with Bersi, as well as to ascertain her current feelings. It is at this point in the narrative and their relationship that Kormákr asks Steingerðr to make him a shirt. In response, Steingerðr tells him that, 'enga þörf komu hans, kvað Þorvald eigi mundu þola hefndalaust eða frændur hans' ('there was no need of his coming and that Thorvald and his kinsmen would not let it go unavenged').[237] This 'non-response' is characteristic of Steingerðr when she is faced with something she is not pleased with, such as Bersi's initial victory over Kormákr in chapter eleven. However, she goes a step further when she threatens her former lover with the inevitable retribution enacted by her current betrothed. Kormákr interprets this the way it was intended: Steingerðr's feelings have changed, and she no longer wishes him to interfere in her marital affairs. He recites a verse intended to insult Þorvaldr, to which Steingerðr responds with a promise to tell her future husband of Kormákr's words so that he may retaliate. It is said that, 'eftir þetta skilja þau með engri blíðu og fór Kormákur til skips' ('After that they parted with no friendliness, and Kormak went to the ship').[238]

Parker has observed that there was a certain economy of favour at work during the exchange of textile-goods during the nineteenth century.[239] We see something akin to this economy of favour at work when he asks his mother for a new shirt. Here, Kormákr draws on familial ties of obligation, governed by the laws of kinship.[240] Similarly, instead of approaching the matter of their relationship

---

[236] *Kormáks saga* 17, 'ekki með hennar mótmæli'; *Kormak's Saga*, ('no protest from her').
[237] *Kormáks saga* 17, p. 264; *Kormak's Saga*, p. 207.
[238] *Kormáks saga* 17, p. 265; *Kormak's Saga*, 208.
[239] Parker, *The Subversive Stitch,* p. 5.
[240] See Friedrich Engels, *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigenthums und des Staats* (*The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*), trans. by Alick West (London: Penguin, 2010); Claude Levis-Strauss, *Les Structures élémentaires de la Parenté* (*The Elementary Structures of Kinship),* trans. by James Bell et al. (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2016); Marcel Mauss, *Essai sur le don: forme*

directly, he again draws on this unwritten economy of favour by asking Steingerðr to make him a shirt. His request for a shirt communicates to Steingerðr that he believes their relationship to still be an intimate one, as the giving of clothes arguably implies love and affection; furthermore it was the duty of a wife to clothe her husband.[241] If making clothing and textile-goods works within an economy of favour, then a woman must exercise caution in bestowing that favour, which manifests itself as textile-related labour, for fear of damaging her chaste reputation and thus her value as a marriageable commodity.[242]

In refusing to make Kormákr a shirt, Steingerðr not only successfully conveys her altered feelings, but also expresses her power and autonomy, as restricted as it is, by withholding her textile-related labour. However, her behaviour and use of textiles is at odds with how women in the sagas have come to be seen. If they do not incite their male kin to vengeance or perform in ways deemed to be exceptional or 'masculine', then they are not generally considered to be of scholarly interest.[243] Yet, as has been shown, there are many ways in which saga-women exert their agency and express themselves which largely go unacknowledged, overshadowed by those characters who are more outrageous and dynamic in their behaviour. There is also the deeply problematic association between 'unremarkable women' – female characters who appear to conform to the social and gender norms of the sagas – and textile-making practices, whereby textiles have become synonymous with idealised, domesticated and submissive femininity, and femininity with women. Femininity is also regularly weaponised and used as an insult against both men and women in the sagas.[244] The coalescence of gender essentialist attributes, such as passivity in women and activity in men, with the arbitrary hierarchy of cultural worth which governs the perception of art and craft (which *is also* subject to social and gender stratification) has resulted in

---

archaique de l'échange, (*The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies),* trans. by Ian Cunnison (London: Routledge, 1966).

[241] See Sauckel, *Die Literarische Funktion von Kleidung*, p. 128.

[242] For feminist analysis gender/sex structures within a system of capitalist kinship and exchange see Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex' in *Toward an Anthropology of Women,* ed. by Rayna Reiter (New York, NY; Monthly Review Press, 1975) and Luce Irigaray, 'Women on the Market' in *This Sex which is not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985). See also Jóhanna, 'Vulnerability and honour' in *Valkyrie*', pp. 45-49, in which she specifically focuses on Kormákr as a sexual aggressor.

[243] Jóhanna, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, p. 7.

[244] See Clark, *Gender, Violence and the Past;* Evans, *Men and Masculinities.*

what can only be described as a 'blind spot' in the study of textiles and gender in medieval literature. As a consequence, when Steingerðr refuses to make a shirt for her now ex-lover, we do not regard her refusal of labour as an act of personal agency, but instead focus on her speech about Þorvaldr's inevitable reaction. As will be discussed in Chapter Four, words are held in higher regard than material objects, which goes some way in explaining this focus on speech instead of her withholding of labour and favour. There is, however, a deeply entrenched gender bias which means that speech and action are conceived of as 'masculine' traits, while the making of textiles is supposedly not just 'feminine', but *innately* feminine which, as I have shown, results in the devaluation of both the finished item as well as the skills required to produce it.

Conclusions

The combined cultural and gendered inferiority of textiles has led to not so much an intentional dismissal, but rather a general lack of critical attention. This, combined with a restrictive and reductive approach to women in medieval literature means that moments of quiet female agency, such as Steingerðr's refusal to make a shirt, Guðrún's seven half-years of embroidery, and Sigrdrífa/Brynhildr's commitment to the warrior ideal in the face of enforced domesticity at the end of a spindle, gain little in the way of focussed analysis in discussions of women in the sagas, or the wider Old Norse literary canon. Yet it is clear that this refusal marks the 'turning point' in the narrative. Prior to this moment, Steingerðr welcomed Kormákr's romantic attentions, and although her feelings remain ambiguous throughout the period of duelling between her first husband and her lover, she does not overtly reject him until now, by denying him access to her textile-labour. If textiles are indeed synonymous with modern normative feminine traits such as domesticity and passivity, then it is unusual that the saga author uses this request for – and denial of – a shirt as an opportunity for a shift in narrative direction, especially as it is dictated by a character who supposedly possesses the least power to affect such shifts.[245]

[245] However, as Jóhanna has demonstrated in *Women in Old Norse Literature,* the traditional model of power (violence) is not the only valid approach, thus the women of Old Norse Literature possess more power than they are usually credited with.

In addition to the narrative consequences, Steingerðr's denial of her textile-labour is, quite clearly, a small act of personal agency amidst a plot driven by the desires of those men who dominate her existence. Scholarship has, until now, viewed textile-creation as always indicative of modern normative feminine behaviour. My analysis of Old Norse depictions of textile-making shows that this relationship is not straightforward. Any association between textile-creation and femininity is the result of social and cultural inculcation of gender roles. This is not to suggest that just because it is a cultural product that it is any less influential or real. Rather, highlighting the constructed nature of the textile-femininity relationship demonstrates that it can also be deconstructed. It is true that when Steingerðr withholds her textile-labour, she subverts modern normative femininity and exerts her personal agency. Here, as with Dalla's foreboding words at the beginning of the saga, Kormákr has requested a shirt and instead received a warning of impeding turmoil. Dalla and Steingerðr both use textiles as a vehicle for exerting influence over the saga narrative, which suggests that the saga author – as well as the medieval audience they were writing for – had a different understanding of the significance of textiles and textile-making skills from the one that informs modern popular and scholarly understanding. Yet if the situation was reversed, and she occupied herself with the task of making a shirt, it is not immediately the case that she lacks agency or, more importantly, that she is less worthy of being studied. This is because in Old Norse literature, it seems that textiles are not synonymous with either Old Norse or modern normative femininity at all, but with power. The rest of this thesis will explore how we might uncover the various different meanings and functions associated with textiles and textile-making. I will return to the themes of femininity and power in Chapters Three and Four, but in the following chapter I will outline a method for approaching Old Norse textile terminology in the *Íslendingasögur*: the Old Norse Vestementary Code.

Chapter Two Methodology: Towards an Old Norse Vestementary Code

In the previous chapter I dealt with femininity and cultural value, and how they intersect with and influence our perception of textiles and textile-related labour. This chapter will be more focused on textile terminology in the *Íslendingasögur* and outline some of the methodological challenges of investigating written textiles. It is a 'working methodology', and will suggest a potential resolution to those challenges in the form of the Old Norse vestementary code. This framework is an adaptation of the vestementary code as established by Roland Barthes in his analysis of the semiology of written Fashion in mid-twentieth-century fashion magazines.[246] As I will demonstrate in both this and the following chapter, the Old Norse vestementary code is an essential theoretical and critical tool which can be used to explore the literary function of written textiles in the *Íslendingasögur.* Written textiles have not received as much attention in scholarship in comparison to their material counterparts. As the vestementary code will illuminate, Old Norse textile terminology is imbued with a wealth of culturally contingent meanings that, when used in saga narrative, act as signifiers for a broad range of significations. However, as with Barthes' original model, the Old Norse vestementary code is not without limitations. Examining textile terminology in isolation does not reveal the function of written textiles, but merely illustrates the relationship between written object and an abstract social or cultural phenomenon. In order to ascertain what purpose textiles may serve, and understand why they are important devices within literature as a whole, it is necessary to examine textile terminology within its narrative and cultural contexts. The present chapter will focus on two specific terms which – on the surface – appear to describe the same garment: the *kápa* and the *kufl.* By applying the rationale of the vestementary code in my analysis of these two terms, I will show that although conceptually similar, they signify different things. While the differences are subtle, acknowledgement of the nuance presented by Old Norse textile terms will enhance our understanding of the *Íslendingasögur,* as well as their received cultural value by their medieval compilers and audiences.

[246] Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System,* trans. by Matthew Ward and Richard Howard, (London: Bloomsbury, 2006).

In the middle of Iceland during the mid-tenth century, a man gives his cloak to his servant and offers to pull him on their sled for a short while. In return, he would like to wear his servant's cloak.[247] The servant agrees, partly because his lower status means that he has to, but also because his master is renowned for being *vel búinn* ('well dressed').[248] This suggests that the cloak swap will benefit the servant because he will obtain a better cloak than his own. Shortly after however, it is revealed that their swap is intended to confuse his master's pursuers, who are closing in on their location, hunting the man who killed one brother-in-law to avenge the other. This man is, of course, Gísli Súrsson, and in the resulting skirmish, the men giving chase kill the servant. They congratulate themselves for slaying Gísli, until they discover the real identity of the dead man, Þórðr the 'coward', who was forced to wear Gísli's cloak and act as a decoy.[249]

As Clark has demonstrated, *Gísla saga Súrssonar* evokes themes from the heroic past. He identifies a number of motifs in the sagas which can be traced back to the *Poetic Edda*, such as laughing in the face of death, portents of inevitable doom and similarities between modes of death (such as being murdered in bed).[250] Parallels can also be drawn between the characterisation and depiction of certain female characters, such as the one that can be traced between the legendary Brynhildr and *Laxdæla saga's* Guðrún Ósvífrdóttir.[251] Importantly, Carolyne Larrington observes that heroes are 'humans who take up arms against human or supernatural foes, who are brave and fearless, but not necessarily morally admirable.'[252] The ambiguous morality of the different heroic characters of the *Poetic Edda* is not ignored by the authors of the poems. As argued by Clark, the 'ethic' of vengeance is undermined in the final two poems of the 'Sigurðr cycle', *Hamðismál* and *Guðrúnarhvǫt.*[253] 'There is an explicit recognition [in *Guðrúnarhvǫt*

---

[247] *Gísla saga Súrssonar* 20, in *Vestfirðinga sögur,* Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jonsson (eds.), Íslenzk Fornrit 6 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1943), pp. 3-118, pp. 64-65; *Gisli Sursson's Saga,* trans. by Martin S. Regal in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* II., pp. 1-48.
[248] For a discussion on the role of livery and other clothing in the master-servant power dynamic, see Anne Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 17-33.
[249] His name in the text is 'Þórðr inn huglausi'. 'Huglauss' means 'cowardly' or 'faint-hearted.'
[250] David Clark, *Gender, Violence and the Past in Edda and Saga*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 89-116, pp. 90-92.
[251] Ibid., p. 92.
[252] Carolyne Larrington, 'Eddic poetry and heroic legend', in *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 147-172.
[253] Clark, *Gender, Violence and the Past*, pp. 17-45.

5] that… if Guðrún had not taken vengeance for the previous killing of her brothers, she would have made it much easier to avenge Svanhildr.'[254] He concludes that the presentation of Guðrún as a woman who fully encompasses the admirable and the horrific aspects of the legendary heroic ethos demonstrates authorial (and by extension, cultural) ambivalence, at the time of compilation.[255]

The heroic ethos can be loosely surmised as a single-minded and inflexible adherence to a strict code of personal honour and familial loyalty, which is maintained through a cycle of gift-giving, violence and vengeance. Heroes are brave, but their actions are not always sensible or easily endorsed. Despite being forewarned about Atli's trap, for example, Gunnar and Högni ignore the advice from their kinswomen and ride to their deaths.[256] Preserving corporeal safety at the expense of heroic reputation is *not* part of the heroic ethos; bravery in the face of inevitable doom is.[257]

This is important to remember when considering the differences between Gísli and Þórðr, which are implied in the short description of the latter.[258] 'Heroes' cannot be physically mistaken for servants, and vice versa. This is expressed most clearly in the poem *Atlakviða* 21 – 25*,* from the *Poetic Edda*. After luring the two legendary brothers, Högni and Gunnar, to his home under false pretences, Atli demands that Gunnar tell him the location of the Rhinegold. Instead, Gunnar demands to see Högni's heart. Atli orders his men to cut out the heart of another 'cowardly' servant, one named Hjalli.[259] When they show it to Gunnar, he declares that it cannot be the heart of his brother because it is trembling.[260] Atli's men then cut out Högni's heart and Gunnar acknowledges it to belong to his brother because it is like a stone, which indicates his bravery and heroic nature.[261] Clark shows that motifs such as this, which conceive of heroism in physiological terms, often occur

---

[254] Ibid., p. 21. See also, Larrington, 'Eddic poetry and heroic legend', pp. 152-154.
[255] Ibid., pp. 44-45.
[256] *Atlakviða* 8, in *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern,* rev. Hans Kuhn, 5th edn. (Heidelberg, 1983), http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etcs/germ/anord/edda/edda.htm [accessed 16th June 2020]
[257] Larrington, 'Eddic poetry and heroic legend', pp. 154, 159.
[258] Ibid., pp. 89-116. See also Heather O'Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 136-179.
[259] Gunnar calls him 'Hialli inn *blauðr*', 'Hialli the cowardly', *Atlakviða* 23, II.
[260] *Atlakviða* 23, IV-V; 'er mioc bifaz, er á bióði liggr;/ bifðiz hálfo meirr, er í briósti lá' ('It [Hialli's heart] quivers greatly as it lies on the platter;/ it quivered twice as much when it was in the breast').
[261] Clark, *Gender, Violence and the Past* p. 90.

in the sagas as a way to evoke the heroic past in the saga present.[262] Although the specific comparison between the hearts of brave and cowardly men does not happen in *Gísla saga*, Clark observes that Gísli is explicit about how *unlike* the legendary Guðrún Giúkadóttir his sister is, when she does not demonstrate familial loyalty towards him.[263] This is one among a number of heroic allusions the saga author draws between the characters of *Gísla saga* and the legendary figures of the *Poetic Edda.*[264]

While there are problems with assuming a straightforward thematic relationship between eddic poetry and saga literature, the connection is pronounced.[265] The reasons for this emphasis of the heroic has already been discussed by others.[266] It remains that if personal characteristics and qualities can be seen in a heart which has been removed from a body, then it is conceivable that these same qualities are manifest in the man himself. It could therefore appear infeasible to a modern audience that Gísli's pursuers are fooled by a simple swap of clothes. This event occurs around the time of the *stefnudagar,* 'summoning days', when Börkr brings his legal case against Gísli, thus 'summoning' him to an Assembly.[267] Earlier in the same chapter it is specified that Börkr learns that Gísli is the killer in spring. Later, after Börkr and his men mistakenly kill Þórðr, it is said that Gísli prepares a small homestead to see himself through the winter.[268] The elapsed time between discovery and flight could be anything from days to months, but these temporal markers indicate that the confrontation took place before the onset of winter. This is significant because poor weather conditions might explain how Þórðr could be mistaken for Gísli, but if visibility was low, the saga narrator does not mention it. The absence of this information does not necessarily mean that on the day of Gísli's outlawry it was bright and clear, but it does force us to examine what *is* there. The differences between the two men are explicitly – albeit briefly – mentioned. Like Hjalli, Þórðr is 'cowardly', to the extent that it his nickname. It is also said that although he is a big man he lacks both courage and

[262] Ibid., pp. 89-93.
[263] Ibid., pp. 93-94.
[264] Ibid., pp. 94-98.
[265] Ibid., pp. 98-102. See earlier discussion in the Introduction of this thesis.
[266] Clark, citing Olsen, 'Gísla saga og heltediktningen'; Guðbrandur, '*Excursus III*'.
[267] *Gísla saga* 19, p. 63.
[268] *Gísla saga* 19 and 20, pp. 60 and 67 respectively.

wit.[269] While Gísli's actions in the saga are morally ambiguous he is clearly the more 'heroic' out of the two men, therefore a cloak swap seems like a weak attempt at disguise. According to the well-established logic of heroic poetry, Þórðr's cowardly heart would be trembling clearly for all to see. When Gísli's pursuers do not recognise that he and Þórðr have swapped places, it is evident that *something* is in place that allows the deception to succeed, so much so that it is not possible to observe the embodied manifestations of personal quality which would, in more normal circumstances, separate the two men into the categories of master and servant.

That 'something' is their swapped cloaks. This is not merely a case of superficial disguise, however. Cloaks (and by extension other garments and textiles) do more than keep an individual warm, or even enable identification from a distance.[270] In the case of Gísli and Þórðr, when they swap cloaks they also hand over the very essence of their identity, and when they wear the other man's cloak they 'become' the other. Cloaks and other garments function on a semiotic (grammatical), symbolic, and metonymic level. It is imbued with the original wearer's identity, including those particular qualities that relegate them to the role of either master or servant. When Gísli pulls on Þórðr's cloak, he also pulls on his cowardly nature, or at least enough of it to trick the pursuers into killing Þórðr instead of him.[271]

'Cloth Societies': Cloth, Clothing and Embodied Meaning

Grammatical, symbolic, metonymic: with the exception of 'symbolic', these are qualities which we do not usually associate with cloth and clothing. Therefore the strangeness of this connection bears further scrutiny, using the example of Gísli and Þórðr. Perhaps the most straightforward of the three categories to unpick is the symbolic because it is the one with which we have primarily been concerned: the exchange of physical cloaks which signifies the surface-level transference of identities. In other words, Gísli becomes a symbol of his servant in order to evade capture, while the reverse is true for Þórðr. The cloaks are *representative* of each

[269] 'Þórðr var mikill maðr vexti', *Gísla saga* 20, p. 65.
[270] See below for a discussion of cloaks as identification.
[271] Gísli's use of stealth and disguise to escape his pursuers is a clear example of why it is problematic to draw a straightforward comparison between heroic themes in edda and saga.

man, his status and his personality. Additionally cloaks are metonymic, a quality that serves to deepen their symbolic significance. In other words, they *are* the original wearer, although it must be emphasised that this is only possible in what Peter Stallybrass has called a 'cloth society': 'in its most extreme form, [a cloth society] is a society in which values and exchanges alike take the form of cloth'.[272] 'Cloth society' is an appropriate description of both Viking Age and Saga Age Iceland. In the case of the latter, its social and economic society draws from medieval Icelandic laws and customs, as recorded in law codes such as *Grágáss*.[273] The main unit for comparison in economic exchange during this time was a domestically produced woollen cloth called *vaðmál*. As literary saga society is closely analogous to Viking Age Iceland, it is not unreasonable to assume that those historical, economic and cultural values are also reflected in the cultural landscape of their literary counterparts.[274] 'In a cloth society,' Stallybrass argues, 'cloth is both a currency and a means of incorporation'.[275] He goes on to explain that cloth possesses two qualities of materiality which are contradictory but also simultaneously true. The first is its ability to be permeated and transformed by both maker and wearer alike, as either individual can alter the surface or structure of a garment, creating permanent changes which bear the significance of their possession, or embodied experience, of the cloth. The second is, despite its vulnerability to enforced transformation, for example, through purposeful alteration or accidental staining, cloth has the ability to endure over time.[276]

Owing to its dual nature of permeation/transformation and endurance, Stallybrass suggests that cloth has a powerful association with memory – indeed

---

[272] Stallybrass, 'Worn Worlds: Clothes, Mourning and the Life of Things' in *The Textile Reader*, ed. by Jessica Hemmings, (New York, NY: Berg Publishers, 2012), pp. 68-77, p. 70.
[273] *Grágás efter det Arnamagnænske Haandskrify Nr. 334 fol.,* Staðarhólsbók, ed. by Vilhjálmur Finsen, (Nordiske Literature-Samfund, 1879; reprnt., by Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1974*); Laws of Early Iceland, Grágás*, 2 vols., trans. by Andy Dennis, Peter Foote and Richard Perkins, (Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 1980, 2002).
[274] Michele Hayeur Smith, 'Weaving Wealth: Cloth and Trade in Viking Age and Medieval Iceland' in *Textiles and the Medieval Economy: Production, Trade and Consumption of Textiles, 8th – 16th Centuries,* ed. by Angela Ling Huang and Carsten Jahnke, Ancient Textiles Series, 16 (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2015), pp. 23-40, pp. 23-25.
[275] Stallybrass, 'Worn Worlds', p. 70.
[276] Ibid., p. 70. A spectacular example of cloth's ability to endure over time is the Norse-Greenlandic textiles, which date from the late tenth century to the mid fifteenth centuries, as detailed in Else Østergård, *Woven into the Earth: Textiles from Norse Greenland,* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2009).

cloth *is* memory.[277] He illustrates this best when he describes how, after the death of a loved one, their clothes '*are* the pain which the [bereaved] feels. [They] hang there, 'waiting', they endure, but only as a residue that recreates absence, darkness, death; things which are not'.[278] While it is certainly true that cloth and garments function in this way in the *Íslendingasögur* (as will be explored later in Chapter Three of this thesis), in the case of Gísli and his servant, they are both alive at the initial moment of exchange. If clothing can act as memory by recreating the dead via a sequence of negatives – absence, emptiness, etc. – then the same must be true for the living, as it has at its foundation something solid and corporeal to work with. Furthermore, the clothing of the living (and to a lesser extent the dead) take on a life of their own, standing in for the original wearer.[279] For Gísli and his servant, the cloaks are metonymic devices which take on more significance than either of the characters on their own, which is why the pursuers were tricked into thinking that the man wearing Gísli's cloak was Gísli and, arguably, the reason why Gísli orchestrated the swap in the first place.

Paying closer attention to the symbolic and metonymic functions of cloth and clothing in the *Íslendingasögur* is one of way of demonstrating why literary textiles are a valuable resource in the pursuit of understanding the social and cultural mores of Viking/Saga age. However, it is not possible to understand the significance of textiles and clothing in their literary capacity if we do not first examine the terminology used to name and describe them. The reasons for the case of 'mistaken' identity between Gísli and his servant cannot be explained with only the symbolic and metonymic; how is it *exactly* that the qualities of the original owner/wearer of a cloak come to be transmitted to a new owner/wearer? More importantly, how might other characters mistake one man for another through the simple act of wearing a different cloak?

---

[277] Stallybrass, 'Worn Worlds', p. 70.
[278] Ibid., p. 72.
[279] This can be seen in *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* 11-13, in *Borgfirðinga sogur, Hænsa-Þóris saga, Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu, Bjarnar saga Hítdælakappa, Heiðarvíga saga, Gísls þáttr Illugasonar,* Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, (eds.), Íslenzk Fornrit 3 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1951). Gunnlaugr gives Helga a scarlet *skikkja*; moments before her death, she requests to see the cloak, which is her last act before dying in the arms of her husband. This will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Three.

The Grammatical Function of Textile Vocabulary and Shifting Identities

The case of the swapped cloaks in *Gísla saga* is far from the only instance where a saga character eludes confrontation or capture by changing their clothes. In *Víga-Glúms saga*, the eponymous hero is lured into a trap by his former son-in-law, Skúta.[280] Glúmur wears a green *kápa,* while Skúta wears a sleeveless outer garment (*vesl*) which is reversable, one side black and one side white. Although he is unarmed while his adversary wears a helmet and carries a sword, Glúmur manages to escape Skúta and jumps over the edge of an overhanging river bank. Skúta spots a green *kápa* floating on the current and thrusts at it with his sword. Immediately after, he hears someone speaking, '"lítil fremd að spilla klæðum manna"' ('"Not much credit in spoiling people's clothes"').[281] That someone is Glúmur himself, who immediately takes the opportunity to gather sixty men in order to retaliate. Skúta sees the men heading his way and makes the smart decision to disguise himself by turning his spear into a staff, removing the saddle from his horse and reversing the pattern of his *vesl.* When they question him he does not look like Skúta but a passing shepherd, thus he is able to escape.[282]

In *Víga-Glúms saga,* outer garments serve as identifiers that the characters use to escape their enemies.[283] This is a subversion of the usual motif, when characters are able to identify others by their clothes such as in *Laxdæla saga* 63, when Helgi recognises the men on their way to attack him from a description alone.[284] When Gísli and Þórðr swap their cloaks, when Glúmur floats his green *kápa* on the river as a decoy, or when Skúta reverses the pattern of his own outerwear, there is something significant happening at a deeper level, one that is not immediately obvious to us as a modern audience because we are long removed

---

280 *Víga-Glúms saga* 16 in *Eyfirðinga sögur, Víga-Glúms saga, Ógmundar þáttr dytts, Þorvalds þáttr tasalda, Svarfdæla saga, Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds, Valla-Ljóts saga, Sneglu-Halla þáttr, Þorgríms þáttr Hallasonar,* ed. by Jónas Kristjánsson, ÍF 9 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1956)**;** *Killer Glum's Saga,* trans. by John McKinnell in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, II., pp. 267 – 314, pp. 290-292.

281 *Víga-Glúms saga* 16; *Killer Glum's Saga* 16, p. 291.

282 *Víga-Glúms saga* 16; *Killer Glum's Saga* 16, p. 291.

283 C.f., Sauckel, *Die Literarische Funktion von Kleidung in den* Íslendingasögu*r and* Íslendingaþættir, Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanishen Altertumskunde 83, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), pp. 30-31.

284 *Laxdæla saga* 63 in *Laxdæla saga, Halldórs þættir Snorrasonar, Stúfs þáttr*, Einar Ól., (ed.), ÍF 5 (1934), pp. 3-248, p. 187;*The Saga of the People of Laxardal* 63, trans. by Kevena Kunz in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* V., pp. 1-119, p. 97. This will be discussed in further detail later on in this chapter.

from the immediate cultural and social contexts.[285] One of the ways that this meaning can be uncovered is through a closer examination of how written textiles and clothing function as a type of grammar. The rules of grammar dictate how the various components of a sentence relate to each other in order to create meaning. Similarly, written textiles are governed by a similar set of rules – as of yet unidentified – which can be loosely understood as 'grammar'. Without the specificity of terminology we would not know that Gísli's cloak is a *kápa*, while his servant's cloak is a *kufl*, both Old Norse terms for a cloak with a cowl or hood attached to it.[286] The material similarity of both garments lends itself to the identity-swap, but if they were identical in *significance*, then why are they referred to by two different nouns? What linguistic and cultural meaning, if any, is conveyed by a *kápa*, and why is it different to that of a *kufl*? Furthermore, what do these differences reveal about the grammar of written textiles? As Sandra Baliff Straubhaar puts it, 'even if we postmodern English-speakers can access the texts in their original language, we will still perform conceptual translations in our heads'.[287] While here she refers specifically to the Old Norse colour spectrum (and Old Norse colour adjectives which convey the subtleties of that spectrum), it also applies to our conceptual realisation of *kápa* and *kufl,* resulting in the approximate modern English term 'cloak'.[288] As we have already seen however, cloaks are more significant than they first appear. When Gísli and his servant swap cloaks, it is not obvious to a modern audience that they have also swapped status, personal

---

[285] Admittedly, Skúta's disguise is more elaborate than Gísli's. Furthermore, the sixty men sent to retaliate against him were searching for him based on a description of his previous appearance, so his changed outer garment is instrumental in his escape.

[286] References to Old Norse definitions usually derived Richard Cleasby, Gudbrand Vigfusson and Sir William A. Craigie, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* 2nd edn., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), unless otherwise stated. Further references will be appear in the main body, abbreviated to 'Cleasby-Vigfusson'.

[287] Sandra Baliff Straubhaar, 'Wrapped in a Blue Mantle: Fashion for Icelandic Slayers?' *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* 1 (2005), 53-65, p. 54.

[288] For more on Old Norse colour, see Kirsten Wolf, 'Some Comments on Old Norse-Icelandic Color Terms', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 121 (2006), 173-192; 'The Color Blue'; 'The Colors of the Rainbow in Snorri's *Edda*', *Maal og minne* (2007), 51-62; 'Snorri's Use of Color Terms in *Gylfaginning'*, *Skandinavistik* 37 (2007), 1-10; 'The Color Grey in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 108 (2009), 222-238; 'Towards a Diachronic Analysis of Old Norse-Icelandic Color terms: The Cases of Green and Yellow', *Orð og tunga* 12 (2010), 109-130; 'Basic Color Terms in Old Norse-Icelandic: A Quantitative Study', *Orð og tunga* 15 (2013), 141-161; 'Non-basic Color Terms in Old Norse-Icelandic', in *New Norse Studies: Essays on the Literature and Culture of Medieval Scandinavia,* ed. by Jeffrey Turco, Islandica, 58, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Library Press, 2015), pp. 389-433; 'The Color Brown in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature', *Nowele* 70 (2017), 22-38.

qualities, even their very identities. It may have been more apparent to a contemporary medieval audience, however, especially since this motif is used elsewhere in the *Íslendingasögur,* only reinforcing the connection between identity and clothing. Furthermore, the fact that Gísli's first recourse is to swap cloaks with his servant to avoid capture, and the fact that his pursuers are successfully deceived by their swap, suggests that within the collective cultural consciousness of saga society is the understanding that a *kápa* and a *kufl* are worn by different people for different reasons, and have different significations.

Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System* and the Semiology of Dress

Other textiles and garments within the *Íslendingasögur* may therefore signify something else, something beyond what might be assumed given the context in which a garment might appear. However, not all written textiles function in this way; it is possible that a garment might be 'just' a garment. In order to discern between these two categories, it is necessary to establish a framework that allows for relatively quick identification. During the mid-twentieth century Barthes published such a framework in *Systeme de la Mode* (*The Fashion System*), which attempts to develop the linguistic code of 'Fashion' through the rules of semiotics as defined by Ferdinand de Saussure.[289] Barthes draws parallels between Saussure's opposition of *langue* and *parole* – language and speech – and the ways in which clothing and dress (Fashion) relate to each other:[290] 'Language is an institution, an abstract body of constraints; speech is the momentary part of this institution which the individual extracts and actualizes for purposes of communication.'[291] Similarly, Barthes conceptualises the category of 'clothing' (*langue*) as the institution from which dress or Fashion (*parole*) draws from in order to communicate something.

In terms of this thesis, the various narrative texts of the *Íslendingasögur* correlate to the abstract body, where language and clothing (*langue*) is equivalent to semiotics, dress and Fashion, while the individual instances of textile vocabulary function in the same way as speech or dress (*parole*). Barthes calls these

[289] Barthes, *The Fashion System*.
[290] Ibid., pp. 17-18.
[291] Ibid., pp. 17.

overarching interrelationships the 'vestementary code'. The main advantage of this code is that, rather than adapting methodologies which rely on the existence of a material object, it has been formulated specifically for use with the *written* garment.[292] *The Fashion System* is very clear in its intention to focus on written Fashion, because it has no practical or aesthetic function. For example, written Fashion does not protect an individual from the elements, neither does it enhance their appearance.[293] It exists only on the page as a linguistic and semantic sign whose only purpose is to *signify something*. As Barthes has said of Fashion, 'the function of the description of Fashion is not only to propose a model which is a copy of reality, but also and especially to circulate Fashion *broadly as a meaning*.'[294] The emphasis of meaning over making is important, as it focusses on what codified significances can be discovered about the written textile within a specialised corpus.[295] While the textiles and garments represented by technical vocabulary within the selected texts of the *Íslendingasögur* may not necessarily 'copy reality' (as the relation between the *Íslendingasögur* and historical reality is neither straightforward or unproblematic), they do serve a function within their narrative context.[296] Barthes' vestementary code serves as a critical foundation for this thesis, and has been instrumental in the initial analysis of textile vocabulary, helping us to answer the question: what can written textiles tell us about the symbolic, historical, cultural and other, as-of-yet unknown significances within the *Íslendingasögur?* More importantly, the vestementary code has also led to the development of ideas which go beyond the immediate linguistic significations under investigation in this chapter, as will be explored in Chapters Three and Four.

Before discussing the method for applying the vestementary code to the textile vocabulary of the *Íslendingasögur,* it is worth exploring some of the

---

[292] Material approaches to medieval textiles are still important, as will be explored in Chapter Four of this thesis.
[293] Barthes, *The Fashion System,* p. 8.
[294] Ibid., p. 10, emphasis my own. Barthes is here referring to Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, 'Essi sur quelques forms primitives de classification', *Année Sociologique,* 6 (1901-2), 1-72. For a critical volume in English, see: *Primitive Classification*, trans. by Rodney Needham, (London: Routledge, 2009).
[295] The significance of the physical act of 'making' will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four of this thesis.
[296] Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Realism and the Fantastic in Old Icelandic Sagas', *Scandinavian Studies* 74 (2002), 443-454; Heather O'Donoghue, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Short Introduction,* Blackwell Introductions to Literature, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 36-46.

limitations of Barthes' approach and how these can be circumvented. Caution is often required when applying contemporary literary and critical approaches to medieval sources. With that being said, critical theory is an essential component in literary analysis. As Marion Turner has succinctly put it, '"Theory" is […] taken to mean an articulation of an approach to a text, or of a cultural perspective taken from outside the object of enquiry'.[297] Critical theory is a tool which can be used to 'open' a text, thus allowing it to 'speak'; it can shed light on repressed or understudied facets of humanity; it can interrogate dominant narratives, such as – for example – colonialism, and can provide the tools required to dismantle those narratives.[298] Turner goes on to say that, 'theory is a given, something that grounds [academic] work, and no longer needs defense or explicit explanation.'[299] While theoretical approaches are 'a given', it is still necessary to interrogate theory. Before looking at the practical applications of the vestementary code, it is worth considering which aspects already work for use with the *Íslendingasögur*, as well as identify aspects which may require adaptation.

One of the main differences between Barthes' vestementary code and the vestementary code needed to analyse the textile vocabulary of the *Íslendingasögur* is to do with the source material. The corpus he chooses to investigate is a selection of fashion magazines from a specific time period, with the aim of uncovering the meaning of the coded language of women's described and photographed 'Fashion' in journalism.[300] While the aim of this thesis is also to uncover the meaning of described clothing (and other textiles), the corpus under investigation is largely literary. Barthes considers literature to be a problematic source for descriptions of written garments. While he observes that literature can serve as valuable and illustrative primary sources for the analysis of the written textile, descriptions of garments are, 'too fragmentary [and] too variable historically to be of any use'.[301] One key reason for this rejection originates in his earlier work regarding language and clothing, in which he makes a critical

---

[297] Marion Turner, (ed.), 'Introduction' in *A Handbook of Middle English Studies,* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp. 1-11, p. 3.
[298] Ibid., pp. 3-5.
[299] Ibid., p. 7.
[300] Ibid., pp. ix, 10-11. There is also a significant disadvantage in focussing on early medieval textiles, as so very few remain, making the examination of visual or photographic textiles a non-trivial matter. For this reason alone the focus here is on written evidence.
[301] Barthes, *The Fashion System,* p. 10.

distinction between 'costume' and 'dress'.[302] 'Dress' is seen as the clothing of the everyday, while 'costume' is more performative in function, indicative of a role or overt theatricality.[303] What both written garments in literature and 'real' (i.e., 'historic') costumes have in common is the fact that they are 'constructed' by a creator, such as an author or a designer, and placed in an artificial setting like the stage, or within the imaginary landscape of fiction. The symbolic difference between 'costume' and 'dress' lies in what Barthes identifies as 'facts and values'. Early historians catalogued items of dress, essentially 'costumes', so it is now possible to know what garments were worn, when they were worn and by whom.[304] He suggests that these 'anthologies' fail to move beyond the facts of costume – such as colour, fabric, length – in order to examine the values (semiology) of dress. In other words, while it is possible to know *what* items of clothing were worn, it is not so easy to know what that same item *meant*. Barthes argues that this is because an item of clothing, regardless of what its style might suggest, cannot signify anything by itself. 'Clothing' is akin to 'language' in that they are both *a priori*, functioning on an abstract level from which meaning is drawn, either in the form of speech or dress.[305] Like language, clothing has an institutional and sociological character, deriving meaning from its context.[306] An anthology of individual items of clothing may accurately reproduce images or descriptions of historical 'costume', but fail in translating any social, cultural or material significance that may have been attributed to that same item of 'dress'. It is possible to see why Barthes considered literature to be an inappropriate corpus. In a literary text, a character's clothing has been selected by an author to reflect wider significance according to the context in which – again – the author has created. For Barthes, literary garments are artificial constructs which are already imbued with meaning. Furthermore, that meaning is unique to each literary text since narrative, social and cultural contexts demand a bespoke vestementary system which is neither interchangeable or universal.

---

[302] Barthes, 'Language and Clothing' in *The Language of Fashion,* ed. by Michael Carter, trans. by Andy Stafford, (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), pp. 21-22, originally published in *Critique* 142 (1959), 243-52.
[303] Ibid., pp. 21-22.
[304] Ibid., p. 23.
[305] Ibid., p. 24, p. 26; *The Fashion System*, pp. 17-18.
[306] Barthes, 'Language and Clothing', pp. 26, 27.

A Prototype Old Norse Vestementary Code

Barthes' vestementary code is experimental in nature, intended to demonstrate the relatively new uses of 'applied semiology'.[307] The explicit aim of the 'experiment' was to create a system which determined the meaning for all 'real' Fashion contemporary to the system's inception. In this instance, using literature as a corpus would indeed be problematic.[308] In keeping with the spirit of experimentation however, Barthes' system serves as an ideal model for investigating the function of written textiles in the *Íslendingasögur.* Analysis of the various garment and textile nouns in their narrative contexts will reveal the machinery of the Old Norse vestementary code. This system will elucidate why certain textiles appear in certain scenes, why those textiles are not interchangeable, and furthermore, what those textiles *might* signify to a thirteenth-century audience.[309] In order to achieve this aim I collected Old Norse textile terms and organised them into a database, which I intended to use as a supplement to *The Lexis of Cloth and Clothing.*[310] The *Lexis Project* takes an interdisciplinary, cross-cultural and cross-linguistic approach to documenting textile terminology, examining a wide range of written and visual sources. It is an excellent resource particularly for scholars working on Old and Middle English as well as Latin. While it does not ignore Old Norse references to textile vocabulary this is not its primary focus, therefore it is of limited use in building the vestementary code of the *Íslendingasögur.* A useful digital resource for searching generalised Old Norse vocabulary is the *Ordbog over det norrøne prosaprog* (*A Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*).[311] Again, while the *ONP* is an invaluable online tool for reference and corpus analysis, it is not restricted to textile terminology, thus making it more difficult to find relevant and related textile terms. Due to the specific aims of this thesis, namely to discover the function of textiles in the *Íslendingasögur,* neither of

[307] Barthes, *The Fashion System,* p. IX.
[308] Ibid., p. 10.
[309] It must be noted that there is no one homogenous medieval mind, but there is not adequate space to address audience and reception in any detail. As such, terms such as 'medieval mind', 'audience contemporary to the saga' etc., are purposefully generic. It would be interesting to extend the method of the vestementary code to include differences in manuscripts and supposed audience. For the sake of simplicity, and of this being something of a prototype, these things have not been considered.
[310] *The Lexis of Cloth and Clothing Project*, http://lexissearch.arts.manchester.ac.uk/ [accessed 24th January 2019].
[311] *ONP*, https://onp.ku.dk/ [accessed 24th January 2019].

these online tools have been entirely satisfactory: the limited languages included in the *Lexis Project,* and the generalised nature of the *ONP* means that primary research was conducted over a number of different sources, both analogue and digital.[312] Also, it must be noted that while the main focus of the thesis is textile vocabulary in the *Íslendingasögur,* I have also considered a selection of poetic examples from saga narrative and *The Poetic Edda*, which illustrate how textiles might have been conceived of as cultural and literary symbol without necessarily referring to imagined historic practices or usages. I have also included material from the dictionaries and resources mentioned above because they provide contextualising and supplementary information which may pertain to later analysis. It is also my hope to expand the list of primary resources at a later date to include other saga genres and written resources.

In order to address the difficulty of managing results from across these different resources, I built a database of Old Norse textile vocabulary. I restricted the entries to only include Old Norse terms for textiles, textile-making, and clothing. I also included descriptors such as colour, texture, fibre and material, as well as any references to decoration in order to gain an understanding of textiles through the co-occurrence of terms which may already have an established cultural meaning or value.[313] While the initial aim was to include textile vocabulary from all of the *Íslendingasögur,* constraints on time and space made it necessary to instead focus on a selection of texts. These texts are: *Bjarnar saga Hítdælakappa, Brennu-Njáls saga, Egils saga Skallagrímssonar, Eiríks saga rauða, Gísli saga Súrssonar, Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds, Kormáks saga,* and *Laxdæla saga.*[314] I began the process of

[312] Cleasby-Vigfusson; Sveinbjörn Egilsson, (ed.), *Lexicon Poeticum Antiquæ Linguæ Septentrionalis: Ordbog Over det Norsk-Islandske Skjaldesprog*, (København: S. L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri, 1931).
[313] For example, *blár* and *svartr* cloaks signify different spectrums of meaning, as will be explored shortly.
[314] *Bjarnar saga Hítdælakappa* in *Borgfirðinga sogur, Hænsa-Þóris saga, Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu, Bjarnar saga Hítdælakappa, Heiðarvíga saga, Gísls þáttr Illugasonar,* Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, (eds.), ÍF 3 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1951), pp. 63-97; *Brennu-Njáls saga,* Einar Ól., (ed.), ÍF 12 (1954); *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, Sigurður Nordal (ed.), ÍF 2 (1933); *Eiríks saga rauða* in *Eyrbyggja saga, Brands þáttr qtva, Eiríks saga Rauða, Groenlendinga saga, Groenlendinga þattr,* Einar Ól. and Matthias Thórtharson, (eds.), ÍF 4 (1957); *Gísli saga Súrssonar*, ÍF 6 (1958), pp. 3-118; *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar, Bandamanna saga, Odds þáttr Ófeigssonar,* Guðni Jónsson (ed.), ÍF 7 (1956), pp. 3-290; *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* in *Borgfirðinga sogur,* ÍF 3 (1951), pp. 39 - 63; *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds,* in *Vatnsdœla saga, Hallfreðar saga, Kormáks saga, Hrómundar Þáttr Halta, Hrafns Þáttr Guðrúnarsonar*, Einar Ól., (ed.),

collecting textile terminology by first approaching the texts in English, using *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*.[315] This enabled identification of relevant chapters as quickly and efficiently as possible. In addition, this initial reading of English translations also proved that there is a scarcity of nuanced understanding of Old Norse textile terminology. For example, despite the variety of nouns which indicate sleeveless outer-garments, these terms are mostly translated as 'cloak'.[316] After collecting occurrences of textile vocabulary and recording their locations within the sagas, I then cross-referenced these instances with the text accompanying the map on the 'Saga Map' project.[317] While 'Saga Map' is intended as a resource for spatial readings of the *Íslendingasögur* and as a reflection on the significance of the landscape within saga narratives, it also serves as a reliable and searchable digital text. This text is derived from the digitised text available on 'Snerpa', which uses the *Svart á hvitu* editions.[318] There are, of course, unavoidable discrepancies between these sources. The manuscripts which inform the *Svart á hvitu* editions (and thus for 'Saga Map' and 'Snerpa') are different to the ones used for the *Íslenzk Fornrit* editions which, due to accessibility and scholarly convention, and unless otherwise stated, are the primary sources consulted for this thesis. Furthermore, each of these sources has undergone silent editorial and standardisation processes, resulting in different spellings, as well as some expanded or abbreviated narratives. These differences have invariably influenced the collected data,

---

ÍF 8 (1958), pp. 135-200; *Kormáks saga* in *Vatnsdœla saga*, ÍF 8 (1958), pp. 203-302; *Laxdæla saga*, ÍF 5 (1934), pp. 3-248.

[315] *The Saga of Bjorn, Champion of the Hitardal People,* trans. by Alison Finlay in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders* I., pp. 254-304; *Njal's Saga,* trans. by Robert Cook in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders* III., pp. 1-220; *Egil's Saga*, trans. by Bernard Scudder in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* I., pp. 33-178; *Eirik the Red's Saga,* trans. by Keneva Kunz in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* I., pp. 1-18; *The Saga of Grettir the Strong,* trans. by Bernard Scudder in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* II., pp. 49 – 191; *The Saga of Gunnlaug Serpent-Tongue*, trans. by Katrina C. Attwood in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* I., pp. 305-333; *The Saga of Hallfred the Troublesome Poet,* trans. by Diana Whaley in *The Complete Sagas of* Icelanders, I., pp. 225-253.

[316] A more detailed discussion of the differences in cloak vocabulary and its spectrum of meaning will follow in Chapter Three of this thesis.

[317] 'Saga Map' started as Emily Lethbridge's 'The Sagasteads of Iceland: A 21st-century Pilgrimage', a project in which she travelled Iceland and read the *Íslendingasögur* in situ. http://sagasteads.blogspot.com/ [accessed 16th November 2020]. The project was then developed into its current form, a geo-tagged map of Iceland (and other locations mentioned in the *Íslendingasögur*). http://sagamap.hi.is/is/ [accessed 13th May 2019].

[318] 'Saga Map' is much more accessible in terms of readability, which is why I elected to use it as my primary source rather than 'Snerpa', https://www.snerpa.is/net/fornrit.htm [accessed 13th May 2019]; Bragi Halldorsson et. al., (eds.), *Islendingasogur og pottir* (Reykjavik: Svart á hvitu, 1987).

therefore any substantial or noteworthy differences which occur across the source texts will be indicated within the footnotes.

For Barthes, the main objective of the vestementary code was to show that semiotics could be used to produce a scientific analysis of that which is implicitly understood, but largely unquantifiable: Fashion. In his pursuit of determining the meaning of items such as a 'young hat' (see below), Barthes does not pay attention to context. In contrast, this thesis views the vestementary code as a set of tools used to expand our understanding of the *Íslendingasögur,* an understanding which is facilitated by both vocabulary *and* narrative context. Much like the adaptation of Barthes' vestementary code, this database is experimental. In its current iteration it is quite limited in its capacities, but it would be interesting and beneficial to the field of saga studies if the database were expanded at a future date and made available through an open access platform. This expansion could incorporate textile terminology from the remaining *Íslendingasögur* and *þættir,* so that it may serve as a resource for further research in this area. The overall scope could also be expanded to include other prose genres, historical documentation, as well as poetic examples, enabling a comparative approach to the literary and linguistic representation of textiles across varying cultural milieu. It also remains that there is further work to be done regarding textiles in the *Íslendingasögur* which have not been included, but constraints of space prevent it from being achieved within the scope of this project. Although imperfect, the database has allowed me to organise Old Norse textile terms, their definitions, and their narrative contexts. It has made possible the analysis undertaken in this thesis, starting with the Old Norse vestementary code, which will be explored in more detail below and in the following chapter. The database has also allowed me to move beyond the surface level of linguistic meaning to examine more abstract, cultural significations, as has already been explored in the previous chapter with regards to femininity, and as will be explored in Chapter Four with regards to the 'text-textile' complex. Now, however, I will explore how the Old Norse vestementary code can be used in analysis of the *Íslendingasögur.*

The Old Norse Vestementary Code and the *Íslendingasögur*

In the semiology of Fashion, Barthes identifies two sets of different 'classes' of relational meaning, whereby a change in one indicates a shift in meaning in the other, in a process known as commutation. The first set is comprised of 'clothing' and 'world', for example: 'accessories make the spring', and 'this hat is young because it shows the forehead'.[319] The second is comprised of 'clothing' and 'fashion', which Barthes illustrates with a longer magazine description: 'a waist-length bolero for a turquoise shetland [sic] suit cut high at the neck, elbow-length sleeves, and two fob pockets on the skirt'.[320] In this second example, Barthes notes the absence of specification and/or explicit expression of purpose, and deduces that the primary function of an utterance such as this is to '*transmit* Fashion'.[321] In other words, 'any clothing that is noted coincides with being of Fashion', which simultaneously implies that unmentioned or different clothing is unfashionable.[322]

The way in which these two classes function – implicit (Set B) and explicit (Set A) expression of commutation – form the basis of my approach to written textiles within the *Íslendingasögur*. In saga studies, work has already been done with regards to 'Set A': explicit expressions of function and relation. Straubhaar's article 'Wrapped in a Blue Mantle: Fashion for Icelandic Slayers?' analyses the adjectives *blár* and *svartr* in relation to clothing nouns based on their narrative context.[323] She seeks to explore and problematise the common assumption that when a saga character wears 'dark' clothing, they typically mean to kill someone.[324] This statement is too generic for Straubhaar, and does not acknowledge the nuanced understanding of language that a medieval audience would have had.[325] For example, it does not reflect the conceptual differences between what we think of as 'blue' or 'black' today compared to what was thought of as 'blue' or 'black' during the early medieval period. As she later explores, 'black'

[319] Barthes, *The Fashion System*, pp. 20, 21.
[320] Ibid., p. 21; Barthes argues that by naming these two classes, the linguist imposes their own metalanguage on the system, 'filling' it with meaning that might not be there. In order to avoid this he suggests that they should be called Set A and Set B, although he does not strictly adhere to this convention himself (p. 23).
[321] Ibid., p. 22, original emphasis.
[322] Ibid., p. 22.
[323] Straubhaar, 'Wrapped in a Blue Mantle'.
[324] Ibid., p. 53.
[325] Ibid., p. 54.

is more akin to a natural, dark coloured fleece, what Einar Ól. has identified as *sauðsvartr* in modern Icelandic, otherwise translated as 'sheep-black'. The colour 'blue' is closer to what we as a contemporary readership might think of as black because it is achieved with dyes which results in a richer, more vibrant colour that could range from blue to black.[326] This subtle but significant difference between the two colours goes some way to explain why, according to Straubhaar's findings, *blár* and *svartr* are not interchangeable in their usages – beards may be *svartr* or *blár*, but eyebrows and hair may never be *blár*.[327] Furthermore, as *svartr* is akin to the Old Norse *brúnn* ('brown or 'sheep-black'), it is not always a given that if something is not *blár* then it must be *svartr.* Straubhaar summarises this relationship as, '*blár ≠ svartr = brúnn*: blue does not equal black, but black does equal brown.'[328]

Straubhaar's concern for the conceptual differences between Old Norse terms and our modern understanding of colour is not merely an aesthetic one. Through corpus analysis she is able to show that there is some connection between the colour of a character's garments and the likelihood that they will commit an act of violence, or at the very least be in the vicinity of violence or drawn weapons.[329] More than this, however, she does not say, as the *Íslendingasögur* 'exist to recount feuds', meaning that the results of her analysis are automatically skewed towards associations with violence.[330] This does not suggest that the results cannot be used, as Straubhaar draws a distinction between *blár* and *svartr* by coding them as 'best' and 'not-best' clothes respectively. According to data she was able to collect from her corpus investigation, *blár* (the 'dyed, special-occasion colour') has a connection with three different types of behaviour: 'going to kill', 'going to potentially kill – possibly in disguise', and 'wearing one's best clothes for show- often on horseback'. *Svartr* (the common-place, everyday colour) is associated more exclusively with violence.[331] Assuming that Straubhaar and Einar Ol.'s logic regarding *blár* as the more luxurious colour is correct, then it is

[326] Einar Ól., (ed.), *Laxdæla saga*, (Reykjavík: Hid Íslenzk fornritfélag, 1934), p. 254, as cited in Straubhaar, 'Wrapped in a Blue Mantle', p. 63.
[327] Straubhaar, 'Wrapped in a Blue Mantle', pp. 55-56.
[328] Ibid., p. 56.
[329] Ibid., pp. 63-65.
[330] Ibid., p. 64.
[331] Ibid.

feasible to exclude *svartr* from the category of 'best clothing'. Straubhaar recounts a textual example previously identified by Valtýr Guðmundsson, where a character is expected to be dressed in his best, but instead wears a *svartr* ('sheep-black') cloak and is mocked for it.[332] Therefore, while the popular assumption suggests that a saga character donning dark clothing signifies that they are going to kill someone, in actuality it very much depends on what category of dark clothing it is, and even then, the association is not straightforward. As Straubhaar succinctly puts it, 'activities such as wearing one's best clothes, carrying special weapons ostensibly for show only, riding horses, and killing people may occur in quick succession with or without causal relationships among them'.[333]

Language, Character and Encoded Cultural Significations: Guðrún Ósvífsdóttir

Both Barthes and Straubhaar have demonstrated that paying more attention to the nuanced, coded meaning of clothing and textile terms can reveal or substantiate certain cultural significations. Straubhaar's linguistic analysis is analogous to Barthes' 'Set A'. Even though she complicates the assumed connections between *blár* and violence, there is still an overt and specific relationship between clothing (*blár* cloak) and world (violence). While Barthes is dismissive of the meaning found in the textile terms of literature, Straubhaar demonstrates that, although not straightforward, descriptions of textiles in literature have a recognisable relationship with material and physical culture.[334] Approaching written textiles in a way that draws on implicit significations that have been inferred through linguistic and cultural analysis is akin to Set B, which operates in a more subtle capacity to 'transmit' meaning. This reflection of material realities can illuminate a

---

[332] Ibid., p. 65. Straubhaar and Valtýr refer here to *Eyrbyggja saga*, (ÍF 4, 1957), a text not considered in this thesis. In chapter 11, Snorri *goði* returns to his homestead dressed in a *svört kápa,* when perhaps what would have been more appropriate was a garment similar to Bolli Bollasson's scarlet and gold homecoming outfit in *Laxdæla saga*: 'Bolli var svo mikill skartsmaður er hann kom út úr för þessi að hann vildi engi klæði bera nema skarlatsklæði og pellsklæði og öll vopn hafði hann gullbúin. Hann var kallaður Bolli hinn prúði' ('He had become such a fine dresser by the time he returned from his journey abroad that he wore only clothes of scarlet or silk brocade and all his weapons were decorated with gold. He became known as Bolli the Elegant'), *Laxdæla saga* 77, pp. 224-225; *The Saga of the People of Laxardal* 77, pp. 118; Valtýr Guðmundsson, '*Lítklædi*', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 9 (1893), 171-198.
[333] Straubhaar, 'Wrapped in a Blue Mantle', p. 64.
[334] Ibid., p. 54.

number of things, such as Viking Age textile-making processes, as is the case with the poem *Darraðarljóð* in *Njáls* saga; or how clothing and textiles within the sagas can indicate how later scribes and audiences received and related to the *Íslendingasögur*, because of the ways in which they describe the apparel of certain characters.[335] The language used to depict dress and textiles – even adjectives as simple as *svartr* and *blár* – indicates certain codified cultural significances which imbue the sagas with additional layers of meaning that often goes unexplored or unnoticed.

Straubhaar illustrates this with Guðrún Ósvífsdóttir's garments in *Laxdæla saga* 55.[336] Her clothing is described in detail a number of times throughout the saga, which is interesting in itself because of the propensity in saga narrative to focus on action, however Straubhaar does not explore the significance of this.[337] Instead, she focuses on Guðrún's outfit in this chapter, which consists of a *námkyrtill* ('kirtle made of *nám* cloth'), *vefjarupphlutr* ('woven upper-bodice'), *sveigr,* ('headdress') as well as her *blæja* with *mörk blá og tröf fyrir enda* ('with black 'stitches' and fringe(s) at the end').[338] Straubhaar argues that Guðrún's clothes are 'several centuries younger than Guðrún herself, since it [her clothes] seems to resemble the high-medieval gowns worn by various queens on the friezes at the cathedrals of Chartres, D'Angers, and Nôtre-Dame de Corbeil.'[339] While she considers this anachronism to be a hindrance to the accuracy of her results, I would suggest that it is in keeping with the functionality of Set B: a later scribe's choice to clothe the saga's heroine in garments usually associated with royalty is indicative of how Guðrún was perceived by an audience contemporaneous with the garments in question, rather than as an anomaly to be negotiated.[340]

---

[335] Further discussion of *Darraðarljóð* will take place in Chapter Four of this thesis.
[336] Straubhaar, 'Wrapped in a Blue Mantle', p. 54.
[337] I will discuss the role that textiles play in the characterisation of Guðrún in Chapter Four.
[338] *Laxdæla saga* 55, p. 168; *The Saga of the People of Laxardal* 55, p. 87.
[339] Straubhaar, 'Wrapped in a Blue Mantle', p. 54.
[340] Sif offers an alternative perspective on the significance of the description of Guðrún's clothes. She argues that, 'the narrative voice directs the reader's (or audience's) attention to her clothing, thus focusing on her body which provides an analogue to the mutilated body of Bolli lying close by […] The focus on Guðrún's clothes draws attention to the blood remnants that will stain the material; a visceral and mental mnemonic image that lays the groundwork for the later whetting scene where the bloodstained clothes will play a vital role.' *Emotion in Old Norse Literature*, p. 128. Further discussion on the function and importance of bloodstained clothes to an incitement speech will take place in Chapter Four of this thesis.

Guðrún is a main character whose personality and actions drive a significant portion of the saga narrative, which is why it is fitting that she wears the 'costume' of a queen. As a modern audience lacking the culturally contingent understanding of such comparisons, however, it is possible that our understanding of the social and cultural significations of Guðrún's clothes can be deepened through close attention and analysis of the textile terminology. For example, *blæja* is defined as 'fine coloured cloth' which can be variably used as a bed sheet, burial sheet, or altar cloth (Cleasby-Vigfusson). It is translated as a 'shawl' by Kevena Kunz, which does convey the nature of the garment (in that it wraps, covers, enfolds, and is worn on the outside of other garments as a top-layer) but omits the nature of the fabric, as well as any material or cultural significance that a thirteenth-century audience may have attributed to it. Furthermore, *Laxdæla saga* 55 is the only instance in which a *blæja* is understood to be a shawl: the majority of records refer to bed coverings, or as an altar cloth (*ONP*). The characteristic which is shared across all three meanings is that it is considered to be a thin fabric. Due to its association with the church, as well as the above-mentioned sculptural depictions of royal dress similar to the kind worn by Guðrún, 'thin' could be interpreted as 'fine'. In *Laxdæla saga* 32, Guðrún is described as, 'the most beautiful woman to have grown up in Iceland'.[341] Furthermore, 'Guðrún var kurteis kona svo að í þann tíma þóttu allt barnavípur það er aðrar konur höfðu í skarti hjá henni' (She took great care of her appearance, so much so that the adornments of other women were considered mere child's play in comparison').[342] This attention to her outward appearance is present at all times in the narrative. For example, in her first marriage it is supposedly her demand for fine things that drives her husband to physically assault her.[343] There is also the matter of the headdress, gifted to Kjartan by Ingibjörg as a token of her favour and affection, and a blessing upon his future marriage to Guðrún.[344] Of course, Guðrún is married to Bolli, and upon returning to Iceland, Kjartan decides to marry Hrefna – it is she, not Guðrún, who receives the headdress. There are reasons for the tension between the two

[341] *The Saga of the People of Laxardal* 32, p. 43.
[342] *Laxdæla saga* 32, p. 86; *The Saga of the People of Laxardal* 32, p. 43.
[343] *Laxdæla saga* 34, pp. 93-94.
[344] *Laxdæla saga* 43, p. 131.

households which go beyond the headdress, but when it goes missing – suspected to have been stolen by Guðrún – it marks the end of their cordial relationship.[345]

The headdress serves as a locus for Guðrún's frustration because it is a physical reminder of what perhaps should have been hers (i.e., both Kjartan as her husband as well as the headdress), along with the status and power which would have accompanied that marriage:

> Kjartan gaf Hrefnu að línfé moturinn og var sú gjöf allfræg því að engi var þar svo vitur eða stórauðigur að slíka gersemi hefði séð eða átta. En það er hygginna manna frásögn að átta aurum gulls væri ofið í moturinn.
>
> ('Kjartan gave Hrefna the headdress as a wedding present and the gift was renowned throughout the country, as no Icelander was so cultured that he had seen, or so wealthy that he had possessed, such a treasure. According to reliable reports, there were eight ounces of gold woven into the headdress').[346]

The headdress is clearly valuable, both in terms of the weight of gold woven into it as well as the social and cultural importance it conveys to the one who owns it. While it can be said that garments can be more than just garments to all of the characters in the sagas, this is especially true for Guðrún, who sews a shirt to initiate a divorce, and who presents Bolli's blood-soaked clothes to her teenage sons in order to incite them to vengeance.[347] Therefore, while the attention paid to Guðrún's appearance at the moment Bolli is killed may seem out of place amidst the graphic violence, it is actually consistent with how she is depicted throughout the saga narrative. Close examination of textile vocabulary within the framework of a vestementary code reveals implicit, culturally contingent meaning. The association of *blæja* with a luxury fabric used in – among other places – a religious setting, as well as the general similarity of apparel worn by both Guðrún and the carved representations of royal women is significant. Sartorially speaking, her *blæja* conveys this queenly association to a later medieval audience in a way that the noun 'shawl' fails to replicate.[348]

The remainder of this chapter will focus on how our understanding of certain narrative events is enhanced when we pay close attention to textile

---

[345] *Laxdæla saga* 46, p. 143.
[346] *Laxdæla saga* 45, p. 138; *The Saga of the People of Laxardal* 45, p. 71.
[347] See Chapter Four for further discussion.
[348] For more on this see Chapter Three.

terminology. This will be achieved by considering how textiles might function in Old Norse saga literature as part of a broader vestementary code, as informed by linguistic, metaphoric and cultural understanding. In order to demonstrate one of the many possible ways to approach this, I will now take a closer look at the specific garment terms used in the opening of this chapter: the case of the swapped *kufl* and *kápa* in *Gísla saga.* Of the selection of texts included in the database, four texts contain multiple instances of the word *kufl*, while five texts contain multiple instances of the word *kápa.* This data includes compound nouns as well nouns modified with an adjective, such as *blár kápa* and *söluvaðkufl.* There are two instances of the compound noun *loðkápa,* which occur in *Grettis saga* and *Egils saga;* these will be not be considered here alongside the data for *kápa,* but discussion will follow in Chapter Three. Occurrences of each word have been organised into categories, which have been identified by expanding on Straubhaar's initial categorisation of behaviours associated with *blár* and *svartr*: 'suspicious behaviour', 'practical scenarios', 'disguise' and – conversely – 'identifiers', 'correlation between the presence of weapons and violence with death', 'correlation between the presence of weapons and violence with threats and intimidation', and 'the presence of weapons with the absence of violence'. I will discuss each of the textile terms separately, identifying their function within the vestementary code by exploring the linguistic, symbolic and metaphoric significance attributed to each noun, as well as the narrative contexts in which they appear. Once the differences between these two similar garments have been established, I will re-examine the significance of Gísli and Þórðr's cloak swap.

***Kufl*: Practicality and Survival**

As briefly illustrated in *Gísla saga,* the *kufl* can be used as a means of disguise or as a way to facilitate deceitful behaviour. My analysis will show that it also has a strong connection to methods of survival, as well as other practical functions. The term 'survival', here means preservation of life against various external threats like social or environmental obstacles. Survival can often lead to morally ambiguous action, and indeed the *kufl* is used in ways that could be considered immoral. It is fitting, therefore, that there is a connection between survival and outlawry, as indicated by the fact that out of the four texts in which *kufl* appears within the

context of survival (disguise, practical methods and deceit), three of them show direct connections between *kufl,* survival and outlawry.[349] In *Grettis saga*, perhaps the most famous of 'outlaw' sagas, the *kufl* is used twice for practical means of survival and three times as a disguise. In *Grettis saga* 38, Grettir's companions challenge him to swim across a body of water to obtain fire for their camp. Grettir is doubtful as to the benefits of this ordeal (and indeed prophesises his own outlawry as a direct result, as he accidentally burns the house down, along with all of its occupants), but he is persuaded to do it on the basis of further growing his reputation. The weather conditions are not favourable for outdoor swimming, so Grettir prepares beforehand: 'hann fór í kufl einn klæða og söluvoðarbrækur. Hann stytti upp um sig kuflinn og rak að sér utan basttaug að sér miðjum og hafði með sér kerald. Síðan hljóp hann fyrir borð' ('He took off his clothes and put on nothing but a cowl with breeches of homespun cloth underneath. He tucked up the cowl and tied a bast rope around his waist, and took a cask with him. Then he dived overboard').[350] In this instance, the *kufl* and *söluvaðbrækur* are deemed more practical for swimming than his presumably heavy clothes. *Kufl* is here translated as 'cowl', but, as the various definitions indicate, this could mean either a cloak with cowl attached, or a separate garment worn about the head and neck (Cleasby-Vigfusson, *kufl, dular-kufl* and *kufls-hǫttr*; c.f., *ONP*). It is reasonable to assume that, given the fact that he removes most of his clothes so that they do not become too heavy and drag him under water, this particular *kufl* is not attached to a cloak. The same could be said of a similar situation which arises in *Grettis saga* 75: 'býst Grettir nú til sunds og hafði söluvoðarkufl og gyrður í brækur. Hann lét fitja saman fingurna' ('Grettir prepared for his swim by putting on a 'homespun' cowl and breeches, and having his fingers wrapped up together').[351] This is the second example from *Grettis saga* in which there is a direct connection between survival and the practical uses of a *kufl*. In this case, *kufl* is modified into the compound noun *söluvaðkufl*, which is translated as 'homespun cowl'.[352]

---

[349] For general discussion of the outlaw's attire, see Sauckel, *Die Literarische Funktion von Kleidung*, pp. 54-56.
[350] *Grettis saga* 38, p. 130; *The Saga of Grettir the Strong* 38, p. 111.
[351] *Grettis saga* 75, pp. 238-239; *The Saga of Grettir the Strong* 75, p. 165.
[352] The compound *söluvaðkufl* indicates a *kufl* made from *söluvaðmál. Vaðmál* is *the* homespun cloth produced in Iceland. The prefix *söul-* may refer to *sala*, 'trade, transaction, sale', *ONP.* Another potential avenue of interpretation is *sól,* 'sun, sunlight, sunshine', which may be indicative of its golden/yellow colour. See: *Lexis of Cloth and Clothing,* Latin *solsecle,* 'usually referring to pot

In the three examples in *Grettis saga* where *kufl* is utilised as a means of disguise, two of those instances have associations with suspicious behaviour or motives. In *Grettis saga* 47 for example, 'Grettir fór eina nótt burt af Völlum því að hann vildi ekki að kaupmenn yrðu varir við. Hann fékk sér svartan kufl og steypti utan yfir klæði og duldist svo' ('Grettir left Vellir one night, because he did not want the merchants to find out. He took himself a black cowl which he wore over his clothes as a disguise').[353] Grettir is specifically said to don a *svartr kufl*, a 'black cowl' in order to enable his escape from Vellir unseen by the merchants. From Straubhaar, we already understand some of the associations between *svartr* and certain actions ('going to kill' and 'going to kill – potentially in disguise'), which suggests that an early medieval audience would have been privy to cultural and social implications of Grettir wearing a 'black' cowl. Furthermore, it is specified that Grettir leaves Vellir 'one night'; one of Straubhaar's counter arguments regarding the association between dark clothing, 'dark deeds' and stealth, is the fact that nights are not always dark in Iceland, therefore a black cloak or cowl would not be effective in terms of camouflage.[354] As William Ian Miller has pointed out, however, despite the lack of darkness during the Icelandic summer, there is a clear social and legal connection between the nocturnal hours (typically when 'decent' people are asleep) and suspicious or criminal behaviour such as theft and murder.[355] Furthermore, he argues that, 'solitariness was always ground for suspicion. Being alone [… was] the state to which the outlaw, as well as the kinless and impoverished was condemned.'[356] Therefore, regardless of the season, solo nocturnal wanderings in clothing associated with violence would certainly signal to a medieval audience that Grettir's actions are not morally or socially acceptable.

In *Grettis saga* 72 Grettir has been an outlaw for about fifteen or sixteen years and has settled on the island of Dragney with his brother Illugi and a vagrant

---

marigold (calendula officinalis) or various similar plants, used to describe cloth dyed the colour of marigolds or the colour itself'; c.f., *solsequinus,* 'of the colour of a *solsequium* [heliotrope, i.e.: sunflower etc.,] marigold yellow', *DMLBS.*

[353] *Grettis saga* 47, p. 148; *The Saga of Grettir the Strong* 47, p. 120.

[354] This episode occurs shortly after Grettir is outlawed at the summer *Alþing.* It is further specified that although he sets out under the cover of darkness, it is daylight by the time he arrives at Bakki and steals a horse, albeit before the farmhands are awake.

[355] Miller, 'Gift, Sale, Payment, Raid: Case Studies in the Negotiation and Classification of Exchange in Medieval Iceland', *Speculum* 61 (1986), 18-50, p. 44.

[356] Ibid., p. 44.

called Glaumr.[357] The locals own shares in this island, which is where they graze their livestock. When they row out to retrieve their animals, they find they cannot access the island as Grettir and his companions have pulled up the ladder, and refuse to give up their possession of the land.[358] There is enmity between the locals and the outlaws, with aggressive personalities on each side. Therefore when spring arrives, and Grettir takes the opportunity to go to the mainland to steal supplies, tensions between them are high. He wears a disguise so that he can travel undetected, but is drawn to the games and festivities of the spring assembly. There, two of the main aggressors –Hjalti and Þorbjörn – try to convince Grettir (whom they do not recognise due to his disguise) to wrestle with them. He only agrees to it should those at the assembly swear an oath of peace. Then:

> Eftir það kastaði hann kuflinum og því næst öllum bolklæðum. Þá leit hver til annars og brá mjög vo fyrir grön. Þóttust þeir kenna að þetta var Grettir Ásmundarson því að hann var ólíkur öðrum mönnum fyrir vaxtar sakir og þrekleika og þögnuðu nú allir en Hafur þóttist ósvinnur orðinn
>
> ('After that he threw off his cowl and stripped to the waist. All the men looked at each other with expressions of alarm. They realised that this was Grettir Asmundarson, because he surpassed all other men in physique and strength. Everyone fell silent, and Haf realised he had acted rashly').[359]

This is not the first time that Grettir disguises his identity with a *kufl* – although in this case it is reasonable to suggest that his behaviour (theft) and motives (humiliation of the locals) are not morally or socially acceptable, and therefore fits within the category of 'disguise – suspicious behaviour'. During an earlier chapter Grettir is being hunted by a man called Þórir, whose sons died in the house fire which Grettir had inadvertently started.[360] After he and his companion manage to evade detection by hiding out in a shieling, Grettir decides to play a joke on Þórir by going out to meet him dressed in a disguise comprised of a wide-brimmed hat and a stick. He tells Þórir and his men that he saw the one they were chasing riding not far from where they currently stood, which leads them straight into marshland where they spend the rest of the afternoon trying to get free:

> En er Þórir kom heim þótti mörgum Grettir hafa vafið héðin að höfði þeim. Setti Þórir þá gíslingar fyrir Gretti hvar sem hann kæmi. Tók Grettir það til

[357] *Grettis saga* 72, p. 229.
[358] *Grettis saga* 70-71, pp. 226-229.
[359] *Grettis saga* 72, p. 233; *The Saga of Grettir the Strong* 72, p. 162.
[360] *Grettis saga* 63, pp. 149-151; c.f., *Grettis saga* 38, pp. 130-131.

> ráðs að hann sendi fylgdarmann sinn vestur á sveitir með hestana en hann fór upp til fjalla og var í dularkufli og fór svo norður þar öndverðan vetur svo að hann kenndist ekki.
>
> ('When Thorir returned home, many people certainly thought that Grettir had pulled the wool over their eyes. Thorir mounted spies to look out for Grettir wherever he might go. Grettir's answer was to send his companion to the west of the district with their horses while he went up the mountains disguised in a cowl. Then he went north at the beginning of winter, and no one recognised him').[361]

The conceptual association between *kufl* and disguise functions within the framework of 'Set B', according to the rules of Barthes' vestementary code; that is, an implicit association, created through a series of negatives – anything not mentioned is not required for a successful disguise.[362] However, in the above example where Grettir escapes his pursuers by sending his companion to ride as a decoy while he heads north in a *dularkufl* (a compound noun comprised of *dul,* 'secretiveness', 'disguise' and *kufl* 'cowl') the association is concretised and can be assigned to Barthes' 'Set A', where there is an explicit expression of relation and function between garment and world.

This connection between *kufl* and disguise is not exclusive to *Grettis saga.* There is, of course, the episode of the swapped *kufl* and *kápa* in *Gísla saga,* in addition to episodes that occur in *Laxdæla saga* and *Njáls saga.* More will be said about *Gísla saga* shortly, but it is sufficient to only look at the contexts in which the *kufl* appears in the other two sagas to see that there is a solid conceptual association between *kufl* and the category 'disguise – suspicious behaviour'. In *Njáls saga* 21, Gunnar is approached by his kinswoman, Unnur, who is caught in a legal dispute over her wealth with her ex-husband, Hrútur. She wants Gunnar to get it back for her but he does not know how, so he goes to Njáll for advice. Njáll instructs him to do as he says without deviation, otherwise his life will be in danger. In order for his plan to succeed, it is essential that Gunnar dresses exactly as Njáll tells him to:

> Nú skalt þú ríða heiman við hinn þriðja mann. Skalt þú hafa voskufl ystan klæða og undir söluvoðarkyrtil mórendan. Þar skalt þú hafa undir hin góðu klæði þín og taparöxi í hendi.

---

[361] *Grettis saga* 63, p. 209; *The Saga of Grettir the Strong* 63, p. 150.
[362] Barthes, *The Fashion System,* p. 22.

> ('You must ride from home with two men. You must be wearing a hooded cloak on the outside and striped 'homespun' underneath, and underneath this you must wear your good clothes and carry a short axe').[363]

In order to successfully press a claim again Hrútur, Gunnar must disguise his identity and pretend he is a quarrelsome merchant of much lower standing than he is. An integral aspect of this disguise is the *váskufl* (as well as the clothes made from *söluvaðmál*); however, beneath all of this he must still wear his *góða klæði,* his 'good clothes', and carry an axe in each hand. There is again a concrete connection between disguise and the *kufl*, further enhanced by the fact that in this instance it is a compound comprised of *vás* and *kufl*, where *vás* means 'hardships endured due to bad weather', as well as the harsh conditions (storm, rain, etc.,) themselves (*ONP* c.f., Cleasby-Vigfusson, 'wetness or fatigue from enduring bad weather'). An accepted translation is 'rain-cloak/cowl', which is consistent with other compound textile terms such as *vásklæði* and *váskyrtil.*[364] This suggests that Gunnar must wear a garment suitable for travelling in order to corroborate his merchant act. This is a strong example of an Old Norse textile term functioning in the capacity of 'Set B'. There is no explicit connection between *váskufl* and being a merchant, therefore the primary relationship between these two seemingly separate things – a particular garment and a particular occupation – 'transmits' the conceptual association between aforementioned garment and occupation. The fact the Gunnar must wear his 'good clothes' underneath his merchant's disguise stands as testimony to the strong link between status, identity and clothing. While on the outside, Gunnar wears a *váskufl* and behaves roughly, underneath he is still the same admirable hero of good character and standing.[365] In fact, his 'good clothes' are the only thing that gives him away after he has pressed Unnur's suit against Hrútur.[366]

Þorgils uses the association between the *váskufl* and moral ambiguity in *Laxdæla saga* 62, when he disguises his status and intentions in order to illicitly obtain information from an unsuspecting individual. Þorgils leads a party of ten

---

[363] *Njáls saga* 22, p. 59; *Njal's Saga* 22, p. 26.
[364] *vás-klæði,* 'rain clothes' in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta,* 2 vols., ed. by Ólafur Halldorsson, (Copenhagen: Editiones Arnamagnaeanae, 1958) p. 116 *Grettis saga* 19, p. 64; *vás-kyrtill,* 'rain cloak' in *Diplomatarium Norvegicum,* 22 vols., ed. by Christian C. A. Lange (Oslo, 1847) IV., p. 468.
[365] Gunnar's fine character is described in detail in *Njáls saga* 19.
[366] *Njálss saga* 23, p. 64.

men in order to exact vengeance on Helgi Harðbeinsson, one of the men responsible for the slaying of Bolli.[367] After riding to Vatnshorn, where Helgi's farmstead is located, Þorgils announces that they will make camp some distance away while he goes on alone to discover Helgi's whereabouts, 'Gerir Þorgils nú klæðaskipti, steypir af sér kápu blárri en tók yfir sig voskufl einn grán. Hann fer heim til bæjarins og er hann var kominn nálega að garði þá sér hann mann ganga í móti sér' ('Thorgils then had a change of clothes, removing his black cloak and pulling on a hooded cowl of grey homespun. He went up to the farm and when he had almost reached the hayfield wall he saw a man approaching').[368] There are two points of interest in this example. Firstly, Þorgils initially wore a *blár kápa* on this journey to exact vengeance, which was also identified by Straubhaar as supporting the hypothesis that a blue or black cloak equates to violence.[369] Secondly, it seems to him that the best approach is to first investigate while in disguise so as not to alert Helgi and his men of their intentions, and the best way to achieve this is to change from his *blár kápa* to a *gr váskufl*.

As has already been discussed in relation to *Grettis saga*, there is an explicit relationship between *kufl* and 'disguise – suspicious behaviour', as befitting a 'Set A' categorisation. This relationship is further complicated by the transmission of status and occupation via the way in which an individual clothes their outward appearance, as can be seen when Gunnar disguises his good clothes with a *váskufl* in *Njáls saga.*[370] When Þorgils changes from a *kápa* to a *kufl* in *Laxdæla saga*, this would signal to a medieval audience that he is also shifting from one mode or status to another. In this instance, the *kápa* is indicative (although not necessarily a guarantee) of his violent intentions, as well as the implicit social approval attached to those actions, which enables him to ride in the open with a large group of men. When he pulls on the *váskufl*, however, he is shedding himself of that well-known respectability (as well as any visual indications of his violent intentions) in order to obtain key information by means of stealth.[371] Furthermore, when he

[367] *Laxdæla saga* 55, 62.
[368] *Laxdæla saga* 62, p. 185; *The Saga of the People of Laxardal* 62, p. 95.
[369] Straubhaar, 'Wrapped in a Blue Mantle', Table 4.2, p. 59.
[370] *Njáls saga*, 22, p. 59.
[371] Drawing moral comparison between Þorgils' and Gunnar's actions is unavoidable, as both act in a similar way on the behalf of wronged women – Guðrún and Unnur respectively, As Miller has observed, to be alone is to be suspicious (Miller, 'Gift, Sale, Payment, Raid', p. 44), therefore it is

approaches a local man on Helgi's land, Þorgils explicitly states that he is an outlaw, thus strengthening the connection between the *kufl* and outlawry and with the ambiguity associated with being alone, as well as reducing his capacity for social threat. In other words, he does not have any powerful friends, and cannot pose any immediate or lasting danger.[372] His cunning is rewarded when the local man informs him that Helgi is at his shieling with other outlaws to whom he is providing shelter. After receiving directions, Þorgils returns to his companions and they arrive at the shieling by the following morning.

Significantly, in *Laxdæla saga* 63 one of Helgi's household witnesses the vengeance party and reports back to Helgi. Far from being alarmed and jumping into action however, Helgi demands to know the appearance of each man that the boy saw. From his reply it is clear that Þorgils has changed from his *kufl* back into his *kápa*, 'Sveinninn mælti: "Þar sat maður í steindum söðli og í blárri kápu. Sá var mikill og drengilegur, vikóttur og nokkuð tannber"' ('The boy said: "one of the men sat on a saddle of coloured leather and wore a black cloak. He was a large man of manly build, balding at the temples and with very prominent teeth"').[373] While other aspects of his appearance are telling – such as his prominent teeth – the fact that he is clothed in his *kápa* once more is a symbolic and grammatical indication of Þorgils' violent intentions.[374] On the one hand it is symbolic because of the mutable qualities of cloth, which allows the *kufl* and *kápa* to absorb the culturally contingent connection between this particular style and colour of cloak, and a spectrum of behaviours that are indicative of individual characteristics and social values. On the other hand, it is grammatical because it functions within a wider structure of meaning, much in the same way that grammar informs implicit understanding within the wider structure of a language. The fact that there is an explicit relationship between *kufl* and disguise indicates that when a character

---

significant that despite setting out on their journeys in the company of others, both ultimately act alone.

[372] 'Þorgils svarar: "Eg varð sekur í sumar á þingi"' ('"I was outlawed this summer at the Assembly"'). *Laxdæla saga* 62, p. 185; *The Saga of the People of Laxardal* 62, p. 96.

[373] *Laxdæla saga* 63, p. 187; *The Saga of the People of Laxardal* 63, p. 97.

[374] Teeth visible in a grin can be considered as a somatic indicator, something which Miller has termed 'somatic semiotics', Miller, 'Emotions and the Sagas' in *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland,* ed. by Gísli Pálsson, pp. 88-109, p. 100. For further work on emotion and somatic indicators in the sagas, see Kirsten Wolf, 'Somatic Semiotics'; Sif, *Emotions in Old Norse Literature.*

changes from a *kufl* to a *kápa,* their object is no longer disguise. However, it would be inaccurate to suggest that the exact opposite – exposure – is true, just as it would be reductive to assume that disguise or concealment is an entirely straightforward or unique attribute of the *kufl*. The context and cultural attitudes as expressed through the words and actions of the saga characters can help us identify themes and patterns that suggest a range of meanings. I will now examine *kápa* within the framework of the seven categories identified above.

***Kápa*: Socially Acceptable Violence**

Unlike with the *kufl*, there are no explicit connections between *kápa* and 'disguise' or 'practical uses/scenarios' within the sagas under analysis. Instead, out of the twelve instances where *kápa* is present, we see three examples (*Bjarnar saga Hítdælakappa, Njáls saga,* and *Gísli saga Súrssonar*) where a character wears a *kápa* in a situation with drawn weapons, resulting in death.[375] The remaining examples show a situation where a *kápa* is worn while weapons are present, but events only lead to threat or intimidation rather than death. These results roughly corroborate what Straubhaar argues about the problematic tendency in scholarship to uncritically associate wearing 'dark' clothing with slaying.[376]

Although there are instances where a death occurs in the immediate vicinity of a *kápa,* it is not always the one wearing it that does the killing. In *Njáls saga* 92, the Njálssons ride out to kill Þráinn, with whom they have a long-standing enmity. Before they set off, the saga narrator heightens the dramatic tension via means of focalization, concentrating on Njáll's discovery of his sons preparing to leave. Skarphéðinn's axe makes a noise as it smacks into the wall, which alerts Njáll. He rises from bed to find his sons gathering their weapons. Here the saga narrator halts the progression of the action to focus on what the would-be slayers are wearing:

> Skarphéðinn var fremstur. Hann var í blám stakki og hafði törguskjöld og öxi sína reidda um öxl. Næst honum gekk Kári. Hann hafði silkitreyju og hjálm gylltan, skjöld og var dreginn á leó. Næst honum gekk Helgi. Hann hafði rauðan kyrtil og hjálm og rauðan skjöld og markaður á hjörtur. Allir voru þeir í litklæðum

[375] There is no correlation however, between wearing a *kápa* with being the aggressor or victim.
[376] Straubhaar, 'Wrapped in a Blue Mantle', p. 54.

> ('Skarphedin was in front, in a 'black' jacket. He was holding a small round shield and had his axe ready on his shoulder. Next came Kari. He had on a silk jacket and a gilded helmet, and a shield with a lion drawn on it. After him came Helgi. He wore a red tunic and a helmet and was carrying a red shield marked with a hart. They were all in 'coloured' clothing').[377]

While the garments described in the passage above are clearly luxurious (as attested by the presence of silk and red-dyed clothing),[378] none of them are wearing a *kápa.*[379] Shortly after, we see Þráinn and his men positioning themselves to meet the oncoming threat, in which time, 'Þráinn fer af kápunni og tekur af sér hjálminn' ('Thrain took off his cloak and his helmet').[380] While it is not entirely clear what motivates Þráinn to remove his protective garments – including a *kápa* – narratively-speaking it enables Skarphéðinn the chance to land a fatal blow to his head with his axe, echoing the sound it had made earlier that day when it made contact with Njáll's wall. What is clear is the conceptual significance attributed to his *kápa* and *hjalmr* ('helm'), because of a passage earlier on in the saga in which Þráinn is described as *skrautmenni* (a 'showy man', or literally 'a man' fond of 'ornamentation') who likes to wear a *kápa blár* and *hjalmr* when riding out in public.[381] Part of this outfit includes a spear and shield gifted to him by *jarl* Hákon of Norway, which would have been considered a symbol of favour, success and status when on display.[382] While it makes narrative sense for Þráinn to make himself vulnerable to attack by removing his *kápa* and *hjalmr,* there is an additional layer of significance that works as follows: Þráinn is 'fond of show', which motivates him to display the favour which Hakón has bestowed on him via fine gifts. This display includes wearing the *kápa* which, as part of its grammatical function, already signifies a range of potential meaning (from 'wearing one's best clothes' to 'intention to kill'). The fact that he includes it in his ensemble suggests

---

[377] *Njáls saga* 92, p. 231; *Njal's Saga* 92, p. 111.
[378] Straubhaar, 'Wrapped in a Blue Mantle', pp. 63-65.
[379] Although Skarphéðinn's *stakkr* is *blár* which, according to Straubhaar, spans the scale of potential behaviours associated with dark colours ('Wrapped in a Blue Mantle', p. 64), and is therefore in-keeping with the opulence of his brothers' attire while maintaining a certain level of threat associated with weapons, violence and death.
[380] As indicated by the sun reflecting off of their shields – armed men with a known grudge rarely ride towards you with good intentions.
[381] 'Þráinn var skrautmenni mikið. Hann reið jafnan í blárri kápu og hafði gylltan hjálm og spjót í hendi jarlsnaut og fagran skjöld og gyrður sverði' ('He was a showy person and always rode out in a 'black' cloak and a gilded helmet and carried the spear given to him by the earl and a beautiful shield, and wore a sword at his belt'), *Njáls saga* 91, p. 227; *Njal's Saga* 91, p. 109.
[382] See Chapter Three of this thesis for more on the function of gifts.

that it is meant to radiate power and status, indicating that there is a metaphoric and metonymic transmission (as occurs in Set B) between the *kápa* and that aforementioned power; metaphoric because it serves as a *representation* of Hakón's favour, and metonymic because at the same time it *is* Hákon, a physical presence that demands the same level of respect due to Hákon but paid instead to Þráinn.[383] Therefore when Þráinn wears the *kápa*, he is theoretically under Hákon's protection.[384] Subsequently, when he removes the *kápa* and *hjalmr* he is not only physically vulnerable, but also without Hákon's metaphoric and metonymic protection. This presents a clear path which allows Skarphéðinn to kill him.

However, this is only one example within the category of 'weapons and violence – death'. In *Bjarnar saga Hítdælakappa* 25*,* Björn is invited by Þorbjörg to stay at her homestead. On the last night of his stay, Björn dreams of being attacked by six men, which is taken to foreshadow an actual attack. Þorbjörg advises him to take the longer route back to his own home, as anyone waiting for him would not expect that from him, to which he agrees. However, at the last minute, he changes his mind and takes his usual route, only to spot six armed men ahead of him among whom is his enemy, Þórðr: 'Björn bjóst að verja sig ef þyrfti. Hann var í blárri kápu og gyrti hann að utan og brá síðan sverðinu' ('Bjorn prepared to defend himself if necessary. He was wearing a black cape, and he belted it firmly and then drew his sword').[385] Immediately after the saga narrator observes that he wears a *kápa* and draws his sword, the saga narrator shifts gear to focus on the action. Björn kills a man called Steinn with a spear before delivering a 'wound' to another man called Þorbjörn.[386] Þórðr, however, narrowly avoids death and is able to make his escape.

Finally, in *Gísla saga* 16 Gísli sets out to slay his brother-in-law, Þorgrímr. Just as the tension and drama of the slaying is created in *Njáls saga* as discussed

[383] This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.
[384] The same goes for other parts of his ensemble, such as the spear and helmet. A saga which takes this to a more literal level is *Víga-Glúms saga,* in which Glúmur is given a cloak, a spear and a sword by his grandfather, Vigfuss. As long as all three remain in his possession, he 'won't lose his status'. *Víga-Glúms saga* 6.
[385] *Bjarnar saga Hítdælakappa* 25; *The Saga of Bjorn, Champion of the Hitardal People* 25, pp. 287-288.
[386] While it is unclear how severe the wound (*sár*) is, it is clear that Steinn dies because of the verb *bana,* 'kill'.

above, so too does the saga narrator take the time to set the scene in *Gísla saga,* detailing Gísli's careful excuses to his wife, along with his personal preparations:

> Hann tekur spjótið Grásíðu úr örkinni og er í kápu blárri og skyrtu og í línbrókum og gengur hann síðan til lækjar þess er fellur á milli bæjanna og tekið var neytingarvatn af hvorumtveggja bænum
>
> ('He took the spear, Grey-side, from the trunk and, wearing a black cloak, a shirt and linen underbreeches, he walked down to the stream that ran between the two farms and which was the water source for both').[387]

While Gísli does eventually kill Þorgímr, thus confirming that this example of *kápa* fits within the category of 'weapons and violence – death', what is more interesting is that directly before the *kápa* is mentioned, we see Gísli retrieving a specific spear – Grásíða – from a chest. This particular spear was the weapon used to kill Vésteinn while he slept, and was removed from the scene and concealed in the chest by Gísli himself.[388] According to the narrative, the main reason for doing this was rooted in the law:

> Auðr vaknar við ok kallar á Þórð inn huglausa ok biðr hann taka vápnit ór undinni. Þat var þá mælt, at sá væri skyldr at hefna, er vápni kippði ór sari; en þat váru kölluð launvig, en eigi morð, er men létu vápn eptir í beninni standa.
>
> ('Aud awoke and called out to Thord the Coward and asked him to remove the weapon from the wound. At that time, whoever drew a weapon from a death wound was obliged to take revenge, and when a weapon was thus left in the fatal wound it was called secret manslaughter rather than murder').[389]

The spear is thus loaded with symbolic significance, and when Gísli removes it from its concealment within the chest, meaning is transmitted between both of them, i.e., the spear is enhanced by the *kápa,* while at the same time acts as enhancement for the significance of Gísli wearing the *kápa.*

The above analysis demonstrates that while it is both useful and necessary to create an Old Norse vestementary code to further the study of literary textiles within the *Íslendingasögur*, there is only so much that can be achieved with this approach alone. As argued earlier in this chapter, the vestementary code is

---

[387] *Gísla saga Súrssonar* 16, pp. 52-53; *Gisli Surrson's Saga* 16, p. 18.
[388] *Gísla saga Súrssonar* 13, pp. 43-45.
[389] *Gísla saga Súrssonar* 13, p. 44; *Gisli Surrson's Saga* 13, p. 14. Miller observes that this custom is not recorded anywhere else but in *Gísla Saga*, and is not contemporary to the author, 'Choosing the Avenger', p. 198, n. 153.

valuable in establishing a foundation from which to build an understanding of the basic functions of textiles and Old Norse textile terms within a specific literary text. However, due to the fact that these terms have been removed from their wider narrative and corpus context, their meanings are also out of context. As with Barthes' original vestementary code, there is only so much an individual term can reveal about its specific meaning. While this was not an issue for Barthes, whose aim was to discover a universal vestementary language, it does pose a number of problems for this thesis. First of all, even when there is an explicit relationship between textile term and world (such as between *kufl* and 'survival/outlawry') there is no means of deriving from the term alone what implications that relationship may have had within the collective cultural understanding of a medieval audience. Secondly, there is a very real danger of assuming that once a meaning has been identified and assigned to a textile term, it will be unproblematically applied to all instances of that term. This has already been explored by Straubhaar with regards to certain colours and cloaks, and further confirmed in this chapter after an examination of the contexts in which a *kápa* appears. Contrary to what has previously been assumed, saga characters do not necessarily wear a *blár kápa* in order to slay an enemy. There are other significations to a *kápa* which go beyond killing, such as status or ostentatious display. Quite often there are other indications within a narrative which foreshadow a character's intention to kill, as exemplified by Gísli's recovery and retrieval of the spear that was used to kill Vésteinn and then Þorgrímr. In light of these problems it seems that creating a vestementary system will only reveal so much about the function of literary textiles in the *Íslendingasögur.* The best way forward, it seems, is a more holistic, interdisciplinary approach where the Old Norse vestementary system serves as a foundation. This way, it is possible to consider the minutiae of a narrative in order to more accurately establish how an individual textile term might function *within that narrative moment*, rather than attempting to discover a universal definition for all instances of a textile term.

With this is mind I shall now return to the situation raised at the beginning of this chapter and take a closer look at *Gísla saga*, which takes place after Gísli has been outlawed for killing Þorgrímr. He sets off from his land with his portable

wealth and a servant, well aware that while his brother has refused to help him, he will stall his pursuers as much as he can. As they travel, a plan occurs to Gísli:

> Þá mælti Gísli: "Oft hefur þú mér hlýðinn verið og minn vilja gert og á eg þér góðu að launa." Það var vandi Gísla að hann var í kápu blárri og vel búinn; hann varpar þá af sér kápunni og mælti: "Kápu þessa vil eg gefa þér, vinur, og vil eg að þú njótir nú þegar og farir í kápuna og sit síðan í sleðanum, þeim er síðar fer, en eg mun leiða eykina og vera í kufli þínum." Þeir gera nú svo
>
> ('Gísli said: "you have often shown obedience to me and done what I wanted, and I owe you some reward." As usual, Gísli was wearing his black cloak and was well dressed. He removed his cape and said, "I want to give you this cloak, my friend, and I want you to enjoy its use right away. Put it on and sit behind on the sled and I'll lead the horses and wear your cloak." And that is what they did').[390]

Neither Gísli or his servant possess a 'cloak' in the way that we understand it in modern English – Gísli wears a *kápa* while his servant wears a *kufl.* The use of these two terms is deliberate because each possesses its own spectrum of signification which, when viewed in the light of other saga narratives, suggests that this signification may have been implicitly understood by an early medieval saga audience. In addition to this spectrum of signification is the fact that there is an inextricable link between clothing and identity which is enabled by the reciprocal relationship between cloth and body (permeation and transformation). Cloth somehow *becomes* a person, living or dead, and can serve as a physical manifestation of an individual's qualities, existing independently of the original wearer (or giver, as I will argue in Chapter Three of this thesis). Therefore, aside from the fact that there is an explicit connection between *kufl,* survival, practical scenarios and disguise, as well as a more nebulous association between *kápa* and a sliding scale of behaviours ranging from status to intention to kill, there are also additional associations that exist on a more personal level. As argued at the start of this chapter, when Gísli and his servant swap cloaks, they also swap their identities in a process of 'metonymic identity transference'. This alone may have been enough to confuse Gísli's pursuers. However, as I have shown in the above analysis of *kápa* and *kufl* and their various significations within the sagas, before identity can be transferred it must first be created and understood.

---

[390] *Gísla saga* 20, pp. 64-65; *Gisli Surrson's Saga* 20, p. 14.

Identity creation is enabled by textile terminology, and the significance of each term which is inferred via means of the vestementary code. The meaning attached to Gísli's *kápa* falls within a spectrum that conveys status and power, such as the *kápa* worn by Þráinn as part of his display of Hákon's favour; it is often also accompanied by varying levels of threat, violence and murderous intent, such as the detail of Björn's *kápa* before he meets an ambush party. Conversely, Þórðr's *kufl* conveys stealth, disguise and survival, attributes which bear a heavy association with the condition of the outlaw, such as in the case of Grettir in most of his exploits, or with an individual who is involved with morally grey activities, like Þorgils in *Laxdæla saga*. Gunnar's *kufl* in *Njáls saga* however, is not so straightforwardly understood because Gunnar is considered to be the best of men, and not one to act in a sneaky or underhanded manner. There are two important details regarding Gunnar's *kufl* that mitigate its negative connotations. Firstly, it is denoted by the compound noun *váskufl*, a garment suited to inclement weather conditions and, due to the shift in comutative class from Set A to Set B, is indicative of mercantile activities simply because he disguises himself as a merchant. Secondly, he undertakes this disguise in order to act on behalf of his kinswoman who cannot act for herself. In addition to these two things, he seeks Njáll's legal advice, who warns him that he must follow his instructions to the letter or put his life at risk. Part of that advice is to wear his own 'good' clothes underneath the *kufl.* His principled motives (which could be considered a duty), the threat against his life, as well as the Set B association between garment and profession (*váskufl* and merchant) combine to negate any slander that might befall Gunnar's character as a result of wearing the *kufl.* Wearing his own clothes beneath the disguise is an added insurance against such an outcome, which proves true when Hrútur and his men work out Gunnar's true identity based on his own clothes, not the *váskufl.*

In the case of Þórðr the 'coward', however, there are no exceptions. As I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the allusions which Clark observes between heroic Eddic past and the saga present allow for many parallels, even between the two 'cowardly' decoys, Hjalli in *Atlakviða* and Þórðr in *Gísla saga.* Þórðr's *kufl* is a symbolic, metonymic and grammatical indication of his weak character, signifying the full range of socially unacceptable behaviours. Within the context of the heroic past this is usually a negative thing. However, as Clark and

O'Donoghue have shown, the relationship between heroic ideal and saga reality is both complicated and undermined in the narrative, particularly by Gísli, whose relationship with heroism is ambivalent.[391] This attitude is exemplified when he identifies that the traits associated with the *kufl* – specifically, but not limited to disguise – are beneficial to him now that he is an outlaw. The moment when Gísli and Þórðr swap cloaks is a liminal space where the function and importance of literary textiles cannot be ignored. Clothing is a material manifestation of an individual's character, and Gísli's choice to draw around him the embodiment of Þórðr's cowardly nature, rather than maintain his heroic status, simply confirms the saga's ambivalent relationship with the heroic past. While the kápa and the *kufl* are visually similar (both are cloaks with cowls attached), this surface level trick would not fool Gísli's pursuers beyond a first glance; indeed, they are unaware of the swap until they pull the *kápa* away from Þórðr's corpse. However, when viewed through the lens of the vestementary code, the reason for the success of the swap becomes clear: prior to killing Þorgrímr, a man with Gísli's standing would not wear a *kufl* because of the culturally contingent understanding of a vestementary code from which we, as a modern audience, are completely removed. When Gísli pulls on the *kufl*, he doesn't just 'become' Þórðr, but loses his own identity completely, enabling him to 'disappear' from sight.

Conclusions

The Old Norse vestementary code is an essential theoretical framework and critical tool which can be used to begin an investigation into the full functionality of textiles in the *Íslendingasögur.* As I have demonstrated in this chapter, Old Norse textile terminology is imbued with culturally contingent meanings that, when used in a narrative, act as signifiers for a variety of significations. It enhances our understanding of the social and literary landscape in which the sagas were produced. In a cloth society such as the world of the sagas, textiles are language. Just as with any language however, context is vital to our comprehension. Without such contexts it is easy for inaccurate overgeneralisations to persist, such as the incorrect assumption that when a character wears a 'dark cloak' in the sagas, it

[391] Clark, *Gender, Violence and the Past,* pp. 101-102; O'Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse,* pp. 173-174.

means that they are about to kill – an assumption which Straubhaar complicates using an approach adjacent to the Old Norse Vestementary code. In the following chapter I will further explore the capacity for written textiles to act as a language in their own right, using the approaches outlined above. The discussion will demonstrate that understanding textiles and the Old Norse vestementary code enhances any reading of the *Íslendingasögur* and provides opportunities for new insights and interpretations. This is certainly true when examining aspects of the *Íslendingasögur* that are more inaccessible, such as gender norms, emotions and personal power-dynamics (especially for women). In order to achieve this I will elaborate further on the variety of Old Norse terms which can be translated into the modern English 'cloak'.

Chapter Three: The Semiology of Cloaks

In the previous chapter I established the theoretical framework of the Old Norse vestementary code, which serves as a critical foundation for the rest of this thesis. From this chapter onwards, the Old Norse vestementary code will function silently, and will inform all subsequent analysis in this thesis. I have shown how vital it is to focus on Old Norse textile vocabulary, paying close attention to the narrative contexts in which textiles appear. As demonstrated by my analysis of *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, specific words are imbued with personal and cultural significance, and – I have argued – can act as signposts for the audience which signal attributes such as status and wealth, interpersonal and political affiliations, as well as motives and personality. In this chapter I will expand on the concepts introduced in the methodology and examine a wider range of textile terminology in keeping with the modern English noun 'cloak'. I will argue that, while cloak is an acceptable category, it does not convey the subtleties of meaning imbued within the Old Norse original. This has a detrimental effect on our understanding of the *Íslendingasögur* because, as already highlighted in the previous chapter with regard to *Gísla saga*, garments and textiles are inscribed with culturally contingent significance that conveys paratextual information. The first half of this chapter is dedicated to a discussion of specific, cloak-related terminology and the potential material correspondences to that terminology which inform the symbolic, metonymic and grammatical implications of their literary counterparts. The second half begins with a deeper examination of cloaks as 'worn worlds', material memory and sites of emotional expression, before moving on to explore how this new status as 'emotive signposts' informs and interacts with the well-established social ritual of gift-exchange.[392] Amidst a growing understanding of the modes of emotional expression in the *Íslendingasögur* (a genre which is typically understood to be emotionally constrained) this chapter will demonstrate that textiles play an important role in transmitting emotion within the framework of what Sif Rikardsdottir has called 'emotive scripts' and 'horizons of feeling'.[393]

---

[392] I wish to thank Christina Lee for her input during the early stages of this chapter.
[393] Sif, *Emotion in Old Norse Literature: Translations, Voices, Contexts,* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017).

Before Bersi and Kormákr can begin their duel in *Kormáks saga*, they must first ensure that they follow the legally significant procedure of spreading a *feldr* beneath their feet, so as to demarcate the boundaries of their fight.[394] After their spontaneous swimming contest in *Laxdæla saga*, King Óláfr Tryggvason gives Kjartan the *skikkja* from his own back, thus securing Kjartan's obligation and service.[395] As they attempt to hunt a troublesome bear in *Grettis saga*, Björn throws Grettir's *loðkápa* into the bear's den in order to humiliate Grettir; when everyone else gives up on the hunt, Grettir returns to the den to collect what is his – namely the prestige of killing the bear single-handedly, but also his *loðkápa*.[396] In *Njáls saga,* Hrútur gives Queen Gunnhildr twelve *varafeldir* after spending an intimate fortnight together in Norway.[397] When Hallfreðr's coffin washes up on the shores of a monastery in *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds*, a number of attendants steal the items buried with him, including a *pellskikkja* given to him by Óláfr Tryggvason; despite being long dead, the ghost of Óláfr is so enraged at this theft that he appears to the local abbot in a dream and demands that the *pellskikkja* is recovered.[398]

Feldr, *skikkja*, *kápa*: these three nouns are all translated simply as 'cloak' in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*. Yet, as discussed in the previous chapter, the sheer variety of cloak-related terminology which exists in the *Íslendingasögur* suggests that cloaks (and other textiles) are inscribed with grammatical, symbolic and metonymic significance. This significance is both created by, and embedded within, the terminology itself. As I have already demonstrated in relation to *kápa* and *kufl,* although 'cloak' is a perfectly accurate translation for both of these terms, the medieval social and cultural significations attributed to the original terminology is lost in translation. From the modern English translation of *Gísla saga* 20, for example, an audience may understand that the swapped cloaks are conducive to Gísli's disguise and the tricking of his enemies; however, due to the unavoidable temporal, linguistic and cultural distance between a modern audience and the early medieval period, they cannot access the wider meanings associated

[394] *Kormáks saga* 10, pp. 237-238.
[395] *Laxdæla saga* 40, p. 118.
[396] *Grettis saga* 21, pp. 75-77.
[397] *Njáls saga* 3, p. 15.
[398] *Hallfreðar saga* 11, p. 199.

with the Old Norse terminology, *kápa* and *kufl,* particularly the difference between them in terms of criminality and deception. This barrier inhibits our understanding of how important textiles were during the medieval period, an importance which is used to inform, propel, and enhance many of the key narrative moments of the *Íslendingasögur.*

In order to begin dismantling this barrier it is worth exploring the various types of cloak that may have been worn by the people of the Viking Age. The following is based entirely on the lexical database I assembled.[399] Therefore a distinction must be made between literary depiction and historical, material reality. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the texts of the *Íslendingasögur* were recorded by later, thirteenth-century scribes, although they depict events from the time leading up to the founding of Iceland, as well as the first couple of decades of development from a land into a nation.[400] Any depiction of clothing or textiles should be understood as not being representative of the garments that were worn during the Viking Age. Furthermore, due to both an economic need to utilise all resources (recycling), and the fragile nature of organic matter, very few textile remains have survived from the Viking Age. As Straubhaar illustrates in relation to Guðrún's attire in *Laxdæla saga* 55, saga characters are often clothed in garments from time periods contemporary to the scribe, rather than that of the character.[401] As I have argued in the previous chapter, the disparity between temporal narrative settings and sartorial representations are not necessarily a problem to be negotiated, but instead speak to later perceptions of the characters. For example, Guðrún is not the only Icelandic woman dressed in the likeness of royalty. Hallgerðr, a similarly 'strong-willed' and powerful woman, is well-dressed at the summer *Þing* where she and Gunnar first meet in *Njáls saga*: 'Hún var svo búin að hún var í rauðum kyrtli og var á búningur mikill. Hún hafði yfir sér skarlatsskikkju og var búin hlöðum í skaut niður. Hárið tók ofan á bringu henni og var bæði mikið og fagurt' ('She was dressed like this: she had on a red gown heavily ornamented, and over that a scarlet cloak trimmed with *lace* down to

[399] See previous chapter for details on the method for data collection.
[400] Heather O'Donoghue, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Short Introduction,* Blackwell Introductions to Literature, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 23.
[401] See Chapter Two of this thesis; Sandra Baliff Straubhaar, 'Wrapped in A Blue Mantle: Fashion for Icelandic Slayers?' *Medieval Clothing and Textiiles* 1 (2005), 53-65, p. 54.

the hem. Her hair came down to her breasts and was both thick and fair').[402] Hallgerðr wears a gown and cloak of scarlet cloth. Despite multiple warnings about her character – even from her own mouth – Gunnar immediately wishes for them to be married.[403] As I will shortly demonstrate, *skikkja* is a type of cloak associated with wealth and/or royalty, even without the scarlet (a type of richly dyed, fine woollen cloth) or the additional ornamentation.[404] It is significant, therefore, that Gunnar is also dressed in manner akin to royalty, in the stately garments (*tígnarklæði*) and accessories gifted to him by *jarl* Hákon and King Harold Gormsson.[405]

While both Gunnar and Hallgerðr are clothed in such a way that they look like royalty, a device which is used to indicate how their characters were perceived by a later medieval audience, only one of them received their clothes from a king directly.[406] In the discussion of Þráinn's *kápa* in *Njáls saga* 92, I have already shown how wearing one's gifted finery can convey the symbolic and metonymic power of the giver. This chapter will further examine the social phenomenon of gift-exchange, and how textiles, specifically cloaks, express, enhance, and interact with these rules of social obligation and status. Furthermore, I will argue that when situated at the heart of a gift-exchange, cloaks and, by extension, other garments are sites of embodied emotional expression, functioning as a fundamental component of any given emotive script. First, however, I will explore the broad material and semantic range of Old Norse terminology for cloaks that are recorded in the *Íslendingasögur*.

---

[402] *Njáls saga* 33, p. 85; *Njal's Saga* 33, p. 37. Emphasis my own – see next note.
[403] C.f., Sauckel, *Die Literarische Funktion von Kleidung in den* Íslendingasögu*r and* Íslendingaþættir, Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanishen Altertumskunde 83, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), p. 23.
[404] The translation of *hlað* as 'lace' is problematic because lace is a sixteenth-century innovation. Any reference to 'lace' or 'lacing' in a medieval context usually refers to cords, trims and other fastenings of methods of closure: 'lace 1' and 'lace 2', *The Lexis of Cloth and Clothing*, http://lexissearch.arts.manchester.ac.uk/entry.aspx?id=2834 http://lexissearch.arts.manchester.ac.uk/entry.aspx?id=2835 [accessed 29th December 2020].
[405] *Njáls saga* 33, p. 85.
[406] 'Konungur gaf honum [Gunnar] tígnarklæði sín og glófa gullfjallaða og skarband, og gullhnútar á, og hatt gerskan' ('The king gave him stately garments of his own, leather gloves embroidered with gold, a gold-studded headband, and a Russian hat'). *Njáls saga* 31, pp. 82-83; *Njal's Saga* 33, p. 36.

Material and Linguistic Varieties of 'Cloak'

Cloaks are loose outer garments, usually without sleeves or in-built pockets. They come in a variety of lengths, weights and degrees of utility, and are not restricted to any particular expression of gender (unlike, for example, low-cut shirts or codpieces, as I will discuss in Chapter Four). They can also be used in a figurative sense to imply concealment,[407] or as metonymic devices that identify an individual, such as a Presbyterian – or any other – independent minister.[408] These definitions, however, are insufficient when dealing with cloaks in the *Íslendingasögur,* because they do not convey culturally contingent significances, neither do they allude to the sheer number and variety of Old Norse terms that could be translated as 'cloak'. This variety is achieved through compound nouns comprised of the type of cloak being referred to (a *kápa, kufl, skikkja,* etc.,) and a descriptor, which can often indicate texture, fibre, levels of ornamentation and status. One such compound is the *loðkápa,* which was briefly mentioned in the previous chapter. Old Norse *loð* (Old English *loþa*) is defined as 'shaggy' – of fleece or fur. It can be used of a cloak, such as in *loðkápa,* but it can also indicate large rectangles of cloth which could be used as bed-covers or wall hangings.[409] I have already argued that the value and significance of a cloak is reliant on narrative context, but this is also true of identifying the *type* of cloak. As I have already briefly highlighted in the discussion of *kápa* and *kufl*, and as will shortly be discussed, not all cloaks are suitable for all situations.

For example, a *skikkja* is a type of cloak which is synonymous, thus interchangeable, with *möttull*, a garment specifically defined as a 'mantle'. A mantle was an everyday outer garment, worn by men and women from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries. It could vary in length and be fastened in a variety of ways, such as with cords or clasps, as is the case with Halldór's *skikkja* in *Laxdæla saga* 75; the saga narrator also notes the practicality of his *skikkja,* because it is long enough for Halldór to sit on, like a blanket.[410] Alternatively, it could simply be

[407] This sense is not too dissimilar to the one attached to the Old Norse term *kufl.*
[408] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 'cloak' n. 1, 2b, 3, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/34489?rskey=SVneUY&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid [accesses 12/07/18] (henceforth abbreviated to *OED*).
[409] 'Cloak', *The Encyclopediea of Medieval Dress and Textiles,* pp. 127-129.
[410] Einar Ól. remarks that the cloak could be fastened with either, *Laxdæla saga* 75, p. 219, n. 2. Kevena Kunz opts for the translation 'long clasp', *The Saga of the People of Laxardal* 75, p. 115.

wrapped around the body.[411] In isolation, a *skikkja/möttull* does not indicate whether the cloak/mantle is made of expensive cloth or not, and therefore does not aid the reader in their interpretation of the cloak as a vestementary sign. However, if one takes into account the context in which *skikkja* appears, it becomes obvious that it can either be a basic, everyday kind of cloak, made of good quality (but not luxury) textiles, or an ostentatious, expensively decorated and richly dyed garment. This is evident when one takes into account who wears the garment (and their status in the narrative), as well as the situational context. For example, before Grettir's mother, Ásdís, gives him her father's sword, she first conceals it underneath her *skikkja.* Another example is when Ástriðr of Djúpárbakki tries to save Helgi Njálsson from burning in his home by wrapping him in a *kvenskikkja* (a woman's cloak).[412] In both of these examples, the *skikkja* is associated with a woman on the farmstead, suggesting a practical, hard-wearing garment, although this practicality does not necessarily indicate that it is plain.[413]

On the other hand, the *skikkja* is regularly associated with royalty, or gifts befitting royalty. In *Laxdæla saga* 40, King Óláfr Tryggvason wears a *skikkja góða* (a fine cloak) which he then gives to Kjartan after their swimming contest, an episode which will be discussed later in this chapter.[414] Later, he gives Gellir a *skikkja,* which is 'wonderfully crafted' for Yule.[415] In some of the shorter sagas, hero-poets are rewarded with cloaks lined with fur, 'finely made' cloaks, or cloaks of costly material.[416] However, there are examples where cloaks are explicitly luxurious, such as when King Aðalráðr rewards Gunnlaugr with a cloak made of scarlet, lined with the finest furs.[417] It should be noted that 'scarlet' refers to a fine, closely scraped woollen textile, rather than the vivid red it has come to be associated with, although scarlet cloth was often dyed such a colour, as well as bright greens and blues.[418] Interestingly, when Queen Gunnhildr bids Hrútur

---

[411] Maria Hayward, 'mantle', in *The Encyclopedia of Medieval Dress and Textiles,* p. 362.
[412] *Grettis saga* 17, p. 49; *Njáls saga* 129, p. 329.
[413] For example, the seams could be decorated with applied bands of tablet weaving, both as a means of decoration and reinforcement. See Østergård, *Woven into the Earth: Textiles from Norse Greenland,* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2009), pp. 104-106.
[414] *Laxdæla saga* 40, p. 118.
[415] *Laxdæla saga* 74, p. 216.
[416] *Gunnlaugs saga* 8; *Bjarnar saga* 9; *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds* 9, p. 179.
[417] *Gunnlaugs saga* 7.
[418] For more information, see John Munro, 'scarlet' in *The Encyclopedia of Medieval Dress and Textiles,* pp. 477-481.

farewell in *Laxdæla saga* 19, she hides her face in her *skikkja* which has, in at least one edition, been translated into the modern English 'shawl'.[419] The Old Norse word for 'shawl' (or 'head-dress', or 'kerchief'), which is used later on in the saga, is *sveigr.*[420] There is an association between the finer examples of *skikkja* with kings and heroes, but this translation is not in keeping with that pattern. Some of the other women from *Njáls saga* who are associated with the more ostentatious type of *skikkja* are Hallgerðr at the *Þing*, and Hildigunnr, albeit only for a brief moment during her incitement speech. All three of these women share similarly strong-willed personalities. Hallgerðr is described as 'extravagant' and 'heard-hearted' in *Njáls saga* 9, while Hildigunnr is 'strong-minded', 'unusually tough' and 'harsh-tempered' in *Njáls saga* 95. Queen Gunnhildr is an imperious, powerful woman with a reputation for magic and exerting her sexual agency however she chooses – Ursula Dronke likens her to the witch, Circe, of classical Greek mythology.[421] Her power and status are further augmented by the fact that she is a *konungamóðir,* a 'mother of kings'.[422] However, caution is required: descriptions such as these are often born from a patriarchal and misogynistic cultural attitudes, both medieval and contemporary.[423] It is for this reason that I wish to highlight the function of cloaks and other textiles within the *Íslendingasögur*. Especially in this case, the importance of the Old Norse terminology and its associated symbolic, metonymic and grammatical significance must not be overlooked. In modern English a shawl is not a cloak, but a much smaller garment to be worn around the shoulders and head; certainly a shawl is more humble than a *skikkja,* meaning that it is reductive to alter the status of Gunnhildr's *skikkja* to that of a shawl. As I have already outlined, when heroes and kings wear a *skikkja* it can be inferred both from the fact that they – and not lesser individuals – wear them, as well as from the various adjectives and qualifiers used to describe them, that they are expensive and highly

[419] *The Saga of the People of Laxardal* 19, p. 21.
[420] *Laxdæla saga* 55, p. 168.
[421] Ursula Dronke, *The Role of Sexual Themes in Njáls Saga*, The Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture in Northern Studies, (London: University College London, 1980), p. 6.
[422] For discussion on the significance of Gunnhildr's position in the Norwegian court, see Jóhanna, *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words, Power*, The New Middle Ages Series, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 84-85.
[423] Clark, *Gender, Violence & the Past*, pp. 142-163. Clark argues that many of the sagas demonstrate gender-based scapegoating, which is one of the ways in which misogyny manifests itself, both within the sagas themselves, as well as in secondary criticism.

ornamented garments. Not only is Gunnhildr a member of the Norwegian royal court, but she is also accorded a myth-like status across the sagas.[424] In terms of status, class and power, then, her possession of *skikkja* is reasonable, if not a requirement of her position: in *Laxdæla saga* 43, for example Ingibjörg – Óláfr Tryggvasson's sister – gives Kjartan a headdress that is considered to be a great treasure, indicating that royal women also took part in the cultural ritual of gift-exchange.[425] Another reason why Gunnhildr's *skikkja* should not be translated as 'shawl' is rooted in the longstanding and complex association between textiles and femininity. As argued in Chapter One of this thesis, this association serves to devalue and diminish those who are read as feminine – namely women.[426] In light of the symbolic, metonymic and grammatical conditions outlined above, the translation of the noun *skikkja* into 'shawl' is intriguing. Due to its association with powerful people, the *skikkja* becomes a sartorial sign of power in its own right. Referring to Gunnhildr's *skikkja* as a 'shawl' instead of the likely expensive and richly decorated cloak that it is, reduces her state-sanctioned power along the lines of hegemonic gender norms and internalised misogyny.

Another cloak-like garment that transmits subtle but important cultural markers is the *feldr*. Cleasby-Vigfusson define it as 'a cloak worn by the ancients, especially one lined with fur', but there is some ambiguity surrounding this particular garment. Although a *feldr* may be made of fur/animal hide (or merely lined with it), they suggest that there is no connection with Latin *pellis* (hide, skin, pelt). The retrospective division between the *feldr* and furs and animals skins seems to derive from the political and cultural ideology associated with Tacitus, who also maintains a distinction between the *sagulum* (*feldr,* 'cloak') and *ferarum pelles* ('animal hide').[427] However, some of the modifiers in the sagas demonstrate that the boundary between the *feldr* and fur is permeable. When *feldr* appears in simplex in *Grettis saga* 21*,* it is used to identify a garment previously described as

---

[424] Dronke, *The Role of Sexual Themes in Njáls Saga*, p. 7.
[425] C.f., Saukel, *Die Literarische Funktion von Kleidung,* p. 38. More discussion of the headdress will take place in Chapter Four of this thesis.
[426] This will be fully explored in Chapter Four.
[427] Tacitus, *Germania*, trans. by J. B. Rives, Clarendon Ancient History Series, ed. by Brian Bosworth, Miriam Griffin et. al., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 84. Of course, it is important to employ evidence from *Germania* carefully, as it is a text that is unreliable, and not without its own set of complications – see J. B. Rives, pp. 1-74, esp. pp. 56-66.

loðkápa (fur cloak).[428] As well as fur, *a feldr* could potentially be a garment made of a long-pile, woollen textile, which could also be taken for coarse hair, known as *röggvarfeldr.*[429] Other instances of the *-feldr* construction include *varafeldr,* which appears in *Njáls saga,* translated as 'homespun cloak'.[430] *Vara* broadly means 'wares', however, Cleasby-Vigfusson suggest that the term may reflect different wares, depending on its geographical origins or boundaries of exchange. This is further supported by the distinctions made between Icelandic and Norwegian goods in the *ONP.*[431] The two materials identified are fur in Norway, and *vaðmál* in Iceland. While the *ONP* suggest that the Norwegian speciality was, in fact, leather goods, the argument can still be made that both fur and leather are derived from animal skins, and the term *vara* may apply to both. The *feldr* may be associated with equal or lower status than that of the *skikkja,* depending on which of the two materials it is made from. Returning to Hrútur and Gunnhildr for example, when their liaison comes to an end Hrútur presents her with a hundred ells of woven cloth and twelve *varafeldir*, 'homespun cloaks'.[432] Although this sequence of events is set in Norway, Hrútur is both Icelandic and visiting from Iceland; also, as has already been discussed, a woman of Gunnhildr's is status is more likely to be associated with a *skikkja.* Furthermore, *-feldr* is never used to describe a woman's cloak.[433] While furs can be luxurious and expensive, such as the *skarlatskikkja* lined with fur in *Gunnlaugs saga* 7, narrative context and linguistic evidence supports the idea that the cloaks that Hrútur gives to Gunnhildr are made from wool.

This division between the two types of *feldr* – wool and fur – highlights another level of signification that interacts with gender. Many occurrences of the terms *loðkápa, röggvarfeldr* and *varafeldr* (of the fur or animal skin variety) appear in the context of male violence. However, just as Straubhaar cautions against the

---

[428] *Grettis saga* 21, p. 75.
[429] *Grettis saga* 35, p. 119; *röggvarfeldr* is glossed as *loðfeldr* and *loðkápa* (see n.1, p. 119). There is a well preserved example in Þjóðminjasafn Íslands, The National Museum of Iceland.
[430] *Njáls saga* 3, p. 15.
[431] *ONP,* 'vara' 1., 'handelsvarer, gods, løsøre' (commodities, goods, movables), 'íslenzk vara' (Icelandic product); 2., (spec. vedr. Norge, ofte som betalingsmiddel/værdiangivelse) (coll.) skindvarer (particular to Norway, payment method/value; leather goods); 3., spec. vedr. Island, ofte som betalingsmiddel/værdiangivelse) vadmel (particular to Iceland, payment method. Value; homespun) http://onpweb.nfi.sc.ku.dk/wordlist_e.html [accessed 27th July 2018].
[432] *Njáls saga* 3, p. 15.
[433] *ONP,* 'feldr', <http://onpweb.nfi.sc.ku.dk/wordlist_e.html> [accessed 30th July 2018]; unlike with *skikkja*, *feldr* seemingly does not appear as the compound *kvenna-feldr*.

reductive, yet pervasive, connection between a saga character wearing a 'black' cloak and their intention to kill an enemy, so too should equal caution be applied when approaching the association between fur cloaks and violence.[434] Male violence is bound up with social and cultural models of masculinity, which are as complex and fluid as femininity but not as extensively studied, especially in the context of the *Íslendingasögur*.[435] The short discussion below takes as its foundation the four general principles of gender and masculinity as outlined by Gareth Evans and Jessica Clare Hancock in their volume, *Masculinities in Old Norse Literature.*[436] In particular, I wish to emphasise the fourth principle, 'masculinities are multiple': certain types violence operate within, and are sanctioned by, what R. W. Connell has called 'hegemonic masculinity', a model of masculinity which is 'culturally exalted and dominant within a given context or genre'.[437] Of particular relevance to this discussion is the need for an individual to strive for – or maintain – superiority over other men, either through the acquisition of wealth or reputation. This can be achieved through a variety of means, some more creative than others, and it is arguably this pursuit of hegemonic masculinity that dominates saga narrative.[438] In the following discussion, some of the characters – particularly Grettir – operate at the intersection between an exaggerated type of masculinity (hypermasculinity) and monstrosity.[439] While there is little room for comment at present regarding this liminality, it is hoped that understanding the *feldr* as a site where normative and hypermasculinity find expression will lead to further work on textiles and masculinity in the future.

In *Kormáks saga* 10, Kormákr has challenged Bersi to a *hólmganga* in an attempt to recover Steingerðr, as discussed in Chapter One of this thesis. A *hólmganga* is a legal duel fought between two individuals that supposedly ensured

---

[434] Straubhaar, 'Wrapped in a Blue Mantle', p. 53.
[435] Gareth Lloyd Evans, *Men and Masculinities in the Sagas of Icelanders,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 7-9.
[436] Gareth Lloyd Evans and Jessica Clare Hancock, (eds.), *Masculinities in Old Norse Literature*, (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020), pp. 2-4.
[437] Ibid., p. 4; R. W. Connell, 'Social Organization of Masculinity' in *Masculinities* 2nd edn., (Berkley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1995, reprnt. 2005), pp. 67-86.
[438] See Evans, *Men and Masculinities,* pp. 49-52.
[439] Ibid., p. 107-143; See also discussion of 'monstrosity' and its relationship with outlaws in Rebecca Merkelbach, *Monsters in Society: Alterity, Transgression, and the Use of the Past in Medieval Iceland,* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), pp. 51-86.

no further retaliation beyond the boundaries of combat.[440] Gwyn Jones observes that, as part of the legal proceedings (the *hólmgöngulög*) the boundaries of combat must be clearly demarcated.[441] *Kórmaks saga* is one of a number of the *Íslendingasögur* to provide details, the most relevant of which is the use of a *feldr* to mark the field of combat:[442] 'Þat váru hólmgöngulög, at feldr skal vera fimm alna í skaut ok lykkjur í hornum; skyldi þar setja niðr hæla þá, er höfuð ver á oðrum enda' ('The duelling laws had it that the cloak was to be five ells square, with loops at the corners, and pegs had to be put down there of the kind that had a head at one end').[443] As already noted, a *feldr* could be made of wool or animal skin/fur, but there is nothing in the saga (or, indeed, the other saga sources) to indicate which type should be used for the *hólmganga*. However, another part of the *hólmgöngulög* specifies that if one of them is wounded so that blood fell on the cloak, there was no need to continue fighting, and the wounded party must pay a fee to release himself.[444] This suggests that the *feldr* should be light enough in colour for the blood to easily be seen, and perhaps short in pile so that the blood is not fully absorbed by the fibres. Of course, these characteristics could indicate light, closely scraped wool, or light, non-shaggy fur, respectively. If a combatant stepped from the cloak – *Kormáks saga* specifies that one foot means retreat, while two feet mean fleeing – they were thought to be surrendering, a course of action which was thought to be cowardly and shameful.[445] In his discussion of the *hólmganga* as depicted in the *Íslendingasögur,* Jones repeatedly emphasises the importance of maintaining hegemonic masculinity (although he does not use this terminology) through adherence to this legal and ritualistic display of physical prowess, as evinced by some of the narrative and social consequences for not showing up to a duel.[446] It is significant that the *feldr* serves as a literal stage upon

---

[440] Gwyn Jones, 'Some Characteristics of the Icelandic 'Hólmganga'', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 32 (1933), 203-224, p. 205.
[441] Ibid., pp. 207-208.
[442] See also *Svarfdæla saga* 9, in in *Eyfirðinga sögur,* ed. by Jónas Kristjánsson, Íslenzk Fornrit 9 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1956), and *Egils saga* 64; c.f., *ONP,* citations of 'holm ganga', https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o36015 [accessed 5th January 2021].
[443] *Kormáks saga* 10, p. 237; *Kormak's Saga* 10, p. 194.
[444] *Kormáks saga* 10, p. 237-238; Jones, 'The Icelandic "Hólmganga"', pp. 217-218.
[445] See Jones, 'The Icelandic "Hólmganga"', p. 214.
[446] Jones, writing in the early twentieth century, calls it 'honour' and 'manhood' rather than hegemonic masculinity: 'There was a particularly binding element about a challenge to holmgang. It was a challenge to one's manhood, which could vindicated only by a ready acceptance of the offer of battle… To refuse a challenge was to refuse the manly course of action, and this laid a man open

which individuals can prove, negotiate or enhance their masculinity. It operates as a material and symbolic limitation, beyond which exists the realm of the 'non-masculine'. Kormákr loses to Bersi in the first *hólmganga,* and, as I argued in Chapter One, loses Steingerðr's affection as a result. In another *hólmganga,* Bersi is wounded in a way that she considers to be emasculating, and uses it as an excuse to divorce him.[447] Both men lose some – or all – of their hegemonic masculine privilege and must endure the consequences for the rest of the saga. Conversely, in *Egils saga* 64, the duelling area is indicated by a circle of stones rather than by a *feldr*, but Egill pursues the *berserkr,* Ljótr, around the entire island, indicating that Egill is literally and metaphorically beyond the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity.[448] This is reiterated in the subsequent chapter, when Egill exhibits hyper/monstrous masculinity when biting out the throat of his enemy, Atli *inn skammi*.[449]

Wearing a *feldr* is one of the ways in which a character can signal their hegemonic, hyper- or monstrous masculinity to other men. In *Víga-Glúms saga* 2*,* Eyjólfr travels to Norway with his friend Hreiðar. Once they make port, Hreiðar makes suggestions about where Eyjólfr should stay. Eyjólfr rejects all of them, wishing instead to stay with Hreiðar. It turns out, however, that Hreiðar has a brother, Ívar, who dislikes Icelanders. Eyjólfr eventually talks his friend into inviting him to stay the winter with him, Ívar and Ívar's unruly men.[450] It is said that when Ívar was expected home, 'þá tók Eyjólfur loðkápu og hafði hvern dag. En hann var mikill maður og sat hjá Hreiðari jafnan' (Eyjolf took to wearing a fur cloak every day. He was a big man, and always sat beside Hreidar').[451] This *loðkápa* is not once referred to as a *feldr,* but as highlighted above, they are closely related garments – if not identical. Furthermore the saga narrator does not elaborate on why Ívar's imminent arrival causes Eyjólfr to make this sartorial choice, but it can be inferred both from Hreiðar's earlier warnings about his brother's animosity to

---

to the charge of cowardice and baseness, and the consequent reproach and abuse', 'The Icelandic "Hólmganga"', p. 208; c.f. pp. 210, 214.

[447] *Kormáks saga* 13, p. 254. See also Evans, *Men and Masculinities,* p. 112.

[448] *Egils saga* 64, p. 205.

[449] *Egils saga* 65, p. 210. For an excellent discussion of Egill's masculinity, see Brynja, 'Emotions of a Vulnerable Viking: Negotiations of Masculinity in *Egil's saga'* in *Masculinities in Old Norse Literature*, pp. 146-163.

[450] *Víga-Glúms saga* 2.

[451] *Víga-Glúms saga* 2; *Killer Glum's Saga* 2, p. 269.

Icelanders, and from the offhand comment regarding his build, that there some culturally contingent significance attached to the *loðkápa* which may serve as a deterrent against Ívar's baser inclinations.

One clue which might illuminate that significance occurs in the following chapter, when Eyjólfr, Ívar and Ívar's men go to the forest to chop trees. Eyjólfr sets aside his *loðkápa* for a while, but when he goes to retrieve it he discovers that it is missing. He tracks the drag marks in the snow to discover that it has been taken by a small bear. He mutilates the bear, retrieves his *loðkápa*, and makes his way back to his host's abode. Upon his arrival, Ívar is alarmed to see he is covered in blood; however, once he learns of Eyólfr's encounter with the bear, he declares, 'Óviturlegt bragð að spotta ókunna menn. Hann hefir sýnt vaskleik í þessum hlut þar er eg veit eigi hvort nokkur von mundi til verða' ('It's a foolish practice to insult people one doesn't know; he has shown courage in this business which I don't know whether any of us would have equalled').[452] A comparable chain of events occur in *Grettis saga* 21. Grettir is staying with Þórkell, but a member of his retinue, Björn, considers Grettir to be beneath him. As a character who treads the line between masculine and hypermasculine, human and monster, Grettir cannot accept subordination to any man.[453] In this instance, as Evans observes, the narrator betrays a preference for Grettir, describing Björn as loud and full of himself.[454] Indeed, it is the loud behaviour of Björn and his followers that draws a bear to attack their quarters.[455] Eventually, Þórkell and his men go on a hunting trip to locate the bear's den, notably *after* Björn has failed to kill the bear himself. Grettir wears a *loðkápa,* which is also called a *feldr* in the same scene.[456] He is forced to remove it when they confront the animal with spears, allowing Björn to throw it into the bear's den. Grettir is aware of Björn's actions, so when the strap on his leggings snap, he is provided with the excuse he needs to return to the bear's den in order to kill it and retrieve his cloak. When Grettir returns to Þórkell's company, everyone laughs because the cloak is in tatters (*feldr slitr*).

---

[452] *Víga-Glúms saga 3*; *Killer Glum's Saga* 3, p. 271.
[453] See extended discussions of both Grettir's hypermasculinity and monstrosity in Evans, *Men and Masculinities*, pp. 107-142 and Merkelbach, *Monsters in Society*, pp. 51-86 respectively. The latter is a more general discussion of outlaws as social monsters, but deals with Grettir in detail.
[454] *Grettis saga* 21, p. 73; Evans, *Men and Masculinities,* p. 127.
[455] *Grettis saga* 21, p. 74.
[456] *Grettis saga* 21, p. 77.

However, the atmosphere becomes more serious once Grettir produces the bear's paw. Björn is then publicly admonished by Þórkell, both for failing to kill the bear and for his attempts to humiliate Grettir.

Much like in a *hólmganga*, the *loðkápa/feldr* here functions as a site of competition for social dominance. In *Víga-Glúms saga,* Eyjólfr's *loðkápa* first serves as a deterrent, as the fur combined with his size makes him resemble a bear. This visual comparison is later concretised when he slices off the snout of the bear who steals the *loðkápa.* When he returns to where he is staying, he is greeted by a man who previously did not like him, but whose opinion is wholly altered when he sees the blood dripping from the bear's snout. In *Grettis saga,* the *loðkápa/feldr* is inscribed with Grettir's hypermasculinity/monstrosity. Throwing Grettir's cloak into the bear's den is an indirect challenge to Grettir's masculinity, which is triangulated though the *loðkápa/feldr,* befitting of a man who boasts of bravery while keeping back from the danger.[457] The intended insult of his actions is later confirmed by the laughter of Þórkell's companions.[458] As he is not one to suffer such challenges unanswered, Grettir both retrieves his cloak and completes the task of killing the bear, a task that neither Björn, or an entire troupe of men, could achieve.[459]

Understanding the symbolic, metonymic and grammatical nuance conveyed by Old Norse textile terminology is of the utmost importance. As I have briefly shown, paying close attention to textile-specific language illuminates otherwise obscured significances, because textiles are inscribed with culturally contingent meanings. A *skikkja* can either be an everyday garment, as shown through its use in domestic settings, or a prestige item that indicates wealth and status, a gift worthy of royalty. However, the subtleties in meaning that are associated with this garment are continually lost when *skikkja* is translated as 'cloak', or even 'shawl'. When Queen Gunnhildr buries her face in her *skikkja*, the saga author may wish to convey a particular meaning, which is inscribed on, and codified by, the associate semantics of the *skikkja*; when it is translated as 'shawl', that significance is

[457] 'Björn eggjaði þá mjök til atsóknar, en þó gekk hann eigi svá nær, at honum værivið nökkuru hætt' ('Bjorn eagerly urged them to attack it, but never went so close himself that he was in any danger'), *Grettis saga* 21, p. 75; *Grettir's Saga* 21, p. 84.
[458] *Grettis saga* 21, p. 77.
[459] *Grettis saga* 21, p. 75; see also Evans, *Men and Masculinities,* pp. 128-129.

diminished, or even lost. Similarly, the *feldr* is associated with hegemonic violent masculinity, but seemingly only when it is made from fur. When it is translated as 'cloak', all such associations are lost, rendering it a curiosity or merely a detail to be glossed over. As a consequence, when Grettir's *feldr* is thrown in to the bear's den, modern readers may be unaware of the additional insult to his masculinity. Furthermore, they may miss the underlying reason for the tension between him and Björn, which culminates in the following chapter with their duel to the death. While in this case, 'cloak' is an accurate translation, it does not convey the full spectrum of meaning associated with the original.

The *skikkja* and the *feldr* demonstrate that, within the literary world of the *Íslendingasögur*, a cloak is much more than just a cloak. Depending on its material composition and its context within the narrative, it can possess a symbolic, metonymic and grammatical function, adding culturally contingent significance and narrative depth. Furthermore, any meaning which we may attach to cloaks, as I have shown, is culturally contingent and based on our modern understanding. A medieval audience may have had a different view of Grettir's *feldr*, or of Gunnhild's *skikkja*, partly because they had no need to undergo the linguistic reconstruction of what these garments *were*, but also because the codified significance attached to the cloaks are more culturally and contextually relevant to their own, lived experiences. Despite this gap, however, it is clear that cloaks have a number of different literary and metaphorical functions within the sagas that have not been considered in scholarship so far.[460] Whether they serve as a shorthand for qualities such as status and masculinity, or as something else entirely, I have shown that cloaks in the sagas work in a paratextual way to convey further narrative and symbolic meaning. It thus follows that when cloaks are incorporated into already established social rituals (like the *hólmganga*), their symbolic, metonymic and grammatical significations add depth and texture to that ritual. One such social ritual is that of gift-exchange, which has been widely studied across a number of disciplinary fields, and has been discussed in relation to a large number of social

[460] Attention paid to cloaks in the sagas is often centred on linguistic significance, such as in Straubhaar, 'Wrapped in a Blue Mantle', or used as comparative or evidential material for historical and archaeological studies, such as in a number of works by Owen-Crocker (Old English) and Østergård.

and cultural groups over the course of human history.[461] The following aims to analyse how cloaks – already semantically and symbolically significant – function within the socially prescribed and ritualistic act of gift-exchange.[462] First, however, it is necessary to explore some of the 'classes' of gift-exchange that are evident within the sagas, as a means of understanding their culturally-contingent significance.

The Social and Cultural Ritual of Gift-Exchange in the *Íslendingasögur*

The giving and receiving of gifts is one of the most ceremonial and ritualistic cultural phenomena within any society.[463] It is heavily imbued with symbolic, material, political and social significance, and forms part of a contract of obligation between two or more parties. This significance is culturally contingent, and embedded within the social and cultural expectations of the contemporary medieval audience, the thirteenth/fourteenth-century sensibilities of the scribe who records the saga narrative, as well as the perceived cultural norms of the ninth- and tenth-century settlers of Iceland. Therefore, when we discuss ritualised gift-exchange (of cloaks, or otherwise), it is important to remember the cultural and linguistic context in which those exchanges take place, and to ensure that the distinction is made between contemporary and historical definitions.

Unlike our contemporary understanding of a selfless, disinterested act, gift-giving in the *Íslendingasögur* signifies and implies that a return gift must be made, otherwise the original recipient is seen as (among other things) miserly, subordinate, insolent, or aggressive.[464] Gifts were presented and exchanged in a number of different settings, and, depending on the context, could be taken as a sign of friendship, a symbol of future commitment or aid, subordination, or insult.[465] Evans observes that gift-exchange was one of the main methods for the

---

[461] Mauss's seminal study, *The Gift*, provides a snapshot of the sheer variety of topics and approaches that can be encompassed by the heading 'studies on gift-exchange'. See also Jacques Derrida, *Given Time/ I, Counterfeit money*, (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992) and *The Gift of Death*, 2nd edn., (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008).
[462] C.f. Sauckel, *Die Literarische Funktion von Kleidung,* pp. 36-49.
[463] Mauss, *The Gift,* p. 1; see also A. Ya. Gurevich, 'Wealth and Gift-Bestowal Among the Ancient Scandinavians', *Scandinavica* 7 (1962), 126-139.
[464] Mauss, *The Gift*, pp. 6-16.
[465] William Ian Miller, 'Gift, Sale, Payment, Raid: case Studies in the Negotiation and Classification of Exchange in Medieval Iceland', *Speculum* 61 (1986), 18-50, pp. 21-24, at p. 24

maintenance of homosocial bonds.[466] In terms of contemporaneous literary evidence, The *Eddic* poem *Hávamál* is perhaps one of the best sources for ninth- and tenth-century cultural attitudes towards gift-giving. There are multiple strophes regarding the giving of gifts, but the following two are perhaps the most relevant:[467]

> Vápnom oc váðom scolo vinir gleðiaz,
> þat er á siálfom sýnst;
> viðrgefndr oc endrgefendr erost lengst vinir,
> ef þar bíðr at verða vel
>
> ('With weapons and gifts friends should/ gladden one another,/ those which can be seen on them;/mutual givers and receivers are friends/ for longest,/ if the friendship keeps going well').
>
> (*Hávamál,* XLI, 1-4).

> Mildir, frocnir men bazt lifa,
> sialdan sút ala:
> enn ósniallr maðr uggir hotvetna,
> sýtir æ gløggr við giofom
>
> ('Generous and brave men live the best,/ seldom do they harbour sorrow;/ but the cowardly man is afraid of everything,/ the miser always worries when he gets gifts').
>
> (*Hávamál,* XLVIII, 1-4).

These two strophes demonstrate that the best friendships are maintained by the mutual giving and receiving of gifts, characterised overall by the spirit of generosity. In strophe 48, generosity is equated with bravery and happiness, while the opposite is true of the coward, who is characterised by fear, worry and miserliness. However, the fear of receiving a gift might reflect more than an individual grasping at their coffers. Miller argues that, just like today, gifts in the saga society come with 'strings attached'. These were largely implicit and dependent on the complex web of power, friendship and obligation that encompassed those involved with the exchange.[468] He suggests that the act of giving gifts could be sociable, but often concealed ulterior motives, entangling the

[466] Evans, *Men and Masculinities*, pp. 40-42.
[467] See strophes 39, 42, 44, 45, 46, and 145, as identified by Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Viking Friendship: The Social Bond in Iceland and Norway, c. 900 – 1300*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017), pp. 12-14.
[468] Miller, 'Is a Gift Forever?', Is a Gift Forever?', *Representations* 100 (2007), 13-22. p. 17.

recipient in a nexus of social and cultural obligation.[469] Bestowing a gift was often a means of gaining power over another; it created a material and social debt that needed to be repaid, either by way of a return gift or by a show of support or other useful services.[470] When the return gift was made, it had to be equal to, or of higher value than that of the initial gift in order to avoid insult, or of accepting a position subordinate to the original giver.[471] Thus, gift-giving in both saga-literature and society was often a political act, as much as it was also an act of generosity.

The semantics of the noun 'gift' has shifted diachronically throughout the development of the English language. For example, in modern English, 'gift' pertains to the act of 'giving', in which a 'gift' is the thing that is given.[472] There also seems to be an emphasis on the value of the object, and the fact that it is given willingly, without expectation of any kind of return: 'the action of giving; as a gift, gratuitously, for nothing; something, the possession of which is transferred to another without the expectation or receipt of an equivalent; a donation, present'.[473] However, in Old English and Old Norse, 'gift' can mean 'marriage' or 'marriage contract', specifically to do with the exchange of wealth between a would-be suitor, and the father of the would-be bride.[474] In Old Norse, it also carries connotations of good luck and fortune, as well as the stipend paid to a bishop or priest.[475] Within the dictionary definitions for the Old English and Old Norse then, there is no reference to the non-reciprocal, selfless nature of 'giving a gift'.[476] Therefore when we discuss 'gift-exchange' in the sagas, we are concerned with the forging of relationships and political alliances, with legal and economic bonds, and the material representation of those contracts, rather than just the feelings of generosity that we associate with gift-giving today.

---

[469] Miller, 'Gift, Sale, Payment, Raid', p. 21.
[470] See Miller, 'Is a Gift Forever?', 'Gift, Sale, Payment, Raid', and Mauss, *The Gift.*
[471] Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 23-24.
[472] 'Gift', n.1, *OED* http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/78177?rskey=PXm8qA&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid [accessed 3rd July 2018].
[473] 'Gift', n.1, I. 1a, II. 3a, respectively.
[474] 'Gift', I and II, Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/017035 [accessed 3rd July 2018] Hereby referred to as 'Bosworth and Toller'.
[475] 'Gift', 1, 2, 3 and 4, *ONP,* http://onpweb.nfi.sc.ku.dk/wordlist_e.html [accessed 3rd July 2018].
[476] See 'cloth society' in Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing,* pp. 1-14 and Stallybrass, 'Worn Worlds: Clothes, Mourning and the Life of Things' in *The Textile Reader,* ed. by Jessica Hemmings, (New York, NY: Berg Publishers, 2012), pp. 68-77, p. 70.

The complex web of power, generosity, and political manoeuvring involved with gift-exchange can be seen in *Njáls saga,* when Flosi rides out to gather support for his defence at the forthcoming *Þing*.[477] During this expedition, he visits Hallbjörn, to whom he presents a purse full of money. Hallbjörn immediately wishes to know how he can repay the gift because, as it stands, Flosi does not owe him anything.[478] Hallbjörn is here referring to the reciprocal cycle of gift-giving, as well as the one-upmanship that is associated with it. Flosi's gift of a full purse is the first half of an – as of yet – unspoken agreement. By highlighting this fact, Hallbjörn voices the implied expectations that Flosi has of him. Sure enough, Flosi admits that behind his gift is the ulterior motive of wishing to secure Hallbjörn's support during his defence. By accepting Flosi's gift of money, Hallbjörn enters into an agreement whereby his 'return gift' will be his forthcoming legal support. Once this return gift has been made at the *Þing*, it is unclear whether Flosi will have a continuing social obligation and debt towards Hallbjörn. The implicit social etiquette of gift-exchange suggests that if Flosi does not reciprocate Hallbjörn's support with a return gift of his own, then he accepts a position as Hallbjörn's subordinate. It seems unlikely that a man with Flosi's character would accept this (see discussion below). Furthermore, he obtains the support of a large number of other men, some through the repayment of a previous gift, such as when Hólmsteinn declares that Flosi had paid him for support a long time ago,[479] but others through the method similar to the one he used with Hallbjörn.[480] It is even less likely that he would allow himself to be subordinate to all of the men he requested help from, so it is reasonable to assume that Flosi's gift is a 'payment' for future services.

Gift-giving serves a number of different narrative functions, depending on the status of the giver and receiver, their relationship to each other, and their situational context. The exchange of gifts between equals who are on good terms with each other has a very different meaning to that of a king bestowing a gift on a man from his retinue.[481] There are a number of different 'classes' of gift-exchange

[477] *Njáls saga* 134, pp. 349-353.
[478] *Njáls saga* 134, pp. 349-350.
[479] *Njáls saga* 134, p. 350.
[480] It is important to note that he is not always successful in his bid to secure support with gifts of money, as with Sörli Brodd-Helgason, *Njáls saga* 134, p. 153.
[481] See the discussion of horizontal and vertical friendships in Jón, *Viking Friendship*.

which can be identified across the *Íslendingasögur*. These range from the more positive aspects of social-relations, including declarations of friendship, kinship, loyalty and obligation, to self-interested displays of prestige and personal gain, an increase in reputation, a means of gaining power, or of forcing someone into debt.[482] These exchanges are integral to the daily lives of those in saga society. Before I can examine how cloaks function as part of this social ritual, however, it is first necessary to look at how gift-exchange *in general* influences saga narrative. To do this I will now analyse a number of scenes of gift-exchange from *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds* because it portrays Hallfreðr's relationship with king Óláfr Tryggvasson as it develops over time. These developments are both influenced by and reflected in the various types of gift-exchange.

Exchanging Poetry for Prestige in *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds*

Hallfreðr *vandræðaskálds*, the 'troublesome poet', is the main protagonist of the eponymously titled saga. Like his fellow hero-poets – Egill, Kormákr, and Gunnlaugr – Hallfreðr seeks his fortune beyond the shores of Iceland as *skáld* to kings and other noblemen of renown. He travels from court to court, performing his praise poetry in exchange for reward. The ruler often grants him a place in his retinue, but also rewards him with material goods. The reward is comprised of one or more of the following: a valuable arm-ring, a sword, spear (or other weapons) a helmet, clothes, accessories (such as gloves), as well as cloaks of varying levels of decoration and value.[483] This exchange falls firmly within the category of self-interest because the praise poem is intended to flatter, with a view to gaining material wealth and status. Incidentally, this exchange is of mutual self-interest, as the subject of the poem obtains fame and renown, as well as the opportunity to secure the loyalty of promising young men in return. The exchange between poet and patron is different from other types of gift-giving because of its transactional nature. While many other incidents of gift-exchange are shrouded in ambiguity, the exchange of poetry for material goods is almost entirely economic, a quality which is not always present. Indeed, as Miller has shown, economic transaction is not something that any self-respecting farmer of independent means did. It was more

[482] See Miller, 'Is a Gift Forever?'
[483] *Hallfreðar saga* 9 (*pellskikkja, hjalmr, hringr*).

socially acceptable among equals to give and receive aid in the form of gifts and return gifts, rather than 'buying' it, as this implies the superiority of the one making the purchase.[484] Thus, when Flosi makes the rounds of fellow landowners in search of legal support, his performative adherence to the ritual of gift-exchange is a way for him to disguise the fact that he is 'purchasing' their loyalty.[485] Therefore, the dynamic between poets seeking the patronage of kings is akin to the dynamic between a merchant and a customer. The poet/merchant has something to sell for their own financial and social benefit, while the king/customer is in the economically and socially privileged position to buy what he needs, rather than relying on the ambiguities of gift-exchange. This can be seen in *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* 8, when Gunnlaugr recites a poem for King Sigtryggr. As Gunnlaugr is the first to offer him a poem, Sigtryggr is unsure how to reward him:

> Konungur þakkaði honum kvæðið og kallaði til sín féhirði sinn og mælti svo: "Hverju skal launa kvæðið?" Hann svarar: "Hverju viljið þér herra?" segir hann. "Hversu er launað," segir konungur, "ef eg gef honum knörru tvo?" Féhirslumaður svarar: "Of mikið er það herra," segir hann. "Aðrir konungar gefa að bragarlaunum gripi góða, sverð góð eða gullhringa góða"
>
> (The King thanked Gunnlaug for the poem, and summoned his treasurer. "How should I reward the poem?" he asked. "How would you like to, my lord?" the treasurer said. "What kind of reward would it be if I gave him a pair of *knorrs*?" the king asked. "That is too much, my lord," he replied. "Other kings give fine treasures – good swords or splendid gold bracelets – as rewards for poems").[486]

Sigtryggr's debate with his treasurer demonstrates the comparative economic value attributed to the poem, the poet, the *knerrir* (boats), and 'treasures' (the sword and bracelet), and perhaps reflects the priorities of the late thirteenth century. At a time when wealth was obtained and transported by sea-voyage, it is easy to see why boats should not be given away too freely. Portable treasure is comparatively more expendable, but still significant enough in economic and symbolic value to be an appropriate reward. The exchange of poetry for material goods is a straightforward economic transaction in terms of power dynamics and personal need, where the poet needs to make a reputation for himself on the back

---

[484] Miller, 'Gift, Sale, Repayment, Raid', p. 25; Miller maintains that it was not *price*, but *mode* which determined the success of a transaction, and that, furthermore, there was a resistance to purely economic transactions 'between members of the same social rank'.
[485] Ibid; See pp. 25-35 for his analysis of the tension between Gunnar and Otkell in *Njáls saga* 47.
[486] *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* 8; *Gunnlaug Serpent-Tongue* 8, p. 318.

of his poetry and the king needs to gain reputation through material, martial and cultural capital.

This type of gift-exchange can be seen in *Hallfreðar saga* 5, when he sails to Norway and seeks an audience with Hákon so that he can perform his praise-poem. Hákon rewards him with an inlaid axe and fine clothes (*góða klæði*), as well as an invitation to spend the winter in his company.[487] Hallfreðr provides marketable goods in the form of praise poetry, and Hákon provides payment for services rendered, a poem which contributes to his reputation. When summer returns, Hallfreðr sails back to Iceland and spends many years amassing wealth, before hearing that Óláfr Tryggvasson has taken over power in Norway.[488] During one of his expeditions, his ship is caught up in a storm and they attempt to make harbour in Trondheim. Their vessel is caught up in the middle of the gale, but a boat crewed by locals appears to help. When the anchor-line of Hallfreðr's ship snaps, one man – known as Akkerisfrakki – dives overboard to catch it, thus enabling Hallfreðr and his crew to safely make it to port. After this episode, Hallfreðr and his crew learn that Akkerisfrakki was King Óláfr himself.[489] This event is never raised again, or acknowledged by either Óláfr or Hallfreðr when they meet formally, but it does have a significant impact on their subsequent 'gift-exchange', and on the way that they negotiate their relationship. When Hallfreðr and his men appear before the king, he demands that they convert to Christianity: 'Eptir þat lögðu þeir inn til Hlaða. Þar var Óláfr konungr fyrir, ok var honum sagt, at þessir menn mundu vera heiðnar ok nýkomnir af Íslandi' ('After that they steered into Lade. King Olaf was there, and he was told that these men must be heathens, newly arrived from Iceland').[490] This is a difficult thing to refuse, not only because he is king, but because Hallfreðr is in his debt from before; although Akkerisfrakki/Óláfr did not give him a gift in the material sense, his good deed towards him and his crew must be repaid in some way. Before accepting his conversion, Hallfreðr insists that they make a bargain: first, Óláfr must never turn him away and second, he must sponsor his baptism.[491] While Óláfr is open to the

[487] *Hallfreðar saga* 5, pp. 150-151.
[488] *Hallfreðar saga* 5, p. 151.
[489] *Hallfreðar saga* 5, pp. 152-153.
[490] *Hallfreðar saga* 5, p. 153; *Hallfred the Troublesome Poet* 5, p. 233.
[491] *Hallfreðar saga* 5, pp. 153-154.

usual exchange of loyalty and reward between ruler and retainer, he seems to object to Hallfreðr's suggested spiritual connection.[492] He is persuaded by a bishop, however, and Hallfreðr converts, taking his place in Óláfr's court.

Akkerisfrakki/Óláfr's rescue of Hallfreðr, and Hallfreðr's conversion to Christianity (and ongoing service thereafter) is a type of 'gift-exchange', albeit one that does not involve any material items. The storm and rescue operation functions as the initial, informal meeting of Hallfreðr and the disguised king. The disguise allows Óláfr a certain degree of anonymity, in which he is able to test Hallfreðr's character, as well as to initiate the cycle of gift, debt, and obligation which will define the future trajectory of their relationship. This is something that he might not have been able to achieve had he appeared as himself, as Hallfreðr may have instantly reciprocated in order to absolve his debt. A comparable scene occurs in *Laxdæla saga* 40, when Óláfr reveals his identity to Kjartan after their swimming contest, but before he gives him his cloak; Kjartan's men are unhappy that he accepted the cloak from the king, because now he and they are in his debt.[493] In *Hallfreðar saga*, they do not learn of Óláfr's identity until after the fact. Although the saga narrator does not make much of this knowledge, it is clear that, by its very inclusion, it will bear serious implications when the two men officially meet. Therefore, while this scene looks nothing at all like the subsequent scenes of gift-exchange which take place throughout the remaining saga narrative, it can be argued that it is the first instance of political gift-exchange to take place between king and poet.

With these power dynamics firmly in place, the exchange of poetry and reward takes on a more ambiguous quality than it did with Hákon, even though at its core it is still rooted in economic transaction. The difference is that, while the exchanges between the two rulers appear to be similar in terms of structural elements – Hallfreðr provides a service, both Hákon and Óláfr provide payment – all of their dealings are embedded within the ritualistic and performative act of gift-giving. For example, Hallfreðr resorts to blackmail in order to make Óláfr listen to his poem, by threatening to stop practising Christianity.[494] In return, Óláfr

[492] See Jón's discussion of the *hirð* in *Viking Friendship*, pp. 59-62.
[493] *Laxdæla saga* 40, p. 117-118.
[494] *Hallfreðar saga* 6, p. 155.

rewards the 'Troublesome Poet' with a troublesome weapon – a sword with no sheath, which cannot cause harm for three days and three nights. Óláfr's problematic return-gift indicates his displeasure at being trapped by the custom of gift-giving, and at the way in which Hallfreðr tries to assert his own power and will. The ritual of gift and return-gift is subverted as a means of negotiating power dynamics; not only does Hallfreðr's blackmail ensure that he has the king's attention, but it also ensures a material reward. Óláfr cannot protest this behaviour directly due to the cultural expectations that he must fulfil as a king, therefore this exchange bears all the similarities of a mutually beneficial transaction, even though subtle verbal clues suggest otherwise. Shortly after, Hallfreðr gets into a physical altercation which is punishable by death.[495] At this point, Hallfreðr reminds Óláfr of the bargain they made before his conversion to Christianity. The king keeps this promise and thus Hallfreðr is spared, but their relationship is much cooler going forward.[496] The balance of power is returned to its hegemonic norm; it is all in the hands of the king, while his followers can only do what they can to remain in his favour. This is certainly true for Hallfreðr, who falls before Óláfr with tears in his eyes, wishing to be free from the weight of the king's anger. Óláfr tasks Hallfreðr with a mission, and then requests that he compose a poem that contains the word 'sword' in every line.[497] Upon hearing the poem, Óláfr praises his skill and gives him a sheath for the sword he had earlier bestowed, as well as the promise of future forgiveness for minor transgressions. This is almost the exact reversal of the previous poem/gift exchange, where Óláfr blackmails Hallfreðr by threatening to continue withholding his goodwill, and, due to socio-cultural expectations and performative rituals surrounding gift-exchange, as well as the dictates of the lord-retainer relationship, Hallfreðr must oblige.

These examples from *Hallfreðar saga* demonstrate how gift-exchange – in this instance, a service for material reward – can be manipulated for political gain. This is achieved through performative adherence to the implied social and cultural rules that govern gift-exchange within literary saga society. Both Óláfr and Hallfreðr gain power over the other through deceptive means, whether by disguise

[495] *Hallfreðar saga* 6, pp. 159-161.
[496] *Hallfreðar saga* 6, p. 161.
[497] *Hallfreðar saga* 6, pp. 161-162.

or blackmail, ensuring in the other man a certain degree of resentment at the enforced obligation.[498] Not wishing to compromise their masculinity and social status, they each enter into the cycle of one-upmanship in order to force the other into giving something which they ordinarily would not give such as Hallfreðr's commitment to Christianity or Óláfr's pardon of Hallfreðr's crimes and would-be execution. By paying attention to the different types of gift exchange, it is possible to track the development of Óláfr's and Hallfreðr's often tense relationship. The first exchange takes place over two different meetings due to Óláfr's deception; it seems reasonable to assume that he intended to trap Hallfreðr into a cycle of obligatory gift-exchange from the start. When Hallfreðr is forced to repay the debt generated by Óláfr's aid during a storm, he has no choice but to submit to the king and convert to Christianity, although he ensures a continued cycle of obligation and reciprocity before he agrees to his baptism. This sets the tone for their subsequent scenes of exchange, whereby they each seek to wrong-foot the other. This is evident from the extorted gift of a naked sword, followed by a reversal of power-dynamics, and the bestowal of a sheath for an extorted poem about swords.

The above illustrates just some of the ways in which gifts can be used as literary devices to negotiate social relationships in the *Íslendingasögur*. It is clear that giving gifts plays a significant role within the saga world, but the impact increases if that gift is a cloak or other garment. As explored both in the previous chapter and at the beginning of this chapter, cloaks possess symbolic, metonymic and grammatical functions that would have been understood by a medieval audience. It follows, then, that these culturally contingent significations interact with, and are governed by, social rituals like gift-exchange. For example, giving a cloak or other garment as a gift could strengthen relationships, such as when Flosi gives Höskuldr a scarlet *skikkja* at the beginning of his troubles with the Njállssons.[499] Significantly, this same cloak is later used by Hildigunnr to incite Flosi to avenge Höskuldr's death, demonstrating that his gifted cloak is more than just a token gesture.[500] On the other hand, the giving of a garment can also provoke

[498] Furthermore, because Óláfr is Hallfreðr's godfather, there are also spiritual consequences for not honouring their obligation.
[499] *Njáls saga* 109, p. 279.
[500] Further discussion about the importance of Höskuldr's blood-soaked *skikkja* will take place in Chapter Four.

insult and reignite a feud. This is exactly what happens later on in *Njáls saga,* when Njáll casually adds a *slæðr* and a pair of boots to the already significant amount of compensation agreed upon for the murder of Höskuldr.[501] The *slæðr* is an extremely interesting and ambiguous garment. Cleasby-Vigfusson define it as a gown which trails on the ground or, more specifically, the train of a lady's dress. Despite this specificity regarding the intended gender of the wearer, they also believe that it is a unisex garment. The *ONP* is even less informative, merely stating *usikre,* 'uncertain'. Fortunately, Sauckel provides some illumination:

> Eine außergewöhnlich Practvolle version des *kyrtill* stellte ein Gewand namens *slæðr* dar, das von Männern vie von Frauen gleichermaßen getragen wurde. Es war stets aus kostbaren Stoffen gearbeitet, und mit aufwendigem Dekor verziert. Möglicherweise besaß dieses Schleppkleid sogar kunstvoll gearbeitete Hägerärmel
>
> ('An exceptionally magnificent version of the *kyrtill* is a garment known as a *slæður,* worn by men and women alike. It is always made of precious fabrics and elaborately decorated. Possibly this dress with a train (*Schleppkleid*) possessed artfully worked hanging sleeves').[502]

According to Sauckel, and to Owen-Crocker, the *slæðr* is a luxuriously decorated garment that has 'elaborate' sleeves. Further research is needed in order to identify exactly what garment or item of attire this noun refers to. While the *slæðr* is not explicitly a cloak – Sauckel considers it to be related to the *kyrtill,* a type of tunic – at least three separate critical sources agree that one of its main qualities is the fact that it either has a train, or that parts of it trail on the ground.[503] Furthermore, the sagas support the argument that a *slæðr* is a luxurious item of clothing. In *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* 67, Arinbjörn gives Egill a 'slæður, görvar af silki ok gullsaumaðr mjök, settar fyrir allt gullknöppum í gegnum níðr' ('As a customary Yuletide gift, he gave Egil a silk gown with ornate gold embroidery and gold buttons all the way down').[504] While the *slæðr* that Njáll gives to Flosi is not

---

[501] *Njáls saga* 123, pp. 313-314.
[502] Sauckel, *Die Literarische Funktion von Kleidung,* p. 13. Sauckel refers to Owen-Crocker, *Dress in Anglo Saxon England,* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1986, rev., 2004).
[503] Sauckel, *Die Literarische Funktion von Kleidung,* the sleeves, for example, may be cut in such an exaggerated way that they trail on the ground.
[504] *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* 67, p. 213; *Egil's Saga* 68, p. 134. *Egils saga* is an example of significant differences between *Íslenzk Fornrit* and *Svart á hvitu* edited editions, differences that are further reflected in the translation in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders.* Despite the discrepancy between chapter numbers, the description of the *slæðr,* as well as Egill's subsequent reaction to receiving it, are the same.

described, these are likely the only two occurrences of this noun in the *Íslendingasögur,* which makes it highly probable that they are made of similarly expensive cloth, and just as elaborately decorated.[505]

Despite the ambiguity surrounding what the *slæðr* is, it is clearly a garment of some significance because it provokes in its recipients two strong, but completely different reactions. In *Egils saga*, the *slæðr* is just one among a number of finely worked clothes that Arinbjörn gives to Egill as a 'customary' gift, yet in the subsequent verse it is the *slæðr* that is singled out as a marker of Arinbjörn's generosity and greatness.[506] In *Njáls saga* however, when Flosi counts the money paid in compensation for Höskuldr's murder, the *slæðr* causes him to experience a strong emotion:

> Siðan tók hann upp slæðurnar ok spurði, hverr til mundi hafa gefit, en engi svaraði honum. Í annat sinn veifði hann slæðunum ok spurði, hverr till mundi hafa gefit, ok hló at, ok svaraði engi. Flosi mælti: "Hvárt er þat, at engi yðvarr veit, hverr þenna búning hefir átt, eða þorið þér eigi at segja mér?"
>
> ('Then he picked up the cloak and asked who had given it, and no one answered him. He waved the cloak a second time and asked who had given it, and laughed, and no one answered. Flosi said: "Which is it, that none of you knows whose garment this is or that you don't dare tell me?"').[507]

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly the reason behind Flosi's reaction. From his laugh to the resounding silence of the surrounding men, it can be inferred that he is experiencing an emotion that seems to exist on a spectrum between anger, indignation and disgust.[508] Einar Ól. makes the following suggestion: 'Flosa finnst tvíbent merking klæðanna, svo sem storkað sé karlmennsku hans; samtímis kemur honum í hug frýja Hildigunnar; hann verður fár við og spyr annarlegum rómi, svo að mönnum verður bilt, og stendur á svari' ('Flosi thinks that the meaning of the clothing [the *slæðr* and the boots] is ambiguous, so that his masculinity may be mocked; at the same time he remembers the goading of Hildigunnr. He becomes taciturn and asks the others, so that the men are scared[.] The reply is a long time

---

[505] A caveat: due to the constraints of time as discussed in the previous chapter, this thesis is based on incomplete data. It remains possible that there are other occurrences of *slæðr* in the *Íslendingasögur* of which I am unaware at time of writing.
[506] *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* 67, p. 213.
[507] *Njáls saga* 123, p. 313; *Njal's Saga* 123, p. 148.
[508] The status of laughter as somatic indicia is complicated. Certainly it can be involuntary, but as Sif argues, it can also 'reject emotionality' and act as a 'signifying token' in order to 'convey a narrative message', *Emotions in Old Norse Literature*, p. 118.

coming').[509] Skarphéðinn is the only one who responds, asking Flosi who *he* thinks is responsible, to which Flosi replies that he thinks it was Njáll *karl skegglausi,* 'Old Beardless'.[510] In referring to Njáll by this slanderous nickname, Flosi makes it clear that he has perceived a slight against his own masculinity.[511] The ensuing exchange of *nið* insults between Flosi and Skarphéðinn eventually leads to a breakdown in the proceedings, and Njáll alludes to their eventual demise as a direct result.[512]

Einar Ól.'s observation regarding the ambiguity of the garment's intended gender is interesting, particularly given the fact that this is the second instance in which an emasculating encounter with a cloak has provoked Flosi to emotional extremity (the first being when Hildigunnr uses Höskuldr's cloak to incite Flosi to vengeance, which will be discussed in Chapter Four). However, the narrow focus on gender occludes the possibility for other interpretations.[513] First of all, Egill seems delighted when Arinbjörn gives him a *slæðr,* as evinced by the fact that he uses it as the central motif in his praise poem. Secondly, Egill's personality and behaviour throughout the saga narrative portrays him as a 'caricature of extreme Viking masculinity'.[514] Although he is often overcome by his feelings – lovesickness, grief, etc. – even to the point of speechlessness and/or incapacity, his hegemonic masculine status remains intact until he is an old man.[515] If the only symbolic, grammatical and metonymic function of the *slæðr* is to communicate that which is not masculine, then it is likely that Egill would not have received it with such pleasure.[516] In *Egils saga*, the *slæðr* is a gift from one friend to another, serving to maintain normative homosocial bonds.[517] Arinbjörn is known for his generosity, so his gift of a *slæðr* ensures that he is seen as the most generous of men. Similarly, Egill is in his full, hegemonic masculine power, a reputation which

---

[509] *Njáls saga* 123, p. 313, n. 4. My thanks to Rebecca Merkelbach for helping me with this translation.
[510] *Njáls saga* 123, p. 314; *Njal's Saga* 123, p. 148.
[511] For more on the relationship between hair and masculinity – specifically Njáll's state of beardlessness– see Carl Phelpstead, 'Hair Today, Gone Tomorrow: Hair Loss, the Tonsure, and Masculinity in Medieval Iceland', *Scandinavian Studies* 85 (2013), 1-19, pp. 9-10. See also the related insult *meyjarkinninn* ('maiden cheeks') in Evans, *Men and Masculinities*, p. 66.
[512] *Njáls saga* 123, p. 314. See Meulengracht Sørensen.
[513] For more discussion on the far-reaching impact of gender-bias in the study of textiles, see Chapter One of this thesis.
[514] Brynja, 'Emotions of a Vulnerable Viking', p. 147.
[515] Ibid., p. 162; Evans, *Men and Masculinities,* p. 80-83.
[516] Indeed, Arinbjörn may not have given it as a gift in the first place.
[517] Evans, *Men and Masculinities,* pp. 40-42. Jón, *Viking Friendship,* pp. 18-20.

is in no way tarnished by his receipt of the *slæðr.* Therefore it is reductive to argue that the *slæðr* serves as a *níð* insult in *Njáls saga*, *because it is feminine.*[518] In *Njáls saga*, it is unceremoniously added to the largest pile of compensation goods to have ever been agreed upon.[519] The one responsible for the *slæðr* is also responsible for arbitrating on behalf of the killers, who also happen to be his sons. Furthermore, to make matters more complicated, the victim was his beloved foster-son. In a rare overt display of vocalised emotion, Njáll declares that he would have preferred two of his natural sons to have died so long as Höskuldr lived.[520] While the saga is silent about his motivation for including the *slæðr* as part of the compensation amount, it can be inferred from his past reactions that Njáll is experiencing some strong emotions. In his role as a lawyer he must remain impartial and be seen to uphold the law. As a grieving father, however, he may express his feelings in the unwise, impulsive – and disastrously received – gift of a fine garment. This brief examination of the *slæðr* demonstrates that textiles play an important role in gift exchange. Despite the rarity of the term's occurrence, as well as the ambiguity surrounding what it *is,* the *slæðr* serves to enhance, complement or intensify the mood of the situation it is in. The ambiguity surrounding the *slæðr* is not rooted in gender, but rather its intended function and purpose within the ritual of gifts and payment. In both cases however, the *slæðr* serves as a site of social negotiation and emotional expression, qualities that are not unique to this particular garment.

So far in this chapter the focus has been on Old Norse textile terminology, its linguistic diversity and semantic range, as well as the symbolic, metonymic and grammatical significations attached to each term. I now wish to explore how written textiles can further enhance our understanding of the existing literary, social and cultural frameworks (such as gift-exchange) that are applied across the field of saga studies. However, it is first necessary to examine the qualities of written textiles that make them appropriate vehicles for expressing and transmitting social, cultural and emotional significations. In order to achieve this, it

---

[518] Furthermore, 'cross dressing' is explicitly criticised in *Laxdæla* saga 34-35, and purposefully used to initiate two divorces. For further discussion see Chapter Four of this thesis.
[519] 'En gera vil ek fésket svá mikla, at engi maðr hafi dýrri verit á landinu en Höskuldr' ('I prefer to set a fine so huge that no man in Iceland will ever have been more costly that Hoskuld'), *Njáls saga* 123, p. 311; *Njál's Saga* 123, p. 147.
[520] *Njáls saga* 111, p. 281.

is vital to move on from the discussion of written textiles as merely *terms*, to instead focus on them as representations of actual textiles. In other words, the textiles of the *Íslendingasögur* represent a material reality. In the medieval period, every step of the textile-making process was achieved by hand, regardless of the fibre or material. A cloak may be more than just a cloak in a literary capacity, but a cloak is also more than a word. As I will explore in detail in Chapter Four of this thesis, written textiles cannot, indeed, should not, be separated from the materiality of cloth. In the previous chapter I examined the connection between the textile terms *kápa* and *kufl,* and the broad spectrum of meanings and identities that they conveyed through the process of the Old Norse vestementary code. Although these are linguistic connections, they still inform – and are informed by – their material counterparts. While the following focuses on the material association of written textiles, these linguistic relationships are still important, and must be thought of as working in tandem with the material. I will now examine the material significance of cloth (which is not the same as its materiality), going beyond metaphor to interrogate the notion of material embodiment, material identity, as well as material memory.[521] I will situate this within some of the most recent work on Old Norse emotion. The ensuing discussion is speculative, and more research is required in both written textiles and Old Norse emotion before anything definitive can be claimed. As with the relationship between masculinity and the *feldr,* it is my intention to highlight areas of study which would benefit from a better understanding of textiles.

Worn Worlds, Material Memory and Emotive Scripts

As briefly touched on in Chapter Two, Peter Stallybrass explores how a person's clothing can serve as a metonymic embodiment of their identity, particularly after that person has died.[522] He argues that, unlike other possessions that the dead leave behind, clothing and textiles maintain the shape of the deceased, such as in the creases at elbows and knees, as well as their smell, such as lingering cologne,

[521] Sif, *Emotion in Old Norse Literature,* p. 57; Miller, 'Emotions and the sagas' in *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*, ed. by Gísli Pálson (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1992).
[522] Stallybrass, 'Worn Worlds', p. 72.

stale cigarettes, or their own bodily secretions.[523] The condition of these garments have the potential to evoke memories of their life or personality, a tear here, a stain there, suggesting that the intimacy, physicality, and visceral reality of clothing provides a material connection between the original wearer and the bereft.[524] He suggests that clothes, '*are* the pain that the [bereaved] feels. [They] hang there, "waiting", they endure, but only as a residue that re-creates absence, darkness, death; things which are not.'[525] Cloth and garments do not *replace* the deceased, but maintain their shadowy presence, creating an echo of their personality which endures (but eventually fades) over time. Jones and Stallybrass argue that it is in this capacity that cloth and clothing functions as material mnemonic. They suggest that, 'clothes, like sorrow, inscribe themselves upon a person who comes into being through that inscription.'[526] When a person who has suffered a bereavement wears the garments of the deceased, they clothe themselves in the physical weight of their grief, as well as in the material memory and identity of their lost loved-one. For Jones and Stallybrass, clothing is a 'worn world: a world of social relations put upon the wearer's body.'[527] From this it is clear that clothing is not just a matter of practicality or status, but simultaneously a figurative and literal embodiment of identity; cultural, intimate, physical.[528] As already discussed, clothing in literary texts is often valued for its metaphorical potential, as well as a clear indicator of economic wealth and social status.[529] For Jones and Stallybrass, this duality of significance – both economic and metaphoric/mnemonic – is a centre of tension which is, 'one of the most fertile sources of cultural analysis in the Renaissance'.[530] The same could be argued for clothing during the medieval period. Clothes are sources of wealth and value, as well as of identity formation; they are a 'second skin, a skin that names you'.[531]

However, as Miller has suggested, metonymic identity can also be transferred from person to garment/object while the original owner is still alive

---

[523] Ibid., p. 72
[524] Ibid.
[525] Ibid. Original emphasis.
[526] Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, p. 2.
[527] Ibid., p. 3.
[528] See Chapter Four of this thesis.
[529] Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing,* p. 26.
[530] Ibid., p. 32.
[531] Ibid.

through the means of gift-exchange, in which the spirit of the giver 'haunts' the gift.[532] The value of a gift is therefore enhanced by – or solely calculated on – the status of the giver. This can be seen in the Old Norse suffix –*nautr*, which is affixed to the end of sword or cloak names, such as the cloak *konugsnautr*, 'Kings' Gift' in *Hallfreðar saga* 9, thereby providing a linguistic sign of the continuing connection between gift-giver and gift.[533] The object is not only representative of the qualities of the giver, but the *embodiment* of them. This is especially true when the aforementioned object is a garment or textile accessory because of the intimate, material identity transference and substitution that takes place when the garment is worn. When a king presents a saga hero with a cloak as a gift, he is also presenting him with a material, metonymic piece of himself, such as his political, martial and economic power, his spirituality, and the respect he commands of his followers. The interwoven fibres that make the cloak mirror the social ties that encompass the social fabric of saga society.[534]

In addition to cloth's ability to embody and transmit identity, either through the act of wearing or giving, it can also be a site of emotional expression, as already illustrated above in relation to the *slæðr.* Emotion in Old Norse literature has only recently been the subject of focussed study.[535] By its very nature, literary emotion must be conceived of as separate phenomenon compared to its historical, psychological, biological and neurological counterparts.[536] As Sif observes:

> When applying psychological or neurological theories of emotions to literature one needs to be aware, however, that one is no longer dealing with actual emotions […] but with discursive or textual constructions. These discursive constructions furthermore abide not only by social and cultural rules, as products of a particular social or cultural context, but also by generic and discursive traditions of emotional representations.[537]

---

[532] 'It is a standard view in the Maussian vein that the spirit of the giver haunts the gift… the gift comes with the giver imbued in it', Miller, 'Is a Gift Forever?' p. 17; see also Mauss, *The Gift,* and Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Gifts", in *Essays, Second Series,* 1884, <https://emersoncentral.com/texts/essays-second-series/gifts/> [accessed 27th July 2018].
[533] Miller, 'Is a Gift Forever?'; *Hallfreðar saga* 9, p. 185; c.f: *ONP,* 'nautr', 2., 3., https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o56704 [accessed 9th January 2021].
[534] See Jane Schneider and A. Weiner, *Cloth and Human Experience,* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989); Cavell, *Weaving Words and Binding Bodies*, pp. 47-67.
[535] Sif, *Emotion in Old Norse Literature,* pp. 14-15.
[536] Ibid., pp. 6-10.
[537] Ibid., p. 11.

In other words, expressions of 'emotion' – what Sif calls 'emotive signposts' – in Old Norse literature are not reflective of genuine, historical or 'real' emotion.[538] While they may reflect social and cultural realities, 'they nevertheless convey uniquely literary behavioural scripts that are coded to convey interpretative meanings beyond their emotive functionality or their conventional emotional classification in societies.'[539] The literary function of emotion is to act as 'symbolic codes that guide the reader through the signifying network of a text.'[540] The way in which these codes or signposts are expressed depends on generic, social, gendered and other cultural expectations, an intersectional framework that Sif has named the 'horizon of feeling': 'such emotive identities are bound by emotional conventions and generic markers, but must ultimately reflect an emotive framework that is comprehensible and meaningful to its readers'.[541] The combination of generic expectation and cultural convention leads to 'emotive scripts', whereby a character follows a 'blueprint' of performative emotional display that will carry significance for a contemporary medieval audience.[542]

The ability of cloth and clothing to embody an individual, act as a material mnemonic and serve as an emotive signpost is best seen in *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu.* Like his fellow hero-poets, Gunnlaugr travels beyond Iceland in pursuit of his fortune, presenting himself to various kings and lords in Norway, Sweden, Ireland, Orkney and London. Each summer he makes a point to visit new rulers and recite his poetry in exchange for material wealth, an example of which is discussed earlier in this chapter. Unlike in *Hallfreðar saga* however, where the central relationship seems to be between Hallfreðr and Óláfr, the main narrative plot-point is Gunnlaugr's thwarted romance with Helga, a woman he has known since they were both twelve years old.[543] Before he sets sail from Iceland, he secures an informal agreement with Helga's father to the effect that she will

---

[538] Ibid., p. 18. Emotive signposts are different to emotional vocabulary ('emotives').
[539] Ibid., p. 18.
[540] Ibid.
[541] Ibid.
[542] Also, to some extent, an audience removed from the immediate temporal and cultural environment from which the text originates, Ibid., p. 11; Sif has adapted the term 'emotive script' from 'emotional script', coined by Sylvan Tomkin, 'Script Theory: Differential Magnification of Affects', in *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation 1978,* vol. 26, ed. by Herbert E. Howe and Richard A. Dienstbier (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), pp. 201-36.
[543] *Gunnlaugs saga* 4.

remain unattached for three years while he is away, but if does not return within that time, Gunnlaugr forfeits.[544] In London he presents himself to King Aðalráðr and, after reciting his poem, the king rewards him with a fur-lined scarlet cloak (*skarlatskikkja*).[545] In the court of Ólafr the Swede he encounters Hrafn, who will become his antagonist and marry Helga before he is able to return to Iceland.[546] As discussed in Chapter One with regard to Steingerðr, this happens against Helga's wishes, a point which is emphasised at her wedding, where 'flestra manna sögn að brúðurin væri heldur döpur' ('most people say that the bride was rather gloomy'); after hearing about Hrafn's dream in which he is killed by Gunnlaugr, '"það lutis aldrei gráta," segir hún. "Hafið þér illa svikið mig. Mun Gunnlaugur út kominn" og grét Helga þá mjög' ('"I will never weep over that", Helga said. "You have all tricked me wickedly. Gunnlaug must have come back". And then Helga wept bitterly'); and when she learns that Gunnlaugr has, indeed, returned to Iceland, 'Og litlu síðar 146lutist útkoma Gunnlaugs. Helga gerðist þá svo stirð við Hrafn að hann fékk eigi haldið henni heima þar og fóru þau þá heim aftur til Borgar og nýtti Hrafn lítið af samvistum við hana' ('Indeed, a little while later, news came of Gunnlaug's return. After this, Helga became so intractable towards Hrafn that he could not keep her at home, and so they went back to Borg [her father's home]. Hrafn did not enjoy much intimacy with her').[547]

Helga's explicit and sustained dislike of her husband is exacerbated beyond repair when, in the same chapter, she and Gunnlaugr come face to face at another wedding feast. Gunnlaugr recites a verse expressing his own distress about her marriage before giving her the *skarlatskikkja* from King Aðalráðr, known at this point as *Aðalráðsnaut.*[548] The name denotes the status of the original giver but, due to the material nature of cloth and clothing and its ability to 'maintain shape', it also *is* King Aðalráðr, or at least some essential part of him that 'haunts' the gift. This *skikkja* is a highly significant emotive signpost and is the site of material embodiment and memory. The emotions that Gunnlaugr vocalises in his verse are inscribed on the *skikkja*, interwoven with the fibres, giving shape to their personal

[544] *Gunnlaugs saga* 5.
[545] *Gunnlaugs saga* 7.
[546] *Gunnlaugs saga* 9.
[547] *Gunnlaugs saga* 11.
[548] C.f., Sauckel, *Die Literarische Funktion von Kleidung*, p. 47.

tragedy. In giving it to Helga, Gunnlaugr also gives her part of the king as well as of himself. Later on in her second marriage, which takes place after Gunnlaugr and Hrafn kill each other in a *hólmganga,* she becomes severely ill.[549] It is said that she does not really love her second husband Þórkell, although he is decent, rich and a fair poet, because she cannot stop thinking about Gunnlaugr. It is also said that, 'helst gaman Helgu að hún rekti skikkjuna Gunnlaugsnaut og horfði þar á löngu' ('Helga's greatest pleasure was to unfold the cloak which Gunnlaug had given her and stare at it for a long time').[550] Significantly, *Aðalráðsnautr* is now known as *Gunnlaugsnautr,* which suggests that it is now Gunnlaugr who 'haunts' the cloak. In Helga's final moments, she calls for *Gunnlaugsnautr* to be brought to her. Her last act is to spread the cloak out so that she can look at it, before collapsing, dead, into her husband's arms. In light of this discussion it is now possible to categorically identify that which a reader might have implicitly understood or – more likely – felt. It is only natural that in her grief, Helga turns to *Gunnlaugsnautr* for comfort because, through the process of identity transference that occurs during gift-exchange, and through cloth's ability to inscribe and be inscribed with emotion and memory, *Gunnlaugsnautr* is Gunnlaugr.[551]

In *Gunnlaugs saga*, the cloak that Gunnlaugr receives in exchange for a poem becomes a signpost for both his and Helga's emotions. Before he gave it to her it was simply a material reward, one among many that he received in purely economic transactions with numerous rulers from numerous lands. Its value was rooted both in the expensive fabrics, as well as in the metonymic connection between garment and its giver, King Aðalráðr. This is achieved through cloth's permeability, in which an individual can inscribe themselves on to the fabric, simply through the act of owning or wearing it.[552] Once Gunnlaugr gives it to Helga, however, it forms an additional connection between them and functions as a site of emotional expression and material memory. When Helga looks at *Gunnlaugsnautr,* she does not see a *skikkja* made of scarlet and lined with fur, but rather the material remains – an 'echo' – of the man she loves. When understood in this way,

[549] *Gunnlaugs saga* 13.
[550] *Gunnlaugs saga* 13.
[551] As argued by Stallybrass and Jones, the clothes of the dead recreate their presence through their absence. Stallybrass, 'Worn Worlds', p. 72; Stallybrass and Jones, *Renaissance Clothing*, p. 2.
[552] Stallybrass, 'Worn Worlds', p. 72.

her last act is all the more tragic, not least for her widower, who recites a verse expressing how hard it will be to live without her, and – the saga states – found her death 'hard to bear'.[553]

This brief analysis of *Gunnlaugs saga* shows that garments can serve as material mnemonic, forming – as well as taking the form of – the wearer, enduring long after their death. They serve as a residual reminder of an individual, embodying their shape and personality. They evoke their social ties, especially if the garment in question indicates their social and economic status through the quality and value of the materials used to create it. Clothing can take the place of currency, as it is possible to inscribe a variety of different values on to it, which can then be exchanged in a number of contexts, such as the economic and political transactions as discussed in relation to *Hallfreðar saga*. Finally, cloth and clothing can serve as emotive signposts, sites of emotional expression, connection and remembrance. They both reflect and project, form and inform not only an individual's identity, but also their interpersonal relationships – both intimate, as well as more formal or legalised social ties – and the way in which they negotiate their position in the world. With this in mind, I will return once again to *Hallfreðar saga* and examine the final scene of gift-exchange between Hallfreðr and Óláfr with view to uncovering not only the social and economic dynamics, but also the material and emotive significances as well.

The Function of Cloaks in Gift-Exchange in *Hallfreðar saga*

A number of years have passed since Hallfreðr was a member of Óláfr's following, but after he dreams of his king's anger, he returns to Norway with his family where he is welcomed and baptized.[554] Óláfr rewards him with his blessing, and their relationship is restored, not to its previous status – as it was somewhat tense and characterised by conflict – but to a state of mutual respect and a lack of material or emotional debt on both sides. Hallfreðr's performative act of loyalty renews the social contract between them which had, until this moment, remained dormant. Sadly, not long after their reconciliation, his wife dies, and Hallfreðr decides that it

[553] 'Þórkell bjó þar eftir og þótti allmikið fráfall Helgu sem von var að' ('Thorkell carried on living there. As one might expect he found Helga's death extremely hard to bear'). *Gunnlaugs saga* 13.
[554] *Hallfreðar saga* 9.

is time to return to Iceland. It is here that the king and his poet part on more equal footing. That is, rather than utilising the ritual of gift-exchange to negotiate political power dynamics, Hallfreðr and Óláfr's final act of gift-giving resonates more with the modern English definition of a 'gift', as something which is transferred from one to another without the expectation or receipt of an equivalent.[555] Ólafr gives Hallfreðr three different items: a *hringr* (arm ring), a *hjalmr* (helmet), and a *pellsskikkja,* (a cloak of 'costly material').[556] I wish to focus on the *pellsskikkja*, as cloth and clothing is the focus of this thesis. This is not to suggest that the arm-ring and helmet cannot bear similar material and metonymic significances to the cloak, but, due to the material, mnemonic an emotive qualities of textiles in the *Íslendingasögur*, the importance of the cloak is heightened.

In its simplex form, the noun *skikkja* indicates a cloak intended either for everyday wear – as in the case of Ásdís in *Grettis saga* – or an ostentatious luxury befitting royalty, as illustrated in the above discussion regarding Queen Gunnhildr in *Njáls saga*. In the compound, *pellskikkja*, *pell-* refers to 'costly cloth'. There are a number of 'costly cloths' that this could refer to, such as silk or scarlet.[557] Einar Ól. glosses *pellsskikkja* with the modern Icelandic *silkivefnaður* and *gullofinn*, meaning 'woven silk' and 'wrought with gold' respectively.[558] *Pellsskikkja* could therefore be made entirely from silk, or possess smaller silk components. It could also be woven with beaten gold threads, which would add decorative and economic value to a garment which is already comprised of luxury materials. The techniques for weaving gold (and silver) threads into fabric developed in the ancient world before making their way across the globe from East Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Primarily, gold was hammered into a thin metal foil, which was then woven into the weft of the fabric. This technique lent great shine and rigidity to a garment, but if something required more drape, then it was better to use metal threads, which were made up of fine gold filaments wrapped around a silk or linen core. This technique came into use by the eleventh century and, while it cost less to produce

[555] *OED,* 'Gift', n.1, I.
[556] *Hallfreðar saga* 4.
[557] Although it should be noted that the compound *skarlatsskikkja* is used when a cloak is made from scarlet, while the prefix *silki-* is used to denote when something is made of silk.
[558] *Hallfreðar saga*, p. 179, n. 2.

the threads, they were less durable than their beaten metal counterparts.[559] It is impossible to conclude whether this *pellsskikkja* is simply a cloak made of fine cloth, or if it is made of fine cloth *and* interwoven with gold. It is equally impossible to determine whether the gold is of the 'beaten metal' or 'wrapped thread' variety. Óláfr Tryggvason reigned during the late-tenth to early-eleventh centuries, which would favour the possibility of the *pellsskikkja* being comprised of beaten gold, but the saga was written down in the thirteenth century, which means that the saga author may refer to either method of using gold thread in woven fabrics. Regardless of these details, the *pellsskikkja* was economically valuable in terms of the cost of materials, as well as a symbol of wealth, power and status.

Now that I have established what the term *pellskikkja* represents materially, it is possible to unpick its social, material, mnemonic and emotive significance. First, Óláfr compliments his poet, calling him *'góðr drengr'*, an 'excellent man'; he then goes on to predict that Hallfreðr will eventually wish to return to Norway, but that he is unsure if they will ever meet again.[560] This is important because it signals that this is the final time that these two characters interact in person. As is typical of the *Íslendingasögur,* the narrative takes precedence over emotional interiority; accordingly, the saga narrator simply states that 'Hallfreði þótti mikit fyrir skilnaði við konnung' ('Hallfred was deeply moved by the parting with the king').[561] Although understated, this is in keeping with the generic horizons of feeling. However, there is another emotive signpost: the *pellskikkja.* As has been discussed both here and in the previous chapter, cloaks and other textiles function paratextually to convey symbolic, metonymic and grammatical significance in the *Íslendingasögur.* Therefore the *pellskikkja* conveys material and emotive significance which, due to the culturally contingent nature of emotionality and gift-giving, may have been more implicitly understood by a medieval audience than now. On the other hand, the *pellskikkja* is also a site of metonymic and mnemonic importance, as it is a 'worn world'. In giving Hallfreðr a cloak, Óláfr is in keeping with the phenomenon known a 'livery', by which a person in power (such as a king,

---

[559] 'Gold and Silver metal thread' in *Encyclopaedia of Medieval Dress and Textiles,* pp. 237-239; c.f., Alexandra Lester Makin, *The Lost Art of the Anglo-Saxon World: The Sacred and Secular Power of Embroidery,* Ancient Textiles Series 35, (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2019).
[560] *Hallfreðar saga* 9, pp. 179-180.
[561] *Hallfreðar saga* 9, p. 180.

or even a coloniser) bestows upon their subjects a set of clothes in place of monetary payment.[562] As Jones and Stallybrass have observed, clothing-as-currency is not 'neutral' in the way that money is; payments or gifts of clothing are 'richly absorbent of symbolic meaning […] in which memories and social relations are literally embodied.'[563] More importantly, however, 'clothing, as a form of material memory, incorporated the wearer into a system of obligations'.[564] However, if Hallfreðr is leaving Óláfr's service (and thus is no longer obliged to him), what purpose does the gift of a cloak serve? Its associate web of meaning and obligation suggests that, even though they are parting from each other, their relationship and duty toward each other will endure. This is further confirmed when Óláfr stipulates that Hallfreðr must never part with the *pellskikkja* or the other items. Rather, they must go with him after his death and Christian burial, or must be included in his coffin if he dies at sea.[565] This condition serves to heighten the connection between a follower and his king.[566] It is both comfort and warning to Hallfreðr, a gesture of friendship and a cautionary reminder to him that he must conduct himself in a manner befitting the status of one of the king's followers. Due to the embodied materiality of the *pellskikkja,* the two men are now inextricably connected, meaning that while the imprint of Óláfr's identity (thus, his authority and approval) will bolster Hallfreðr's reputation, Hallfreðr's behaviour will also reflect on the king. Although there is no expectation on Óláfr's side for a *material* return, the nature of giving a *pellskikkja* as a gift means that there are 'strings attached', indicating that, despite Hallfreðr's lack of return-gift, he is still obliged to reciprocate through model behaviour.

Rather than relying on emotive vocabulary, the saga author utilises the physical, affective phenomenon of the *pellskikkja* to convey the depth and significance of feeling that both king and poet experience but which, due to the 'horizons of feeling' associated with the genre, they cannot directly express. The materiality of the *pellskikkja* means that their relationship is inscribed not only

---

[562] Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing,* p. 17.
[563] Ibid., p. 20.
[564] Ibid., p. 22.
[565] *Hallfreðar saga* 9, p. 180. A similar event occurs in *Víga-Glúms saga* 25 when Glúmur finally gives away the last of the three items he was meant to keep, his luck runs out and he is vulnerable to physical and legal attack.
[566] And due to who this king is, it could be argued that he serves as a metaphorical substitution for God, in which the *pellskikkja also* serves as a placeholder for the Christian faith.

onto the cloth, but also on to the bodies of both giver and recipient. In this way, the *pellskikkja* has a symbolic, metonymic and grammatical function, paratextually conveying the complex web of identity, obligation and emotion to the audience. However, it could be argued that the *pellskikkja* – with all of its attendant material, social, economic, and affective significances – acts as a material language, one which is only understood by Óláfr and Hallfreðr because it is a system that they themselves have created through the exchange of political and personal gifts.

Conclusions

Cloaks are a ubiquitous garment in the Íslendingasögur. The modern English 'cloak' may be an accurate translation in terms of identifying what the Old Norse terminology pertains to, but is reductive because it does not convey the full breadth and depth of meaning that can be attributed to the original. This meaning can be found in the language, such as in the prefix *silki-* to denote something made of silk, but mostly a cloak's meaning has to be ascertained from the context in which it appears. In some instances, it is possible to deduce the symbolic significations of particular types of cloak, such as the broad semantics of culture attributed to, for example, the *skikkja*, or *feldr*, with its connotations of masculinity and aggression.

It is important to bear these potential layers of meaning in mind when analysing other, culturally contingent social rituals, such as that of gift-exchange, especially as gift-exchange is already socially, politically and personally charged, and used to negotiate relationships and power in saga society. When gift-exchange centres on a cloak, it functions paratextually to convey further levels of affective meaning and narrative significance. In *Hallfreðar saga*, for example, gift-exchange is used to mediate Hallfreðr and Óláfr's struggle for social dominance; it is even possible to track the fluctuating power dynamics of their relationship by paying attention to the way in which they utilised the ritual of gift-exchange to coerce the other into giving them valuable things, such as material goods or loyal service. When their relationship eventually stabilises (in terms of debts owed and loyalties proved), they are in a position to give freely to each other, signifying that they have reached the point of mutual respect and friendship, as far as that is possible when one of them is a king. The material significance of cloth adds an extra dimension to

this symbolically rich social-ritual: cloth inscribes and is inscribed by the body, making it both an embodied, material substitution for, and metonymic symbol of, the original wearer/gift-giver. Furthermore, as cloth is the product of society, both economically valuable, and representative of the social web of its inception, it can be argued that it functions a site of duality and tension between the social and the personal, the economic and intimate. In a genre famous for its emotional brevity, literary emotionality can only be expressed according to culturally contingent horizons of feeling, achieved through the use of signposts that are comprised of generically-bound 'emotive scripts'. I have shown that these signposts can be cloaks and other textile items, as they are inscribed with many layers of cultural, economic, social and personal significance. Therefore, cloaks in the *Íslendingasögur* are a language, used to inscribe and embody a wide variety of personal, cultural, social, and economic significances. They are also an affective phenomenon, used as emotive signposts to negotiate and explore horizons of feeling.

In the following – and final – chapter of this thesis, I will explore the etymological and cultural relationship between 'text' and 'textile' in order to demonstrate that the materiality of textiles and textile-making processes are just as significant to saga narrative as their written representations. Just as this chapter has shown that written cloaks are imbued with – and convey – personal and inter-personal significations, Chapter Four will show that the physical, material realities of textiles impact the way in which written textiles operate.

Chapter 4: Text, Textiles and the Stitch Act

In this thesis so far I have shown that textiles have a complicated relationship with femininity and power. I have also developed a prototype Old Norse vestementary code in order to show that textile terminology conveys a wide range of culturally contingent significations. In turn, these significations interact with established social and cultural norms providing paratextual information that enhances our understanding of the *Íslendingasögur.* Textiles and textile terminology can function in a wide variety of ways, signalling things like personal wealth and political affinities. They can also indicate more culturally abstract qualities, such as intentions, identities and emotions. The broad range of concepts discussed in this thesis so far are not easily generalised, requiring close attention to both language and narrative context in order to uncover their meaning. There are, however, two definitive strands that run through all of them: materiality and power. In Chapter One of this thesis I argued that textiles are not synonymous with either normative femininity or womanhood, but are rather instruments for exerting power and asserting personal agency. In Chapters Two and Three I have shown this to be the case; whether through gift-exchange, masculinity, royalty, or the material remains of tragic love, garments and textiles serve as vehicles for conveying narrative significance that is too often overlooked.

One of the most impactful ways in which textiles and textile-making practices influence the *Íslendingasögur* is through a specific phenomenon that I have named the 'stitch act'. In short, I define the stitch act to be an act of literary textile-creation that ultimately influences or controls the narrative. Just as Jóhanna argues of Old Norse women using the speech act to exert their agency and power, I will argue the same for the stitch act.[567] While scholars have noted the significance of speech acts in the sagas, especially in relation to women and gendered power dynamics, there has been very little work on its material counterpart thus far. In order to define what a stitch act is, it will first be necessary to explore what David McNeil has called the 'cultural artefact' that is the division between linguistic and non-linguistic, a divide which bears a resemblance to the one between art/craft and text/textiles that I introduced in Chapter One. The conceptual gulf between

[567] Jóhanna, *Women in Old Norse Literature,* p. 19.

material and expression, that is, 'written textiles', is not so wide as it first appears, due to the fundamental etymological and cultural interplay between 'text' and 'textile'. Any juxtaposition between materiality and language provides an opportunity to broaden our understanding of how textiles operate within saga narrative. As Jones and Stallybrass have observed, this 'tension' is fertile soil for analysis.[568] Through written textiles it is possible to shed light on a concept explored by Victoria Mitchell, who refers to the 'textuality of language and the intertextuality of signs', conceived of here as 'the textuality of thought and matter'; that is, the material properties of text and the textual properties of material.[569]

The textuality of thought and matter is perhaps best seen in the motif of weaving or spinning fate. In Old Norse literature fate is an ever-present, all-encompassing narrative device that determines the story.[570] Bek-Pedersen broadly defines it to be 'concerned simply with what happens. Not when it happens or why it happens; simply the fact *that* it happens.'[571] In this way fate is akin to story because it is also only concerned with what happens.[572] Furthermore, fate and story happen regardless of a character's behaviour or feelings, but it is *how* a character responds or the choices they make in the face of fate/story that drives a plot. The emphasis of textile creation and the actualisation of fate and story cannot be understated. I will show that the materiality of textiles and the physicality of their creation play a fundamental role in their fatalistic function, as well as making the stitch act possible. This materiality poses an interesting, theoretical obstacle to understanding textiles in the *Íslendingasögur*. In order to address it, I will examine the connection between fate and textile-creation, first as a purely literary or narrative device, before going on to interrogate the materiality of textiles and textile-creation in a number of key 'fateful' scenes in the *Íslendingasögur.* I will conclude this chapter with a close reading of how the stitch act operates in the poem *Darraðarljóð.* I will argue that fate is the ultimate expression of power, made possible by the stitch act.

---

[568] Jones and Stallybrass, *Clothing in the Renaissance and the Materials of Memory,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)*,* p. 32.
[569] Victoria Mitchell, 'Textiles, Text and Techne', in *The Textile Reader* ed. by Jessica Hemmings, (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 7-13, pp. 6, 11.
[570] Bek-Pedersen, 'Fate and Weaving: Justification of a Metaphor', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 5 (2009), 23-39, pp. 24-32.
[571] Ibid., p. 26. Original emphasis.
[572] E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel,* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2016), pp. 31-49.

Cultural Artefacts: The Text/Textile Dichotomy and the Stitch Act

In his article 'So You Think Gestures are Nonverbal?', speech and gesture specialist David McNeil observes that we, 'tend to consider *linguistic* what we can write down, and *nonlinguistic* anything else; but this division is a cultural artefact, an arbitrary limitation derived from a particular historical evolution.'[573] McNeil argues that, contrary to what linguists thought at the time, speech and gesture are part of the same psychological structure. Rather than attributing more significance to an individual's speech than their gestures, they should be interpreted together,

> because there are such close connections between gesture and overt speech, gestures offer themselves a second channel of observation of the psychological activities that take place during speech production – the first channel being overt speech itself. The channels […] are close, yet different. Combining a spoken sentence with its concurrent gesture into a single observation gives two simultaneous views of the same process.[574]

Historically, speech and gesture have been understood to occupy different hierarchical spheres of importance and meaning-making. However, McNeil argues they are both results of the same process that are simply expressed in two different forms. He calls their separation a 'cultural artefact', which evokes the social and cultural divide between art and craft that I introduced in Chapter One. This arbitrary limitation results in a hierarchy of cultural value and the stratification of skilled and creative output into the categories of high/fine art and craft.

Craft is lower in status compared to art because of its materiality and its connection to the physical. Of more importance, however, is the emphasis on functionality and utility.[575] An item of craft may be displayed in a household or adorn the body but critically, it serves a function. Just like a decorative end table it may stand on its own, or be applied to surfaces, as is the case with embroidery. Regardless of how visually appealing or skilfully worked however, craft as both practice and final result is considered to be the territory of hobbyists and usually

---

[573] D. McNeil, 'So You Think Gestures are Nonverbal?' *Psychological Review* (1985), 350-371, p. 350, as quoted in Mitchell, 'Textiles, Text and Techne', p. 6. Original emphasis.
[574] Ibid., p. 350.
[575] See Elissa Auther, 'Fiber Art and the Hierarchy of Art and Craft, 1960-1980', *The Journal of Modern Craft,* 1 (2008), 13-34, pp. 24-27; Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology,* (London: Pandora Press, 1981, reprnt. London, I.B. Tauris, 2013), p. 50.

connotes amateurism. A crafted item is often perceived to be produced in a domestic setting, lacking both creative agency and the ability to stimulate the higher intellectual faculties.[576] In contrast, art is produced outside of the domestic setting and engages intellectually with philosophy and theory. There is an emphasis on creativity, experimentation and 'genius'.[577] Crucially, art is produced by a professional artist, not a hobbyist, and has no utilitarian function.[578] Cultural value is seemingly bound to the social and cultural notions of utility versus creativity and amateur versus professional. Yet, as I discussed in Chapter One, there is very little actual difference between the two. Roszika Parker observes that, 'the art/craft hierarchy suggests that art made with thread and art made with paint are intrinsically unequal: that the former is artistically less significant. But the real differences between the two are in terms of *where* they are made and *who* makes them.'[579] As a labour-intensive and highly physical process, textile-creation is exacting and time-consuming, requiring knowledge, skill and discipline. Just as gesture is secondary to speech, so too is the crafting of textiles 'less than' the creation of art.[580] Furthermore, textile is considered to be of less importance than its etymological counterpart: text.

'Text' is related to the Latin *textus,* 'texture, tissue, structure',[581] as well as to *texere,* 'to weave, braid, construct',[582] emphasising conceptual and actual weaving, as well as the formation and structuring of cloth and story.[583] There is, however, an

---

[576] See the distinction between 'decorative knotting' and macramé maintained by fibre artists of the 1960's and 1970's, as discussed in Auther, 'Fiber Art', pp. 24-27.
[577] Parker and Pollock demonstrate how flower paining, a sub-genre of still-life, became associated with women and suffered devaluation as a direct result: '[f]lower painting [a still life genre which came to be associated with women] demands no genius of a mental or spiritual kind, but only the genius of taking pains and extreme craftmanship.' M.H. Grant, *Flower Painting Through Four Centuries,* (Leigh-On-Sea, Essex: F Lewis, 1952), p. 21, as quoted in Parker and Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, (London: Pandora Press, 1981, reprnt. London, I. B. Tauris, 2013), p. 54. Full discussion ranges from pp. 51-58.
[578] Authers summarises these differences in her discussion of the differences between weaving and art weaving, 'Fiber Art', pp. 25-27.
[579] Parker, *The Subversive Stitch,* p. 5.
[580] Authers shows, however, that this boundary is porous, 'Fiber Art', pp. 14-17.
[581] 'textus' http://clt.brepolis.net.ezproxy3.lib.le.ac.uk/dld/pages/QuickSearch.aspx (Lewis and Short), [accessed 4th Feb 2018]; 'text' n.1, http://www.oed.com.ezproxy3.lib.le.ac.uk/view/Entry/200002?isAdvanced=false&result=1&rskey=wmUgoz& (OED, accessed 4th Feb 2018].
[582] 'texo' http://clt.brepolis.net.ezproxy3.lib.le.ac.uk/dld/pages/QuickSearch.aspx (Lewis and Short), [accessed 4th Feb 2018].
[583] 'texere' http://clt.brepolis.net.ezproxy3.lib.le.ac.uk/dld/pages/QuickSearch.aspx (DMLBS), [accessed 29th October 2019] .

additional association that Victoria Mitchell highlights, in the noun *techne*, of which there appears to be two fields of meaning. The first is related to trickery or artifice, while the second pertains to skill, craft and art.[584] The root for text, textile, and *techne* is Proto-Indo-European **teks-* which means 'to weave' or 'to fabricate'.[585] Mitchell emphasises that this connection is not only apparent in Latin, but in Greek and Sanskrit as well. In Greek there is *tekton,* 'carpenter', echoes of which can be heard in Sanskrit *taksan,* 'carpenter', and *taksh,* 'art'.[586] This etymological connection has persisted across civilisations and demonstrates the fluidity with which 'text' and 'textile' move within each other's spheres of meaning:

> the sense of physical formation is emphatic. Through *tek-* the formation of *techne* further demonstrates the association of skill and through the Latin *texere* the sense of joining or fitting together reinforces the association of textiles with materials and away from the metaphorical associations illustrated by reference to text.[587]

Letters join to make words, words combine into verbal utterances or written sentences, and sentences create meaning. This process of actualisation is replicated by the spinning of fibres into a single strand of yarn, which is woven into textile, with that textile conveying cultural, social or economic significances. Although text and textile may often be divided into the artificial categories of art, conceived of here as 'intellectual', and craft which is here considered as 'material', in reality they are one and the same. When looking at textiles in literary sources then, it would be beneficial to consider what each can gain from the other in terms of theoretical, methodological and practical approaches. The way we approach text can – and should – also be the way we approach textiles. They are inextricably connected, fundamental to the fabric that is the Middle Ages. Both are made by human hands, ascribed meaning through the use of physical markings that bear a coded significance for their contemporaries. Written language can be read or heard, the message conveyed through culturally-contingent meaning-making. Exactly the same thing occurs with cloth and clothing. Style, colour or embellishment of a garment can be worn, seen, or felt, which also conveys

---

[584] 'techna' http://clt.brepolis.net.ezproxy3.lib.le.ac.uk/dld/pages/QuickSearch.aspx (Lewis and Short, DMLBS) [accessed 30th October 2019].
[585] '*teks' https://www.etymonline.com/ [accessed 30th October 2019].
[586] 'tekton', 'tekhnē' and 'taksan', *Online Etymology Dictionary* https://www.etymonline.com/ [accessed 30th October 2019]; 'taksh', Mitchell, p. 11.
[587] Mitchell, 'Textiles, Text and Techne', p. 11.

culturally-contingent significance ranging from social status, identity and power to personal alliances and intentions.[588] As Bek-Pedersen has observed in her work on weaving, fate and the supernatural, '"textile" is not merely etymologically related to "text" but is also seen as another kind of "text". "Textile" should therefore not be seen simply as a piece of cloth, but as an item conveying meaning'.[589] This description is best summarised by Mitchell: 'the textuality of both thought and matter [is] a neologism which may be formative in minimising the separateness of the spheres within which text, textiles, and *techne* might otherwise operate'.[590] These collapsed boundaries lead her to conclude that textiles can be a type of speech, while language can be a form of making.[591] As a concept, the textuality of thought and matter narrows the gap which has developed over time between the intellectual and material. Just as with the divide between speech and gesture, and art and craft, this dichotomy was born of cultural norms rather than from any innate or natural difference between the two. The same can be said of written text and woven textiles. Once the impact of this 'cultural artefact' is mitigated, it will become obvious that 'written textiles' is not as much of an oxymoron as the term suggests. I will now examine the interplay of text and textile in the praxis-based research of Kathryn Rudy, whose work has greatly influenced my thinking. In adapting J. L. Austin's theory of the speech act, I will demonstrate that the combined materiality of textile-making and the textuality of material results in the stitch act.[592]

Kathryn Rudy is both an art historian and textile practitioner.[593] Her textile-work reflects on the connection between reader and text. In an exhibition catalogue she actively encourages viewers to touch, stroke and handle her

---

[588] See Sauckel, *Die Literarische Funktion von Kleidung in den* Íslendingasögu*r and* Íslendingaþættir, Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanishen Altertumskunde 83, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014).
[589] Bek-Pendersen, *The Norns in Old Norse Mythology,* (Edinburgh: Dunedin, 2009), p. 156.
[590] Mitchell, 'Textiles, Text and Techne', p. 6.
[591] Ibid., p. 7.
[592] Ibid., p. 8; Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, The William James Lectures; Kathryn M. Rudy, 'Sewing as Authority in the Middle Ages' in *ZMK Zeitschrift für Medien – und Kulturforschung, 6/1/2015: Textil*, ed. by Lorenz Engell and Bernhard Siegert, (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag GmbH, 2015), pp. 117-131.
[593] I use the term 'practitioner' here to differentiate between Rudy's artistic and academic work, as both are equally significant to my discussion.

weavings, so that she may 'measure' their reception.[594] Her artistic rationale is related to her academic scholarship, where she has demonstrated that the use of densitometry, a technique that enables the analysis of darkness on a surface, revealing areas of build-up on manuscripts. She argues that these darker areas indicate where people have touched, rubbed or kissed the surface, and demonstrates the physicality of, and ritual interaction with, manuscripts.[595] I briefly explored the emotive and affective potential of cloaks in the previous chapter, outlining how they serves a emotive signposts in the *Íslendingasögur.* Although her focus is on reception rather than Old Norse literary emotionality, Rudy's work is thematically resonant because of its emphasis on cloth's ability to, in turns, inscribe itself and be inscribed upon, something which is further reflected by manuscripts. This permeable quality minimises the gap between text and textile. In one of her woven pieces, *Slide,* Rudy demonstrates the connection between textile and manuscript by incorporating projector slides depicting images of fifteenth-century manuscript pages into the weft of the fabric. For Rudy, this piece embodies two obsolete 'technologies' – the manuscript and the projector slide – forcing them to comingle in order to create new meaning, which is actualised in this particular hand-woven textile.[596] *Slide* is significant because it represents a connection between textiles and medieval text. The manuscript pages are only incorporated through their photographic image, which places the viewer in close proximity with the object being photographed but also at a distance. [597] This distance removes the viewer from the immediate material qualities of the original manuscript, which is instantly mitigated through proximity to, and haptic engagement with, the textile. The weaving of words, image and thread into one object is the ideal manifestation of theory, metaphor and practice that represents how textual and material culture interact with each other. Furthermore, as I will now show, it is the material counterpart to the stitch act.

---

[594] Rudy, *Woven Manuscripts: A soft installation by weaver and medievalist Kathryn Rudy*, (exhibition catalogue), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Library, 2017), p. 6.
[595] Rudy, 'Dirty Books: Quantifying Patterns of Use in Medieval Manuscripts using a Densitometer', *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 2 (2010), DOI: 10.5092/jhna.2010.2.1.1.
[596] Rudy, *Woven Manuscripts.*
[597] Barthes, *Camera Lucida: reflections on photography,* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

In her article, 'Sewing as Authority in the Middle Ages', Rudy explores the potential for sewing to function as a 'speech act'.[598] Austin defines the speech-act as an utterance (known as a 'performative') that changes the shape of the world in some way.[599] In order for the performative to be 'happy' (successful) it must meet a number of criteria. Firstly, the conditions in which a performative might happily flourish must be culturally accepted as the correct conditions. Related to this, there must be certain accepted words or utterances which signal that a performative is being executed and furthermore, the interlocutors taking part in the performative must be 'appropriate' for the given set of conditions. The performative must be completed correctly (and in full) by a person with the authority to do so. All individuals must also experience or think the appropriate emotions or thoughts and conduct themselves in a manner appropriate to those emotions, as well as the conditions in which they find themselves.[600] Finally, the performative must be heard and understood as such in order for it to be successful. Austin argues that if he makes a promise but it is neither heard or understood as such, is it really the case that a promise has been made?[601]

Rudy draws parallels between the function of a speech act and the function of sewing in the late medieval period: 'as with speech acts, the person wielding the needle and thread has the authority to do so, and effects a change in the world by transforming an object'.[602] She shows that meaning can be generated by sewing in a number of different ways, such as stitching pages of vellum together in order to literally increase the surface area and scope for knowledge; attaching pieces of cloth to conceal important figures in books of hours in order to add to the ritual of holy devotion; plaiting parchment together to thread through documents in order to attach seals of authority; even adding embellishments to the surrounding surface and frame of a holy relic display.[603] It is often the case that these objects are already significant, but the additional stitching lends a symbolic weight that functions as a type of shorthand for the medieval viewer.[604] The fact that the

[598] Rudy, 'Sewing as Authority in the Middle Ages', p. 117.
[599]Ibid.; Austin, *How to Do Things with Words,* p. 6.
[600] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words,* pp. 14-15.
[601] Ibid., p. 22.
[602] Ibid., p. 117.
[603] Rudy, 'Sewing as Authority', pp. 118, 119, 122, 123.
[604] Ibid., pp. 123-124.

stitching was often accomplished by a person with authority over the object in question, such as the owner of a manuscript, or a bishop on behalf of papal authority, is not only integral to the success of the act, but also suggests that this type of sewing was understood to have a certain, desirable effect on meaning. For example, Rudy elaborates on how a seal might be attached to an indulgence in Avignon in the fourteenth century, in a process akin to sewing.[605] It is not this act alone that lends authority to the document; it is only when the sewing has been, in Rudy's words, 'cast off' with a wax seal that the sewing actually signifies anything of importance. This is because it is the seal – which is a synecdoche of the authority of its owner – and not just the 'sewing' that actually affects the status of the document. This demonstrates that there are a specific set of circumstances or rituals that had to be performed *in addition* to the sewing in order for it to function as authority, very much like the function of a speech act. Conceptualising stitching and speaking as a speech act is reliant on both being understood to convey authority by the listener/audience. Speaking and stitching influence narrative, lend further significance to an object, or covey a legal authority.

In this thesis I have shown that textiles and textile-making processes play a significant role in the literary and cultural milieu of the *Íslendingasögur* and related genres. I have suggested that textile terminology can be understood as part of a wider vestementary code, which acts a shorthand for various culturally-contingent significances. However, I now wish to examine textile's materiality. I have already suggested that approaching Old Norse literary textiles from a cross-disciplinary perspective is of the utmost importance if we are to gain further insight into their function and significance in early medieval literature. In addition to this, however, both text and textile, speech and stitch can, in the appropriate setting, be the same thing. Speech and stitch both function in a manner akin to story, bringing saga or poetic plot into being through a process of actualisation. Rudy's work on authoritative sewing is invaluable when looking at the function of written textiles in the *Íslendingasögur,* as she highlights the social and cultural significance of sewing – thus textile practices, as well as the textiles themselves – and what it could have meant for a medieval audience when sewing and textiles were used in

[605] Ibid., p. 120.

their literature. Rudy has shown that while the act of sewing was important, it was only when it is accompanied by a specific, culturally understood ritual that it resembles the phenomenon of the speech act. In doing so, she demonstrates that sewing and textiles possess the power of performance, intention and reception that can be wielded for a variety of purposes. Speech and stitch operate as narrative devices, but despite the permeable boundaries between text and textile, it would be misleading to refer to an act of authoritative stitching as a speech act. As Mitchell has observed:

> textiles are *not* words and the differences between them benefit the conceptual apparatus of thought at the expense of its sensory equivalent. Thus when an activity is *labelled* as textiles it ceases to be a substance and becomes instead a 'material of thought', and as such enters into the internal logic of a system which tends to privilege the autonomy of the mind.[606]

Here, Mitchell emphasises the fact that, while it is in many ways necessary to collapse the boundaries between text and textiles, care must be taken to ensure that we do not relegate textiles to the realm of linguistic abstraction. Therefore, rather than simply comparing acts of stitching to 'speech acts', I suggest that they should be given a name in their own right: stitch acts. This term, while still within the realm of language, and therefore a label which 'privileges the autonomy of the mind' over the sensory and the material, removes the emphasis placed on words, thus highlighting the significance of making.

Just like a speech act, a successful stitch act also influences the world in some way. It is important to note, however, that not all depictions of textile-work or, indeed, every significant narrative 'turn' involving garments or other textiles, is a stitch act. When I refer to a narrative turn, I mean a critical moment or incident within a saga's narrative that functions as a catalyst for further development.[607] Such a turn occurs in *Njáls saga* for example, when Njáll adds the *slæðr* to the pile of goods meant as compensation for the murder of Höskuldr.[608] As I argued in the

---

[606] Mitchell, 'Textiles, Text and Techne', p. 8. Original emphasis.
[607] 'Turn' here also functions in the Proppian sense, depending on narrative context. For example, in *Gísla saga Súrssonar* 9, when in the *dyngja*, Auðr tells Ásgerðr that they will no longer discuss her affair with Vésteinn, but the entire conversation is overheard by Þórkell; this can be described as an 'interdiction' which is immediately violated. From here the rest of the narrative unfolds. See Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. by Laurence Scott, The American Folklore Society Bibliographical and Special Series 9, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1958, rev. 1968, reprnt. 2009), pp. 25-64.
[608] *Njáls saga* 123, pp. 311-315.

previous chapter, the *slæðr* is a garment of significant economic value but is ambiguously represented in *Egils saga* and *Njáls saga.*[609] However, its appearance at this precise narrative juncture is critical. Without the existence of the *slæðr*, Njáll might not have added it – however unwisely – to the pile of compensation goods, thus reigniting the feud that leads to his death. In a saga that is dominated by other fateful textiles, such as Höskuldr's bloodied *skikkja*, the entirety of the poem *Darraðarljóð,* as well as Sigurðr Hlöðvisson's raven banner which seemingly brings death to all who bear it, it is difficult to dismiss the *slæðr's* presence as mere coincidence.[610] As I will argue shortly, if the act of weaving can determine fate and function as a locus of narrative agency for the weavers, it stands to reason that woven textiles retain that same agency in their ensuing lives and afterlives. If the warp threads of Njáll's fate lead to his death then the *slæðr*, imbued with its own agency, is the weft. It can also be viewed as a 'character' in its own right, deployed to cause conflict and shape the narrative.[611]

However, regardless of the *slæðr's* significance at this juncture, it is not a stitch act because it does not fulfil the required conditions. Just as with a speech act, a stitch act must occur in the appropriate setting. Furthermore, Rudy illustrates that it is not the act of stitching alone which is imbued with authority, but rather the act combined with the correct words. This must also be understood as a stitch act by witnesses or interlocuters. Finally, those involved must experience emotions appropriate to the scenario and behave accordingly. The *Þing* is an appropriate location for speech acts therefore stitch acts may occur, but the *slæðr* is added to the pile in silence, and reported almost like an afterthought by the saga narrator, as if it were done in a rush of last-minute emotional turmoil.[612] This implied emotion, although understandable, is perhaps not appropriate during legal proceedings, a fact somewhat confirmed by Flosi's extreme reaction when he sees the *slæðr.*[613] The underlying intention and reception do not equate with one another. Although 'fateful', the *slæðr* is just one of many important textiles in the *Íslendingasögur,* a constructed world where clothing and textiles are forces to be

[609] See discussion in Chapter Two.
[610] *Njáls saga* 116 and 157 respectively.
[611] This is shown in a literal way by Þorgil's prophesying cloak in *Laxdæla saga* 67, p. 198.
[612] See previous chapter.
[613] *Njáls saga* 123.

wielded in the service of authority, and where a speech act or a *slæðr* can instigate a bloodfeud.

I have established that understanding text and textile as the 'same but different' is essential to the stitch act. It is now possible to explore how the stitch act functions in Old Norse literature. Depictions of textile-making processes occur in poetry, both in the prosimetra of the sagas as well as in the *Poetic Edda*. A number of these poems demand scrutiny because they represent some of the most complete descriptions of early medieval weaving, as well as other textile crafts.[614] In contrast to the perceived realism of the *Íslendingasögur,* eddic poems focus on gods, giants, heroes, valkyries and legendary noblewomen. As observed by Margaret Clunies Ross, the 'fantastic' elements of the sagas should not be treated as separate from the 'realistic'.[615] The same can be said of the eddic and skaldic poems which depict textile-making processes in legendary or mythic contexts. The subject matter of these poems should not – indeed, does not – undermine their validity in representing social and cultural ideals and material practices. In her discussion of monstrosity in the *Íslendingasögur,* Rebecca Merkelbach argues that social monsters such as revenants, *berserkir* and magic-users (paranormal figures with whom the 'natural' or 'normal' individuals of saga-society co-exist), 'gave saga authors and audiences a tool to covertly address pervasive cultural and social anxieties – anxieties so pressing that they could only be explored and played out in the safe space of the past, through the figure of the monster.'[616] In other words, Merkelbach's 'monster' and Ross's 'fantastic' play an important role in conceptualising otherwise unexpressed cultural values, aspirations, beliefs and anxieties. In Old Norse literature, fate is closely associated with both textile-creation and the 'fantastic'. I will now explore fate as both a literary motif and narrative device before going on to examine how textiles and fate come together through Höskuldr's bloody cloak in *Njáls saga*. As I will show, Hildigunnr's use of the cloak in her incitement speech is not a stitch act, but it is demonstrative of how

[614] For example, *Völundarkviða* begins with three women, other-worldly 'swan maidens' flying across Myrkwood to 'fulfil their fate' and 'spin precious linen', Larrington, *The Poem of Volund,* 1. I, II, and IV.
[615] Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Realism and the Fantastic in Old Icelandic Sagas', *Scandinavian Studies* 74 (2002), 443-454.
[616] Rebecca Merkelbach, *Monsters in Society: Alterity, Transgression, and the Use of the Past in Medieval Iceland,* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), p. 3.

text and textiles – specifically words and woven garment – work together as concurrent channels of meaning.

Fate and Textile-Creation: Fateful Textiles

Early on in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana inn fyrri*, three supernatural women who are identified as *nornir* arrive to 'shape fate for the prince':

> Nótt varð í bo, nornir qvómo,
> þær er ǫðlingi aldr um scópo:
> þann báðo fylki frægstan verða
> oc buðlunga beztan þiccia.
>
> Snero þær af afli ørlögþátto,
> þá er borgir braut í Brálundi;
> þær um greiddo gullin símo
> oc und mána sal miðan festo.
>
> Þær austr oc vestr enda fálo,
> þar átti lofðungr land á milli;
> brá nipt Nera á norðrvega
> einni festi, ey bað hon halda
>
> (Night fell on the place,/ nornir came,/ those who were to shape/ fate for the prince;/ they said the king/ should be most famous/ and that he would be thought/ the best of leaders./ They twisted very strongly/ the strands of fate,/ as the fortifications were broken/ in Brálundr;/ they arranged/ golden threads/ and fastened them in the middle/ of the moon's hall.// East and west/ they put the ends,/ the prince should have/ the land between;/ the kinswoman of Neri/ to the north/ threw one fastening;/ bade it hold forever/).
>
> (*Helgakviða Hundingsbana inn fyrri,* II-IV).

As Bek-Pedersen has shown, there have been conflicting interpretations as to the activity performed by the *nornir* in these three strophes, specifically whether they are weaving or spinning the 'golden threads.'[617] She argues that they are plying three individual strands in order to create a united single thread of fate for Helgi Sigmundsson (later known as Helgi Hundingsbana), although I would suggest that an argument could also be made in favour of tablet weaving, especially because of the importance of tablet-woven bands to the cloth-weaving process.[618] Regardless

[617] Bek-Pedersen, *The Norns*, p. 129.
[618] Ibid., pp. 129-130; for information on tablet-weaving and its uses, see Østergård, *Woven into the Earth: Textiles from Norse Greenland,* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2009), pp. 64-65, pp. 113-114. See discussion of weaving and *Darraðarljóð* later on in this chapter.

of the exact textile-making activity taking place, it is heavily implied that in twisting these three *ørlǫgþáttr* (II.2) 'fate-threads', the *nornir* directly influence Helgi's fate and the ensuing poetic narrative.[619] This association is possible because of the etymological connection between text and textiles, as well as the relationship between textiles, fate and story. These strophes demonstrate that in the Old Norse imagination there is an undeniable metaphorical association between supernatural women, fate and textile-work and that, furthermore, in performing their textile-work, these women create story. Of course, the imagery of fate-creation through the manipulation of threads is not exclusive to the Old Norse literary canon:

> Referring to fate or destiny as something that is woven or spun is a well-known metaphorical image, which is most frequently associated with moirae and parcae the Fates of classical mythology, but also with the norns of Old Norse mythology and with similar beings in other traditions.[620]

The association between supernatural women, textile-creation and fate was observed as early as the nineteenth century by Jacob Grimm in his multi-volume *Teutonic Mythology*.[621] Grimm's so-called 'wise women' – an all-encompassing term which included the *norninr* and valkyries, as well as other folkloristic figures – were intrinsically connected to textile-creation and fate. [622] He even went so far as to suggest that, 'spindles are an essential characteristic of all the wise-women of antiquity among Teutons, Celts and Greeks.'[623] Bek-Pedersen argues that '[when] consulting the source material for Old Norse tradition, one is faced with rather sparse evidence to back up the notion that the norns and other supernatural female beings were commonly thought of as weavers'.[624] While Grimm refers to spindles and spinning rather than weaving, she does agree with the connection between textile-work and fate, especially when fate is woven on a warp-weighted

---

[619] Bek-Pedersen, *The Norns,* p. 129. An equally interesting social-cultural-textile complex also exists in Old English, *freoðuwebbe,* 'peace-weaver', although this term is not exclusive to women; see L. John Skulte, '*Freoðuwebbe* in Old English Poetry', in *New Readings on Women in Old Norse Literature,* ed. by Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennesey Olsen, (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 204-210.
[620] Bek-Pedersen, 'Fate and Weaving', p. 23.
[621] Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology,* 4th ed., 4 vols., trans. by James Steven Stallybrass, (Massachusetts, NY: Peter Smith, 1976, 1883), IV., pp. 396-437.
[622] Ibid., p. 413.
[623] Ibid., p. 419.
[624] Bek-Pedersen, 'Fate and Weaving', p. 23.

loom.[625] She likens an individual character's fate to the warp threads of a loom, suggesting that fate operates in such a way that a pattern has been laid out (for a person's life experiences as well as a piece of cloth) so that while there is some degree of choice or 'free will' permitted with the weft, the prescribed pattern in the warp threads/fate keep the weaver to a particular course or narrative:

> Once it has been laid down, one cannot escape one's fate […] As the warp contains the basic truth about the finished cloth, so a person's fate constitutes the basic truth about their personality […] Fate in Old Norse tradition is presented as a *process of actualization* as an interplay between what one is given to work with and what one does with it […] The interplay between warp and weft on the weaver's loom is a good way of describing this, and this is… why the metaphor fate-as-weaving works so well.[626]

Envisioning the fate of Old Norse literary characters as warp threads, and the choices they make as the weft goes some way in explaining the prevalence of the 'fate-weaving' metaphor, at least in critical and popular imagination, if not explicitly in the Old Norse sources themselves.[627] However, it also supports the connection between text, textile, fate and story. Bek-Pedersen's study is by necessity narrow in scope, and therefore the significance of literary textiles and their function in the *Íslendingasögur* is not considered. As demonstrated by Anita Sauckel, as well as by myself with regards to cloaks and the vestementary code, textiles invariably serve a number of social and cultural functions in the *Íslendingasögur* (and *þættir*).[628] However, the making, wearing, gifting, and general presence of textiles at certain narrative junctures within the sagas are more than just symbolic or gestural, but rather a substitute for something or someone. Furthermore, they are imbued with personal agency to create story within the wider saga structure. When textiles and textile-making practices are used as a metaphor for fate, or exist in conjunction with significant narrative 'turns', we should view them as agents directly responsible for – to borrow Bek-Pedersen's term – the 'actualisation' of poetic or saga narrative. They are an integral part of the pattern established by the warp threads that characters must navigate throughout the course of their lives. In this way, she maintains, textiles are not just

[625] Ibid., p. 24.
[626] Ibid., pp. 36-37. Emphasis my own.
[627] Ibid., p. 23.
[628] Anita Sauckel, *Die Literarische Funktion von Kleidung.* See Chapter Two of this thesis.

'pieces of cloth' but 'another kind of text', objects that imbue and convey meaning.[629] Viewing textile as 'another kind of text' however, still subscribes to the notion that the two are separate from each other. As demonstrated by *Slide* textiles and text are material and written counterparts, meaning that written textiles require consideration on their own terms. Textiles in Old Norse literature demand a hybrid approach that draws from material and textual disciplines, which is why it is necessary to look at arguments that go beyond text.

Textile-work is a form of composition, and textile a type of voice, either spoken or written. It is important to recognise that this is not analogy, neither is it 'just' metaphorical. Instead, as already discussed in Chapter Two, textiles *are* language and communication.[630] Furthermore, the deeply rooted etymological and cultural connection between text and textile lends to each the properties of the other and emphasises the interconnectedness of weaving and writing through fabrication and structure. Although mutable and difficult to identify, the connection between the two is a fundamental quality which must be considered when exploring how textiles function in the *Íslendingasögur.* However, despite work which has focussed on this connection in other fields (such as fine art), it has not been fully explored in relation to early medieval literature. Scholars have so far conceived of textiles and text as two separate spheres, the material and the linguistic, with the unspoken acceptance that text is superior to textiles. This is due, in part, to the historic privileging of that which is cerebral, cognitive and visual over other more 'base' senses, such as touch. It is clear that the significance of textiles in Old Norse literature has not escaped this arbitrary cultural division and devaluation.

Going forward, any study of literary textiles should bear this phenomenon in mind. Mitchell argues that, 'it is necessary to disrupt the boundaries which divide nature from culture.'[631] The cognitive and physical, the intellectual and material, art and craft, text and textile all supposedly occupy separate spheres. In order to understand the ways in which they interact, she suggests that they must

---

[629] Bek-Pendersen, *The Norns,* p. 156.
[630] Barthes, *The Fashion System,* trans. by Matthew Ward and Richard Howard, (London: Vintage, 2010), p. 10.
[631] Mitchell, 'Textiles, Text and Techne', p. 6.

be viewed as the equals they are, without the distorting lens of culture.[632] While there has been some scholarly attention dedicated to exploring how textiles can function at a metaphorical and structural level, as well as on how textiles and textile-making processes affect our understanding of poetics, the collapsed boundaries which allow for the materiality of text and the textuality of textiles have not been considered. In other words, the artificial boundaries that exist between text and textile have so far remained resolutely solid. Consequentially this means that we are as of yet unaware of the full significance and impact that textiles have in the sagas. One such moment occurs in *Njáls saga* 116, Hildigunnr's infamous incitement of Flosi. As briefly discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis, the role of the bloody *skikkja* is considered by critics to be a vital component of Hildigunnr's success. It is thought to work in conjunction with her incitement speech to provoke a sense of shame and duty within Flosi, which then motivates him to violent and vengeful action. The significance of the *skikkja* has not been ignored in previous criticism, but given the relationship between textiles and text, weaving and fate, it is worth revisiting the scene to re-evaluate how Höskuldr's bloodied *skikkja* functions as a fateful agent of story.

Blood Ties and Binding Threads: *Flosanautrr*

In his discussion of the many legalities at work within the bloodfeud, Miller discusses the ritual of presenting to a would-be avenger a 'bloody token', understood here to mean either bloodied clothing or a severed head.[633] He argues that where words alone are ineffective, the presence of the corpse via the bloody token, combined with the correct words, functions as part of a quasi-legal ceremony in which the grievant (usually an individual incapable of exacting vengeance themselves) 'charges' another to act on their behalf.[634]

> Goading and nagging, mere words, were not by themselves sufficient to motivate someone who did not wish to take action. […] At its best, the goad was cuttingly incisive [but] [i]t could also be ignored. […] The hallmark of

[632] Ibid., pp. 11-12.
[633] Miller, 'Choosing the Avenger: Some Aspects of the Bloodfeud in Medieval Iceland and England', *Law and Society* 1 (1983), 159 – 204; see also Sif's discussion of how Guðrún uses Bolli's blood-stained clothing to incite her sons to vengeance, *Emotions in Old Norse Literature: Translations, Voices, Contexts*, (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017), pp. 128-129; c.f., Sauckel, *Die Literarische Funktion von Kleidung*, pp. 101-103.
[634] Miller, 'Choosing the Avenger', pp. 185-188.

> the ceremonial charge was that it never needed repetition; it was never ignored for long.[635]

Similarly, in her examination of Hildigunnr's incitement, Clover observes that Hildigunnr performs a number of ritualistic actions, including the presentation of her murdered husband's bloody cloak alongside a spoken, 'formal charge'.[636] Clover argues that when viewed as individual incidents they have little impact on Flosi, but when seen as the culmination of a sequence of premeditated behaviours, the combination of the bloody cloak and speech result in Flosi resentfully accepting the charge laid upon him.[637] Miller and Clover identify the significance of formal speech and the presentation of a bloody token – which can sometimes be an item of clothing – within a ceremonial or ritualistic setting. This combination enables a 'grievant' to nominate and motivate an unwilling arbitrator to enact vengeance against a perpetrator.[638]

This work forms the basis for Jóhanna's analysis of the speech act and its function within the broader constructs of gender and power dynamics in saga society. While the term 'speech act' is not used by either Miller or Clover, it is clear that their focus on language in a ceremonial, performative context points in that direction.[639] They identify that the 'bloody token' plays an equal role in an incitement scenario, but the textile nature of such a token is incidental. Jóhanna explores the 'whetting' or 'incitement' scene as a speech act, in which a woman (typically) provokes a man into a particular channel of violent action.[640] Authority and power do not stem directly from spoken words, but from the context in which they are said. In the case of incitement, Jóhanna lists some of the typical, ritualistic

---

[635] Ibid., p. 181.

[636] Clover identifies the other incidents as follows: assigning Flosi the 'high seat', the ragged presentation of the meal, as represented by the torn towel she provides for him to wipe his hands, and elaborately performed weeping, in which she pushes her hair back to ensure that her tears are witnessed. Clover, 'Hildigunnr's Lament' in *Cold Counsel: The Women in Old Norse Literature and Myth,* ed. by Sarah M. Anderson and Karen Swenson, (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, 2012), pp. 15-54, p. 18.

[637] Ibid., pp. 18, 37-40.

[638] Miller observes that three people are required in order to fulfil the legal requirements of the incitement scene: the 'grievant', the would-be avenger and the corpse. The 'bloody token' is representative of the murdered individual and in presenting the token to the avenger, Miller argues that the grievant is able to speak for the dead person and 'act on behalf of the corpse'. Miller, 'Choosing the Avenger', p. 194.

[639] Jóhanna, *Women in Old Norse Literature,* p. 19.

[640] Ibid., pp. 17-19. On the role of specifically women as inciters in Old Norse saga tradition, see Miller, 'Choosing the Avenger', at p. 194.

'strategies' which the women of the sagas deploy against their male kin, including the bloody token or shaming him for being 'unmanly'. The timing and setting also contribute to the formula of the incitement speech act, as the woman often chooses to incite her kinsman either during or after a meal. This is an important aspect, as the public nature of the speech forces the listener to act so as not to lose the respect of their followers or other kinsmen.[641] Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the speech act must be heard and understood for it to have any status as an act. In the case of the incitement speech, the man often responds in a negative way and is seemingly dismissive of what is being said, but in actual fact he is resigning himself to an inescapable fate.[642] However, the significance of Hildigunnr's use of the bloodied *skikkja* goes beyond both Miller's legal interpretation, and Clover and Jóhanna's attention to performativity and ritual. While Hildigunnr is not shown at her textile-work, it is said that, 'hon var svá hög, at fár konur váru, þær er hagari váru ('Few women could match her skill at handiwork').[643] Einar Ól. observes that the term *hǫg* is 'without a doubt' meant to indicate *hannyrðir,* a noun which denotes textile-work such as weaving and embroidery, which, he reminds us, is the special remit of women in the sagas.[644] In Chapter One I demonstrated that the connection between women and textile-work is a cultural artefact, and that there is no essentialised or natural associations between *hannyrðir* and gender. However Hildigunnr's mastery of *hannyrðir* and her widowed status places her in a position of authority – Miller even suggests duty and responsibility – over the vengeance-taking, as embodied by Höskuldr's *skikkja*.[645]

Earlier on in this chapter I suggested that the *slæðr* in *Njáls saga* 123 could be read as an agent of fate, a role made possible by the intrinsic connection between text and textile. If, as Bek-Pedersen suggests, the process of weaving is *also* the process of actualising fate, then it follows that the material results of that

---

[641] Jóhanna – citing Clover – reminds us that a meal would be communal. Clover, 'Hildigunnr's Lament', in *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New Approaches to Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism*, ed. by John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth and Gerd Wolfgang Weber, (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986), pp. 141-83, p. 176, as cited in Jóhanna, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, p. 17.
[642] Jóhanna, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, p. 17.
[643] *Njáls saga* 95, p. 238; *Njal's Saga* 95, p. 115.
[644] *Njáls saga* 95, p. 238, n.9. Refer back to Chapter One for discussion of *hannyrðir* and femininity.
[645] Miller, 'Choosing the Avenger', p. 191.

process retain some of that power. This is definitely true of Höskuldr's *skikkja.* Upon learning that there is trouble brewing between his nephew and the Njálssons, Flosi advises Höskuldr not to return to his home. This course of action is unacceptable to Höskuldr because it would give the appearance of running away. When the time comes for Höskuldr to leave, Flosi gives him a *skarlatskikkja* trimmed with *hlað.*[646] In Chapter Three I examined the function of cloaks in the social ritual of gift-exchange, arguing that the material significance of cloth enhances the connection between giver and receiver. When Flosi gives his nephew the *skikkja*, he also commits part of himself to Höskuldr's fate. The *skikkja* enhances the bond between them and is both the means for, and material embodiment of, their relationship. Very shortly after, the narrator describes how Höskuldr woke up early to sow crops. He wears the *skikkja* which Flosi gave to him, now known as *Flosanautr,* 'Flosi's Gift'.[647] As I have already demonstrated in relation to *Gunnlaugs saga* and *Hallfreðar saga,* the type of cloaks that receive the name construction 'name of giver' + *nautr* are 'worn worlds'. Cloaks, especially named cloaks, inscribe and are inscribed by the body. They are an embodied, material substitution for, and metonymic symbol of, the original wearer/gift-giver. It is therefore significant that the Njálssons and Mörðr murder Höskuldr while he is wearing *Flosanautr* because any attack on him is also an attack on Flosi. This is further evidenced by the fact that when she discovers her murdered husband, Hildigunnr 'tók skikkjuna ok þerrði þar með blóðit allt ok vafði þar í blóðlifrarnar ok braut svá saman skikkjuna ok lagði í kistu sína' ('She picked up the cloak and wiped off all the blood and wrapped the clotted blood into the cloak and folded it and placed it in her chest').[648] She purposely merges the blood with the *skikkja* not only, as Miller suggests, to strengthen the bond between corpse and would-be avenger, but also because she is aware that *Flosanautr* is a material connection between Höskuldr and Flosi. Her actions emphasise and symbolise her authority in this situation, lending credibility and weight to her future speech act/incitement. As someone whose skill in *hannyrðir* cannot be matched, she arguably possesses

---

[646] *Njáls saga* 109, p. 270-271. *Hlað* is often mistakenly translated as 'lace', which is impossible because lace is an early modern innovation. It could possibly refer to fine embroidery or tablet-woven bands which are appliquéd around the neckline, hems, cuffs, as well as other seams. See Østergård, *Woven into the Earth,* pp. 104-107, 229.
[647] *Njáls saga* 111, p. 280.
[648] *Njáls saga* 112, p. 282; *Njal's Saga* 112, p. 133.

the most direct line of authority over the blood-soaked fibres, while her responsibility towards maintaining the social and cultural requirements of a bloodfeud society demand that she advocate for vengeance on behalf of the victim. However, they also show her conscious manipulation of both story and cloth, text and textile. The blood-soaked *skikkja* passes from Flosi to Höskuldr and back again, a fateful reminder that an uncle's commitment to his nephew continues even after death. The bloodied *skikkja* is essential to Hildigunnr's success in inciting Flosi to vengeance because of the interaction between speech, textile and authority, which further draws on the symbiotic relationship between words and weaving.

Placing *Flosanautr* around Flosi's shoulders however, is not a stitch act. Despite the fact that some of the required conditions are met, such as the authority of the grievant which is understood as such by the would-be avenger, there is a distinct lack of actual stitching, or any other act of textile-creation. Words were not always enough to motivate a reluctant man to vengeance therefore the women of the sagas had to draw on the other reserves of power available to them. Miller, Clover, and to some extent Jóhanna have all considered Hildigunnr's use of the cloak to be significant, but still secondary to her speech or to the written word of the law, despite the fact that it is the elaborate presentation of the cloak *in conjunction* with her incitement speech that provokes Flosi to the point that his face turns as red as blood, as green as grass, and as black as Hel.[649] Jóhanna demonstrates that speech, as well as the speech act, are vital elements in reframing the way gendered power dynamics should be approached in Old Norse literature. As discussed at the start of this chapter however, words are held in higher cultural estimation than material things. The continuous privileging of speech and words over the non-verbal, unspoken and non-written means that even in scenes where the material is demonstrably impactful and repeatedly acknowledged as such by multiple critics, it is still of secondary significance. For the inciting woman, words alone are not always sufficient but fortunately for her, textiles are not words.

---

[649] 'Flosa brá svá við, at hann var í andliti stundum rauðr sem blóð, en stundum fölr sem gras, en stumdum blár sem hel', *Njáls saga* 116, p. 292. Miller highlights the significance of this description thus: 'Flosi […] was upset and enraged [by Hildigunnr's speech], so much that the author treated him to three of the 148 similes recorded in the entire corpus of the Icelandic family sagas', Miller, 'Choosing the Avenger', p. 184, citing P. Schach, 'The Use of the Simile in the Old Icelandic Family Sagas', *Scandinavian Studies* 24 (1952), 149-165. For a more recent study on facial expression and colouration in the *Íslendingasögur,* see Kirsten Wolf, 'Somatic Semiotics'.

Rather, the relationship that exists between textiles and words enables her to use textile-making processes, as well as the material results of those processes, to speak for her loudly and more emphatically than 'mere words'. Flosi's reaction to Hildigunnr's performance is to immediately scapegoat her, '"Þú ert it mesta forað ok vildir, at vér tækjum þat upp, er öllum oss gegnir verst, ok er köld kvenna ráð"' ('"You are a monster and want us to take the course which will be worst for us all – cold are the counsels of women"').[650] Women in Old Norse literature are often blamed for the violent deeds of men, even though they are often only voicing social and cultural expectations.[651] It is arguable, however, that Flosi's extreme reaction is not necessarily due to the inescapable cycle of violence, or his enforced role in maintaining that cycle. Rather, his anger can be explained by the fact that Hildigunnr refused to let him dismiss her, a feat achievable only via the material embodiment of the relationship between Flosi and her murdered husband, in the form of his blood-stained *skikkja*.

The Stitch Act and Spinning Fate in *Laxdæla saga* 49

Just like the speech act, the stitch act is a phenomenon which influences its wider surroundings, and is also an important critical tool to use when examining the function of textiles in the *Íslendingasögur.* If the inclusion of a garment in an incitement ritual does not qualify as a stitch act, despite its close resemblance and adherence to the conditions needed for a successful stitch act, then what does a stitch act look like? As mentioned above, there is a distinct lack of actual *stitching* in *Njáls saga* 116. In attempting to redress the imbalance of attention paid to the material, it is necessary that material processes remain at the centre of the discussion. The limited depictions of sewing, weaving and other textile-making processes in the *Íslendingasögur* are problematic in this instance, as the act of textile-making is essential to fulfilling the necessary conditions of the stitch act. As a consequence, the number of stitch acts in the *Íslendingasögur* are also limited.

---

[650] *Njáls saga* 116, pp. 291-292; *Njal's Saga* 116, p. 137.

[651] For more on the female inciter as misogynistic literary trope, see Jochens, *Old Norse Images of Women*, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); For an analysis of the female inciter, misogyny and male violence, as well as the 'anti-inciter' or 'peace-keeper', see: Clark, *Gender, Violence and the Past in Edda and saga,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 142-163 (specifically relating to *Sturlunga saga*), and Jóhanna, *Women in Old Norse Literature,* pp. 15-45 (across the multiple genres of Old Norse prose).

This lack of quantity is not detrimental to their significance, but rather enhances their potency. For example, upon returning home from slaying his sworn-brother Kjartan, Bolli is greeted by his wife, Guðrún. She asks him for the time before going on to say, '"Misjöfn verða morgunverkin. Eg hefi spunnið tólf alna garn en þú hefir vegið Kjartan"' ('"A poor match they make, our morning work – I have spun twelve ells of yarn while you have slain Kjartan").[652] This speech is as jarring as it is vivid, but it is also not the only instance in which textiles provide Guðrún with a weapon or a means to undermine and unsettle the men in her life. In *Laxdæla saga* 34 Þórðr suggests to Guðrún that in order to be free from her husband, she should make him a shirt with a low-cut neckline. It would serve as grounds for divorce, as it goes against gendered sartorial norms, '"Gerðu honum skyrtu og brautgangs höfuðsmátt og seg skilið við hann fyrir þessar sakir"' ('"Make him a shirt with the neck so low-cut that it will give you grounds for divorcing him"').[653] In the following chapter, Guðrún observes that Þórðr's wife, nicknamed *Bróka*-Auðr ('Breeches' Aud) also flouts sartorial conventions because she wears breeches (*bræka*) and a 'codpiece' (*set-geiri*):

> Slíkt víti á konum að skapa fyrir það á sitt hóf sem karlmanni ef hann hefir höfuðsmátt svo mikla að sjái geirvörtur hans berar, brautgangssök hvorttveggja
>
> ('If women go about dressed as men, they invite the same treatment as do men who wear shirts cut so low that the nipples of their breasts can be seen – both are grounds for divorce').[654]

After they both divorce their previous spouses on the grounds of inappropriately gendered clothing, they go on to marry each other. Although Guðrún did not devise this sartorial-based divorce scheme on her own, it is implied that she went through with Þórðr's suggestion of making a low-cut shirt, as it is explicitly said that, 'eigi mælti Guðrún í móti þessu' ('Gudrun did not oppose the idea').[655] During another key exchange, this time after Bolli has been slain in revenge for Kjartan's death, one of his killers wipes Bolli's blood on the hem of her clothing: in response, Guðrún simply smiles. Another of the slayers condemns his comrade's behaviour,

---

[652] *Laxdæla saga* 49, p. 154; *The Saga of the People of Laxardal* 49, p. 79.
[653] *Laxdæla saga* 34, p. 94; *The Saga of Laxardal* 34, p. 47.
[654] *Laxdæla saga* 35, p. 96; *The Saga of Laxardal* 35, p. 48.
[655] *Laxdæla saga* 34, p. 94; *The Saga of Laxardal* 34, p. 47.

to which he replies, '"undir þessu blæjuhorni búi minn höfuðsbani"' ('"Something tells me that my own death lies under the end of that shawl"').[656] She accompanies them as they return to their horses, and afterwards one of them remarks that she seemed to not care that they had just killed her husband. This suggestion is quickly denied, because Guðrún is of 'strong character' and it is more likely that she was trying to ascertain who committed which action so that she could meet them with equal retaliation.[657] Wiping Bolli's blood on her clothing was intended to provoke her, but her unsettling smile is understood to promise the perpetrator's death, which takes place years later, when her sons are old enough to undertake the vengeance killing.[658]

Clothing plays a significant role throughout the entirety of Guðrún's narrative, therefore it is of no surprise that one of the few instances of actual textile-work in the *Íslendingasögur* is by her hands. Although her spinning is reported rather than shown, a textile-making process has taken place. Jonna Louis-Jensen argues that, in comparing Bolli's slaying of Kjartan to her spinning, Guðrún draws comparison between both of their 'morning work' in order to re-frame Bolli's uncommon actions as commonplace, a theme which is in-keeping with how she began her incitement at the beginning of the day.[659] Louis-Jensen suggests that there are two potential reasons for the manner of Guðrún's speech. The first is that neither of their day's work was particularly special, thus reducing Bolli's actions – as well as their personal and social cost – to equal the quotidian job of spinning wool.[660] The second is that both of their tasks 'acquire mythical dimension' in the shaping of their fates because, Louis-Jensen argues, the distaff (spindle) is an emblem of women's work and an attribute of the fates.[661] Furthermore, she

---

[656] *Laxdæla saga* 55, p. 168; *The Saga of Laxardal* 55, p. 87. A brief note on the translator's choice of 'shawl': *blæja* refers to the type of material used for Guðrún's garment rather than to what the actual garment is. 'Shawl' is recorded only once as a definition of *blæja* in Cleasby-Vigfusson, and it is in reference to Guðrún's garment in this scene. See Chapter Three for my discussion of 'shawl' as a translation choice.
[657] *Laxdæla saga* 56, p. 169; on the significance of Guðrún's smile, see Sif, *Emotions in Old Norse Literature,* p. 127.
[658] *Laxdæla saga* 64, pp. 192-193. Interestingly, Guðrún also employs Bolli's blood-stained clothing to incite her sons to vengeance, once more demonstrating the power of blood-stained clothing. *Laxdæla saga* 60, p. 179.
[659] Jonna Louis-Jensen, 'A Good Day's Work: *Laxdæla saga,* ch. 49' in *The Cold Counsel: Women in Old Norse Literature and Myth,* pp. 189-199; c.f., Sauckel, p. 100.
[660] This also carries overtones of both gender and class insults, Louis-Jensen, pp. 193-195.
[661] Ibid., p. 193; See also Bek-Pedersen, 'Fate and Weaving', pp. 23-24.

observes that twelve ells is the price of a burial place according to the law code *Grágás*, and that in specifying twelve ells the saga author 'may have intended to designate her as the spinner of a fatal web, Kjartan's destiny.'[662]

However, just as the bloody cloak was secondary in Miller and Clover's analysis of Hildigunnr's incitement of Flosi, to focus solely on Guðrún's words yet again elides the significance of the material: in this case her spinning.[663] Like Bek-Pedersen, Louis-Jensen touches on the fatalistic aspects of cloth creation, attributing its power to a cultural or literary trope. It is clear that although reported rather than shown, Guðrún's spinning is a stitch act. First, she has carefully 'set the stage' (to borrow a term from Louis-Jensen), framing her earlier incitement of both her brothers and Bolli against a backdrop of farm work and masculinity, '"gott skaplyndi hefði þér fengit, ef þér værið dœtr einshvers bónda ok láta hvárki at yðr verða gagn né mein"' ('"With your temperament, you'd have made some farmer a good group of daughters, fit to do no one any good or any harm"').[664] Louis-Jensen argues that Guðrún's question to Bolli regarding the time of day is meant to recall those earlier themes, which provide the framework for the metaphor regarding their 'morning work'.[665] Against this backdrop of farm work and gendered-labour , Guðrún is certainly in a position of authority because much of the management and responsibility of the farm work would have fallen to her. Secondly, the stitch act must be understood as such in order for it to be a stitch act. After her comment about the difference in their work, Bolli replies, '"Þó mætti mér þat óhapp seint ór hug ganga, þóttú minntir mik ekki á þat"' ('"I'll not soon forget this misfortune, even without you to remind me of it"').[666] His reaction indicates that he is aware of the significance of Guðrún's spinning in this context, and demonstrates that her spinning has been understood as a stitch act.

It is difficult to escape the essential connection between textile and text, textile-creation and fate which is embedded in language and culture across broad geographical and temporal axes. In comparison to weaving and *hannyrðir,* spinning rarely makes an appearance in Old Norse literature, so it is interesting that when it

---

[662] Louis-Jensen, pp. 193-194.
[663] See Louis-Jensen for a summary of the various translations and significations of Guðrún spinning 'twelve ells of yarn', pp. 194-195.
[664] *Laxdæla saga* 48, p. 150; *The Saga of Laxardal* 48, p. 77.
[665] Louis-Jensen, pp. 192-193.
[666] *Laxdæla saga* 49, p. 154; *The Saga of Laxardal* 49, p. 79.

is present, it is often in a supernatural or fatalistic context. In the eddic poem *Völundarkviða,* three supernatural women fly from the south to fulfil fate and spin linen on the banks of a lake.[667] Bek-Pedersen argues that the spinning women are as subject to fate as the men of the poem, and while this is true an argument can also be made for them being both subject to – and creators of – fate.[668] The same can be said of Guðrún in *Laxdæla* 49. Even though she manipulates circumstances so that her male kin are forced to act against Kjartan, she is still subject to the fate that she has had a hand in creating. Both she and the audience are reminded of this when, after she gloats about Hrefna's loss, Bolli retorts, '"Ósýnt þykki mér, at hon fölni meir við þessi tíðendi en þú, ok þat grunar mik, at þú brygðir þér minnr við, þó at vér lægim eptir á vígvellinum, en Kjartan segði frá tíðendum"' ('"I wonder whether she'll pale at the news any more than you, and I suspect that you would be much less upset if it were me lying there slain and Kjartan lived to tell the tale"').[669] Although Guðrún attempts to convince Bolli that this is untrue, ultimately her reaction to his eventual death is an unsettling, ambiguous smile.

Guðrún's stitch act is significant to the saga narrative because while she was spinning, Bolli slew Kjartan. The framing of these two separate actions collectively as both of their 'morning work' implies a strong causality between spinning and slaying. The inferred simultaneity of their actions forges a further connection between textile-work and the actualisation of fate. This allusion was probably not lost on an early (or even high) medieval audience, who were probably aware of a similar motif at work in *Darraðarljóð. Darraðarljóð* is a poem that can be seen as a composite of thought and matter, words and weaving, poetry and practice. I have explored how fate, textiles and textile-creation function as literary motif and narrative device. It is now possible to examine how these three distinct but interconnected strands come together in the form of the stitch act. The following is a case study of *Darraðarljóð,* which occurs in *Njáls saga* 157. It depicts valkyries weaving on a loom strung up with human viscera, with the implication that their textile-creation influences the outcome of the Battle of Clontarf.[670] Although thematically resonant with the preceding saga narrative, its mythic expression is

[667] *Völundarkviða*, 1. I, II, and IV.
[668] Bek-Pedersen, *The Norns,* pp. 123-127.
[669] *Laxdæla saga* 49, p. 155; *The Saga of Laxardal* 49, p. 80.
[670] Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Njáls saga,* p. 454, n.1.

slightly divergent from its style. This is consistent with the literary presentation of textiles and fate so far. The poem and accompanying frame narrative has been the subject of much scholarly interest but there has been little attention paid to the importance of the text-textile relationship, let alone the poem's status as a stitch act. First I will review a selection of secondary criticism in order to gain an understanding of how the poem has been perceived so far. Then I will go on to explore *Darraðarljóð's* status as a stitch act, and why it is the ultimate literary expression of the textuality of thought and matter, power and fate in the *Íslendingasögur.*

The Stitch Act as Fatalistic and Narrative Actualisation in *Darraðarljóð*

At only eleven strophes long, *Darraðarljóð* is the most complete record of Old Norse weaving terminology to date, and is used as a resource by philologists, archaeologists and material culture specialists.[671] The poem and accompanying frame-narrative occurs immediately after the Battle of Clontarf, and describes how twelve riders arrive at a *dyngja* to weave cloth.[672] The domestic, quotidian nature of their work – which strikes a discordant note after the death of king Brian Boru of Ireland – is rapidly overturned when the loom is described in the frame narrative: 'Mannahöfuð voru fyrir kljána en þarmar úr mönnum fyrir viftu og garn, sverð var fyrir skeið en ör fyrir hræl' ('Men's heads were used for weights, men's intestines for the weft and warp, a sword for the sword-beater, and an arrow for the pin beater').[673] The weavers, who identify themselves as 'the friends of Randver's slayer', a kenning for valkyries, then proceed to sing while they work, prophesying death and destruction for the men on the battlefield. While the entire poem is of interest, especially with regards to the function of fate, the majority of this analysis will focus on the first two strophes. This is because of their focus on material practice:

> Vítt er orpit
> fyrir valfalli
> rifs reiðiský,
> rignir blóði;

[671] Anne Holtsmark, 'Vefr Darraðar', *Særtrykk av Maal og Minne* 2 (1936), 74-96, p. 75; see also Østergård, *Woven into the Earth,* p. 53.
[672] See discussion of the *dyngja* in Chapter One of this thesis.
[673] 'Darraðarljóð', *Njáls Saga* 157, pp. 454-458, 'Song of Dorrud', *Njal's Saga,* pp. 215-217.

nú er fyrir geirum
grár upp kominn
vefr verþjoðar,
er þær vinur fylla
Randvés bana.

Sjá er orpinn vefr
ýta þǫrmum
ok harðkléaðr
hǫfðum manna;
eru dreyrrekin
dǫrr at skǫptum,
járnvarðr yllir,
en ǫrum hrælaðr;
skulum slá sverðum
sigrvef þenna.

(A wide warp/ warns of slaughter;/ blood rains/ from the beam's cloud./ A spear-grey fabric/ is being spun,/ which the friends/ of Randver's slayer/ will fill out with red weft./ The warp is woven/ with warriors' guts,/ and heavily weighted/ with the heads of men./ Spears serve as heddle rods,/ spattered with blood;/ iron- bound is the shed rod, and arrows are the pin beaters; we will beat with swords/ our battle web).

(*Darraðarljóð*, I-II).

The relationship between poem and saga has been examined by Judy Quinn, who analyses the ways in which the poem's presence functions within – but also disrupts – generic saga conventions.[674] She also considers the way in which the mythic subject matter of *Darraðarljóð* and its connection to fate enhances the narrative surrounding Kári in his quest to avenge the deaths of Njáll and his sons.[675] This argument is not dissimilar to the one suggested by John Leyerle regarding what he calls the 'interlace structure' at work within *Beowulf*.[676] Interlace is a visual, surface design comprised of loops and knots while weaving is a physical, material process by which textile is brought into existence, again, via a

[674] Judy Quinn, '*Darraðarljóð* in *Njáls saga', Die Faszination des Verborgenen und seine Entschlüsselung: Raði säR kunni. Beiträge zur Runologie, skandinavistischen Mediävistik und germanischen Sprachwissenschaft*, ed. by Jana Krüger et al., Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde 101 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), pp. 299-313, p. 299.
[675] C.f., Sauckel, *Die Literarische Funktion von Kleidung,* p. 98. Saukel observes that the fate generated by the weaving valkyries affects Flosi rather than Kári.
[676] John Leyerle, 'The Interlace Structure of *Beowulf*', *University of Toronto Quarterly* 37 (1967), 1-17.

series of loops and knots.[677] Quinn suggests that the poetic imagery of weaving in *Darraðarljóð*, 'creates a splash in the prosimetrum, one whose ripples […] extend beyond the immediate context of quotation and have implications for the interpretation of the saga as a whole'.[678] Just like interlace, the impact of the poem extends beyond itself in a manner too complex to easily follow. Similarly, Leyerle suggests that '*Beowulf* demonstrates an interlace or interweaving of thematic material that extends across and links the entire narrative poem, as past actions or 'episodes' are intertwined thematically and symbolically with actions of the narrative present'.[679] Furthermore, as Maren Clegg Hyer has discussed, other scholars have expanded on the observation of interweaving and interlacing both on a micro and macro level, such as across sounds in individual lines of poetry, or thematic resonances across an entire canon of literature.[680] The interweaving or interlacing of metaphor and narrative evident in both *Beowulf* and *Darraðarljóð* draws on the etymological, metaphoric and metonymic relationship between text and textile, yet none of these scholars – with the exception of Hyer – explore or even acknowledge this relationship.[681]

As a counter-argument, Megan Cavell has suggested that although attractive, Leyerle's argument draws on a modern understanding of intertextuality, rather than of an early medieval awareness of the conceptual and etymological relationship between text and textile.[682] She suggests that Leyerle's link between

---

[677] 'Interlace' is a particular style of decoration which 'creates the illusion of strands, ribbons or limbs and bodies of animals passing over and under each other.' Eva Wilson, 'Interlace', Grove Art Online (2003), https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T041412. While the style of interlace changes over the centuries – indeed, archaeologists refer to the different categories as Styles I, II, and III – their use across a variety of media (stone, metalwork, embroidery, etc.,) is constant. See Carola Hicks, 'Migration Period', Grove Art Online (2003), https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T057909. For further reading see Makin, *The Lost Art of the Anglo-Saxon World,* pp. 68-69.

[678] Quinn, '*Darraðarljóð* in *Njáls saga'* p. 299.

[679] Leyerle, 'The Interlace Structure of *Beowulf*', quoted in Maren Clegg Hyer, 'Text/Textile: "Wordweaving" in the Literatures of Anglo-Saxon England', *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* 15 (2019), 33-52 at p. 42.

[680] See James C. Adderson, 'Aural Interlace in the "Battle of Brunanburh"' *Language and Style: An International Journal* 15 (1982), 267 – 276, and Pauline E. Head, *Representation and Design: Tracing a Hermeneutics of Old English Poetry,* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 161 in Hyer, 'Text/Textile', pp. 41-43.

[681] 'One hypothesis to explain the metaphor ["wordweaver"…] in Old English Literature is that Anglo-Saxon peoples were aware of the visual and etymological relationship in Latin between words for weaving and writing or composing […] Interrogating the resonance of text/textile metaphor allows for far more complex lines of enquiry', Hyer, 'Text/Textile', p. 33

[682] Megan Cavell, *Weaving Words and Binding Bodies: The Poetics of Human Experience in Old English Literature,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), p. 233.

poetic language and skilled craftsmanship is useful, as it maintains her already established association between poetry, material objects and high status.[683] While Cavell's reasons for disagreeing with the concept of narrative interlace are rooted in avoiding modern interpolations that may obscure an early medieval mindset, the cultural and etymological evidence already discussed suggests that early-medieval scribes were aware of the association between text and textile. Indeed, Hyer observes that, 'Old English glossaries make it clear that some awareness existed among the Anglo Saxons of the play on words associated with Latin *texere, textum,* and *oridor*'.[684] Additionally, the very nature of transcribing oral tradition into a written one produces complicated, diverse, intertextual narratives that speak to each other, especially at the time in which they were written down. The argument for metaphorical interlace is therefore not anachronistic. While it does not consider text-textile complex from a material perspective, it certainly points in that direction.

In contrast to the complex, nearly material workings of interlace and interweaving, Russell Poole assumes the connection between the weaving valkyries and the battle to be 'merely visual', and conceives the poem as a highly sophisticated 'running-commentary' that closely follows the steps needed to weave fabric or fight a battle.[685] He even goes so far as suggesting that the interweaving of warp and weft threads provide a visual analogue for the way in which the corpses of fallen warriors would fall on top of one another on the battlefield.[686] Quinn, Leyerle, Hyer and Cavell observe the connection between material practice and text , even if they do not go further than simply acknowledging that it exists. Poole does not consider the wider implications of its overt materiality, despite the great length to which he goes in examining the technical aspects of weaving.[687] His close reading even compares this labour-intensive process with the events of the battlefield, which suggests some awareness of the textile-fate complex. Even so, he is dismissive of theories that

[683] For more on this see Cavell, "Part I – Webs and Rings: Experiencing Objects", in *Weaving Words and Binding Bodies*, pp. 15-92.
[684] Hyer, 'Text/Textile', p. 34.
[685] R. G. Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace: A Study in Skaldic Narrative*, (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 138.
[686] Ibid., p. 138.
[687] Ibid., see pp. 132-134 for his discussion of the warp-weighted loom.

suggest the weaving motif is 'magic' or 'fate'. He considers *Darraðarljóð* only as abstracted image, a visual and poetic analogue between weaving and battle.[688]

Anne Holtsmark is one of the earliest commentators on weaving in *Darraðarljóð.* Unlike Poole, however, Holtsmark considers the relationship between loom and battle as metonymic. She suggests that the weaving is like magic, which enables the valkyries to directly control the outcome of the battle. This is not unlike the connection between Guðrún spinning fate for Bolli and Kjartan in *Laxdæla saga.* As Bek-Pedersen has put it, Holtsmark conceives of the valkyries as 'not only in the house in Caithness, they are also present on the battlefield near Dublin and their weaving directly influences the fighting'.[689]

> *Darraðarljóð* is a vision and those who sing it are part of that vision […] These are weaving *nornir* at work, they weave life and death for people… The weaving is no 'metaphor', it is magic. They weave and sing about what happens – and it happens.[690]

Although Holtsmark uses the term 'magic' rather than 'stitch act' to describe the relationship between weaving and battle, and refers to the weavers as *nornir* rather than valkyries, it is clear that she considers the materiality of the poem to be fundamental to its function in the wider saga narrative.[691] This is reflected in her attention toward the technical vocabulary. For example, before the valkyries can begin creating the fates of the fighting men, they must first set up the loom, a fact that is reflected in the opening strophe, *vítt er orpit.* Holtsmark suggests that *orpit* refers to the warp threads (ON *varp*).[692] What is not immediately obvious to an audience who lack either technical or even cultural knowledge of the weaving process is that there are a number of steps which must be undertaken *before* a weaver can set up the warp on an upright/warp-weighted loom. She goes on to

---

[688] Ibid., pp. 140-141. See also von See, 'Das Walkürenlied', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 81 (1959), 1-15.
[689] Bek-Pedersen, *The Norns,* p. 139.
[690] Holtsmark, 'Vefr Darraðar' p. 93: '*Darraðarljóð* er en visjon, og som synger den, er en del av visjonen […] Det er vevende norner i arbeid, de vever liv og død for mennesker […] Vevingen er ikke 'metafor', den er magi. De vever og synger om det som hender – og det hender.' As quoted in Bek-Pedersen, *The Norns,* p. 138. Translation by Bek-Pedersen. Bek-Pedersen is careful in her taxonomy of supernatural female beings, acknowledging that, while the boundaries are permeable, there are some distinctive characteristics which separate *nornir* from valkyries. While Holtsmark refers to the weavers in *Darraðarljóð* as *nornir,* I will continue to identify them as valkyries, following Bek-Pedersen's definition in *The Norns*, pp. 13-66.
[691] Bek-Pedersen, *The Norns,* p. 139.
[692] Holtsmark, 'Vefr Darraðar', pp. 75-76.

explain that the weavers must first create a tablet-woven band which acts as the starting selvedge edge of the cloth.[693] This band is affixed to the cross-beam of the loom, so that the warp threads can be threaded through it.[694] She also describes the involved process of measuring out the warp threads, where they are wound around two pins until they are the appropriate length, according to the total width of the starter tablet-woven band.[695] Holtsmark suggests that it is to *this* preparatory process, as well as to the actual hanging warp threads, that the term *orpit* refers to.[696]

In a single line, *Darraðarljóð* illuminates the complexity of textile-production in a way that both complements and aligns with what is known about early medieval material culture from the Viking Age, as well as other early medieval archaeological finds. Despite the fact that there may not be an exact correspondence between the dating of *Njáls saga* (late thirteenth century)[697] and the dating of archaeological textiles and textile-tools spanning numerous geographical locations, it is reasonable to assume that weaving tools and technology remained relatively unchanged until the advent of the horizontal loom, which was first described as early as *circa* eleventh century.[698] While *Njáls saga*

---

[693] See earlier discussion of *ørlǫgþáttr,* 'fate threads' in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana inn fyrri.*
[694] Holtsmark, 'Vefr Darraðar', p. 76, 'Framgangsmåten er slik: varpen er en slags bandavev (brikkevev ble også brukt i gammel tid), man vever et band, som kommer til å danne øverste jare; men isletten blir for hvert slag gjennom bandet slynget – *orpit* – rundt to pinner[…] som står på brettet på tvers av den egentlige bandveven; varpet (renningen) i veven blir på den måten 3 [sic] ganger så lang som avstanden mellom de to pinnene. Står pinnene langt fra hverandre, er det *vítt orpit* som i 'Darraðarljoð' 1, det er eslet til en stor vev' (The procedure is like this: the warp is a kind of tablet-woven band ([which]was also used in ancient times), you weave a band that will form the top edge/selvedge; but for every stroke through the band the weft is wound – *orpit* – around two pins […] that stand on the board across the actual woven band; *varpet* (the warp) in the weave becomes 3 [sic] times as long as the distance between the two pins. If the pins are far apart, there is a wide *orpit* as in *Darraðarljóð* 1, which is attached to a large weave/web. [Translation my own]. For a description of tablet weaving and its uses, see: Østergård, pp. 104-106; for a visual representation of the 'tablets', see also p. 113, fig. 84.
[695] See figure IV of Holtsmark, 'Vefr Darraðar', p. 77, based off of finds at Folk Museum at Bygdøy, Oslo, and the Nordic Museum, Stockholm.
[696] This is arguably one of the benefits of examining Darraðarljóð from the perspective of a weaving practitioner, as practice-based knowledge can shed more light on the described process. For example, Poole assumes – like others have – that the beginning of Darraðarljóð is the beginning of the weaving process, which is not the case. Poole, *Viking Poems,* p. 134.
[697] Lars Lönnroth, *Njáls Saga: A Critical Introduction,* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1976), p.2.
[698] John Munro, 'Medieval Woollens: Textiles, Textile Technology and Industrial Organisation, c. 800 – 1500', in *The Cambridge History of Western Textiles,* 2 vols., ed., by David Jenkins, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), I., pp, 181-227, p. 194; Owen-Crocker, 'Looms' in Gale Owen-Crocker, Elizabeth Coatsworth and Maria Hayward, (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Medieval Dress and Textiles of the British Isles c. 450-1450,* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 344-347.

was written down at a time when the horizontal loom was in common use, *Darraðarljóð* is said to be an original component of the saga's earliest transcriptions, and therefore may have a basis in its much older oral tradition.[699] If this is true, then *Darraðarljóð* reflects early medieval weaving technologies. The only other potential competitor in terms of cloth-weaving apparatus is the vertical two-beam loom. However, due to the lack of additional equipment (loom-weights etc.,) there is no direct archaeological evidence for its use.[700] All of this demonstrates that *Darraðarljóð* has a basis in material practice, and must be approached with this materiality in mind in order to appreciate the full significance of the textuality of thought and matter within Old Norse literary texts. The emphasis on weaving-as-practice rather than as metaphor also fulfils one of the conditions required for the stitch act. This is further strengthened by the fact that, just as Guðrún's spinning was concurrent with Kjartan's death, the valkyries' weaving and words occur concurrently with the battle.

In the second strophe, a further metonymic connection is established between various loom parts and the types of weapons found on the battlefield. In Chapter One I briefly explored the symbiotic relationship between textile-tools and weapons in relation to the sleep-thorn used against Sigrdrífa/Brynhildr. This relationship draws on the culturally contingent association between weaving and war that was more prevalent in medieval cultures than it is today.[701] Elsa E. Guðjónsson has also explored the analogues between weapons and loom in detail, focussing on *járnvarðr yllir* (*Dar.* II 7), which has been identified as a moveable shed-rod that is bound with iron.[702] The other weapons mentioned in direct relation to the loom are spears (*dǫrr*) which serve as the heddle-rods (*skǫft*), arrows (*ǫr*) which are pin-beaters and swords (*sverð),* which are appropriately used as sword-beaters.[703] She also draws attention to the fact that the weapons

---

[699] Quinn '*Darraðarljóð* in *Njáls saga*', p. 299.
[700] Instead, archaeologists rely on analysis of different weave types to determine if a certain textile was woven on a two-beam or warp-weighted loom. For more information, see Owen-Crocker, 'Looms' in *Encyclopaedia,* pp. 344-347.
[701] Cavell, 'Looming Danger and Dangerous Looms: Violence and Weaving in Exeter Book *Riddle 56*, *Leeds Studies in English New Series* 42 (2011), 29-42, pp. 29-30.
[702] Elsa E. Guðjónsson, "Járnvaðr yllir: A Fourth Weapon of the Valkyries in *Darraðarljóð*', Textile History 20, 185-197, p. 190.
[703] Ibid. pp. 185-187; Poole, *Viking Poems,* p. 145; see also Brunning, *The Sword in Early Medieval Northern Europe: Experience, Identity, Representation,* Anglo Saxon Studies 36 (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2019), p. 94, n. 65.

appear in 'working order', highlighting that the chronology of weaving is just as important as the metonymic and conceptual implications to the overall significance of the narrative:

> It could then be said that while the first four lines of the second verse concerns the stretched warp of the *vefur*, the last six lines contain a description […] of the actual process of weaving *vaðmál,* by mentioning in turn spears as heddle-rods, *yllir* as shed rod, arrows as pin beaters, and swords as weaving swords. Heddle rods had to be moved to change the sheds in the warp, a shed rod to clear a shed, pin beaters to even out (space) the warp and weft, and weaving swords to beat up the weft.[704]

While three of the loom parts have easily identifiable counterparts on the battlefield, *járnvarðr yllir* is more ambiguous. Elsa argues that, due to the identification of other parts of the loom as weapons associated with the vikings as a socio-ethnic group as well as the valkyries, it is logical that *járnvarðr yllir* is also included in that category.[705] She proposes that it is both the moveable shed-rod of the warp-weighted loom as well as the long-handled, two-handed battle axe. She goes on to say:

> With *járnvarðr yllir* interpreted as a battleaxe, the four main weapons of the Vikings – and of the Valkyries – posing, so to speak, as parts of the warp-weighted loom, would all be accounted for in a logical sequence of weaving: the spear, the axe, the (bow and) arrow, and the sword.[706]

Elsa's identification of the 'fourth weapon of the valkyries' helps to concretise the association between *Darraðarljóð* and the battle. If the various components of the loom have martial counterparts, then its grisly textile is analogous to the wounded men, something that can be clearly seen in the valkyrie's use of warriors' guts (*ýta þǫrmum*) for the warp and weft threads. The viscera functions as an embodied connection between the manipulated entrails being woven into fabric, and the manipulation of entrails contained (and spilt) at Clontarf. The unique preservation of technical vocabulary, careful metonymic association between weaving implements and weapons, and accurate representation of the physical and material process of weaving, combined with the idea that fate can be constructed using material processes, suggests that *Darraðarljóð* is a significant moment within

---

[704] Elsa, 'Járnvaðr yllir', pp. 186-88.
[705] Peter Foote and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement. The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia,* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1970) pp. 273, 275, 276, and 278, as referenced in Elsa, 'Járnvaðr yllir', p. 197; Elsa, pp. 193-194.
[706] Elsa, 'Járnvaðr yllir', pp. 193-194.

the wider narrative of *Njáls saga*. However, while the metonymic relationship between weaving, weapons, fate and textiles is an effective literary motif, it still does not interrogate the text-textile complex from a material perspective. For example, Bek-Pedersen asks how is weaving an appropriate metaphor for conceptualising Old Norse ideas of fate?[707] Similarly, Hyer wonders why does the etymological, cultural and metaphorical association between textile and text persist over time and through different literary cultures?[708] While these questions are not aimed directly at *Darraðarljóð,* the poem may provide some answers. The incorporation of the material and physical reality of textiles and textile-making processes into both Old Norse poetry and prose functions not just a metaphor, but points towards the symbiotic, almost boundaryless relationship between text and textile. Textile-creation in *Darraðarljóð* functions in the same way as it does at the beginning of *Helgakviða Hundingsbana inn fyrri* and in *Laxdæla saga* 49: as a formative process that shapes the fate of those within the narrative. In other words, it's a stitch act.

Darraðarljóð is set up to be a successful stitch act from the very beginning, via a prose frame narrative that centres Dörruðr, a character who only appears once in the saga, and whose purpose remains ambiguous:

> Föstudagsmorgun varð sá atburður á Katanesi að maður sá er Dörruður hét gekk út. Hann sá að menn riðu tólf saman til dyngju einnar og hurfu þar allir. Hann gekk til dyngjunnar. Hann sá inn í glugg einn er á var og sá að þar voru konur inni og höfðu færðan upp vef
>
> (On the morning of Good Friday, in Caithness, this happened: a man named Dorrud walked outside and saw twelve people riding together to a woman's workroom, and then they all went into it. He went up to the room and looked in through the window that was there and saw that there were women inside and that they had set up a loom).[709]
>
> (*Darraðarljóð* prose I).

In addition to shedding new light on how *Darraðarljóð* functions within the wider saga narrative, the stitch act also enables a new understanding of Dörruðr.[710] As I have repeatedly demonstrated in this chapter, a stitch act must be witnessed, its

[707] Bek-Pedersen, *The Norns,* pp. 123-164; Bek-Pedersen, 'Fate and Weaving', p. 23.
[708] Hyer, 'Text/Textile', pp. 33 – 51.
[709] *Njáls saga* 157, p. 454; *Njal's Saga* 157, pp. 214-215.
[710] Poole has called Dörruðr's name (and broader narrative function) an 'etymological whimsy or blunder', *Viking Poems,* p. 142.

meaning must be understood, and it must result in direct narrative consequences.[711] Initially it could be said that Dörruðr is someone with whom the saga audience can align themselves, so that when he sees the twelve armoured riders approaching, it is as if the audience stand where he stands, see events from his eyes, and walk with him to peer into the window of the *dyngja.* Dörruðr is a locus for the audience, an essential anchor during an otherwise turbulent and rapidly-changing narrative.[712] However, I argue that the inclusion of Dörruðr and the frame narrative is also to ensure that the terms of the stitch act are fulfilled. While the valkyries are initially unaware of or indifferent to Dörruðr's presence (and one could imagine them weaving like this regardless of audience), without him looking through the window neither he, or the saga audience tied to him, would be aware of their manipulations. Similarly, if Guðrún had not announced to Bolli that she spun yarn while he slayed Kjartan, then her hand in the creation of Kjartan's fate would remain undetected and a stitch act would not have occurred. In *Njáls saga,* Dörruðr watches the valkyries weave and listens to their verse, thus fulfilling his role as witness. However, another fundamental aspect of the stitch act is that those who 'stitch' must experience the thoughts and feelings appropriate to the context. If the valkyries do not possess the right *intention,* then their words and weaving are merely words and weaving, while Dörruðr's presence is simply a coincidence. This particular condition is not fulfilled until strophe ten meaning that until then, *Darraðarljóð's* status as a stitch act is ambiguous.

> Vel kváðum vér
> um konung ungan
> sigrhljóða fjöld,
> syngjum heilar.
> En hinn nemi,
> er heyrir á
> geirfljóða hljóð,
> og gumum segi

[711] While a case can be made for the one witnessing or hearing the act being a man, especially with regard to the typoscenes explored by Jóhanna, Old Norse gender is not binary – see Clover, 'Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe', *Representations* 44 (1993), 1-28. Unfortunately, due to constraints of space, I cannot adequately address the gendered dynamics of the stitch act.

[712] Heather O'Donoghue, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Short Introduction,* Blackwell Introductions to Literature, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 23, 62.

> (Our pronouncement was good/ for the young prince;/ sound of mind/ we sing victory songs./ May he who listens/ learn from this/ the tones of spear-women/ and tell them to men).[713]
>
> (*Darraðarljóð*, X).

This strophe makes it clear that the valkyries are not only aware of Dörruðr, but that they intend for him to see them weaving and singing fate so that he may then go on to tell others of their 'pronouncement'. The most important lines occur towards the end of the strophe, 'may he who listens/ learn from this/ the tones of the spear-women/ and tell them to men'. In acknowledging his presence, 'may he who listens', the valkyries use a speech act to incorporate Dörruðr into their performance; he is no longer a spectator but an active participant. The kenning *geirfljóð* ('of the spear-women') can initially be read as another poetic circumlocution that reminds both Dörruðr, and the audience aligned with him, of their power and authority in this situation. Incidentally, this also fulfils another condition required for a successful stitch act. However, given the careful metonymic relationship between weapons and textile-tools that was established in the second strophe, *geirfljóð* also serves as a reminder that a spear can be a heddle-rod, and that their 'pronouncement' of fate is not just a matter of words, but of a process of material actualisation. Dörruðr's involvement with the weaving valkyries is far from accidental. Rather, their conscious manipulation of threads, guts, words and fate means that he is an integral participant in the stitch act ritual.

The narrative consequences – those which Dörruðr is ordered to tell to other men – are the final condition of the stitch act that *Darraðarljóð* fulfils. Once the valkyries finish reciting their verse, they pull the fabric down and tear it into pieces before riding away, six to the north and six to the south, each with a piece of their grisly work clasped in their hands.[714] Immediately after they do this, the saga author reports on a string of supernatural events.[715] The most significant of these

---

[713] *Njáls saga* 157, p. 548; *Njals Saga* 157, p. 670.
[714] *Njáls saga* 157, pp. 458-459; *Njal's Saga,* pp. 670-671.
[715] 'Á Íslandi at Svínafelli kom blóð ofan á messuhökul prests föstudagin langa, ok varð hann ór at fara. At Þváttá sýndisk prestinum á föstudaginn langa sjávardjúp jhá altárinu, ok sá þar í ógnir margar, ok var þat lengi, at hann mátti eigi syngja tíðirnar. Sá atburðr varð í Orkneyjum, at Hárekr þóttisk sjá Sigurð jarl ok nökkura men með honum. Tók Hárekr hest sinn ok reið til móts við jarl, ok sá menn, at þeir fundusk ok riðu undir leiti nökkurt. Sásk þeir aldri síðan, ok engi ørmul fundusk af Háreki.' *Njáls saga* 157, p. 459; ('At Svinafell in Iceland blood appeared on the priest's cope on Good Friday, and he had to take it off. At Thvotta river on Good Friday a priest thought he saw a deep sea next to the altar, and he saw many terrifying sights in it, and it was a long time before he was able to sing mass again. In Orkney this happened: Harek thought he saw Earl Sigurd together with some

is when Flosi's *jarl,* Gilla, has a prophetic dream about the outcome of the battle, days before Hrafn *inn rauði* arrives to actually report on the battle. Flosi asks about his men who were fighting there, only to learn that all but two died on the battlefield.[716] As Quinn observes, the deaths of Flosi's men occur between Kári's two vengeance killings, which indicates that *Darraðarljóð* is thematically interlaced with his wider narrative.[717] The men who died on the battlefield were also the men who took part in the burning of Njáll; their deaths are a direct consequence of the stitch act performed by the weaving valkyries. Quinn suggests that Kári (and his quest for vengeance) is reminiscent of other heroes who are protected by supernatural beings, such as Helgi from *Helgakviða Hundingsbana inn fyrri*.[718] The association between mortal men and the supernatural women who create their fate is made explicit in strophe six of *Darraðarljóð*, with the lines 'látum eigi/ líf hans farast,/eiga valkyrjur/ vals um kosti' ('let us not permit/ his life to be lost/ the valkyries have/ their choice of the slain').[719]

Conclusions

Just as the *nornir* created Helgi's fate through textile-practice and spoken prophecy, so too do the valkyries enable Kári to fulfil his vengeance quest by both weaving and reciting the deaths of the men he is sworn to kill. Both the *nornir* and the valkyries are able to create fate in this way because of the formative quality of textiles which is mirrored by the material quality of words, attributes which find a home in the stitch act. Like a warp-thread on a loom, or the *ørlǫgþáttr* of the *nornir*, textiles stretch from beginning to middle to end, and although the pattern of the weft permits some deviation from the path, Bek-Pedersen reminds us, 'the weft is only co-creator and only has a limited number of choices at its disposal; it is in the interaction between warp and weft that a pattern emerges and the nature of

---

other men. Harek took his horse and rode to meet the earl, and people saw them come together and ride behind a hill. They were never seen again, and no trace of Harek was ever found'), *Njal's Saga,* p. 671.

[716] *Njáls saga* 157, p. 460.

[717] 'While the poem is not directly linked to Kári's mission, its thematic engagement with the supernatural protection of a fighter in battle resonates with the saga's depiction of Kári throughout the saga', Quinn, '*Darraðarljóð* in *Njáls saga*', p. 301.

[718] Ibid., p. 304; *HH1* II-IV, XXX-LIV.

[719] *Njáls saga* 157, VI., 5-8, p. 457; *Njal's Saga* 157, p. 668.

the weaver's decisions become clear'.[720] The weaving in both *Helgakviða Hundingsbana inn fyrri* and *Darraðarljóð,* and the spinning in *Laxdæla saga* 49 are stitch acts which bring fate into being. The formation of spoken words, the twisting of fibres, the weaving of yarn into fabric are all a process of actualisation, and all contain the potential to shape their world. However, this is only made possible through the formalised process of the stitch act.

[720] Bek-Pedersen, 'Fate and Weaving', p. 35.

Conclusion

In this thesis I set out to explore the function and significance of written textiles in the *Íslendingasögur.* In order to do this I suggested two approaches that would work concurrently with each other. The first approach focussed on developing a more nuanced understanding of Old Norse textile terminology by paying particular attention to the narrative contexts in which the terms occurred. The second approach focussed on re-examining the relationship between textiles and women, and on highlighting the etymological and material connection between textiles and text.

In Chapter One I agreed with Roszika Parker that, rather than being anything innate or natural, the association between textile-making and normative femininity is the result of a largely self-conscious cultural 'inculcation' that has taken place over the centuries.[721] At its most intense (i.e., around the nineteenth century in western cultures) the association between textiles, textile-making and idealised femininity operated on a biologically essentialist level, with intellectuals such as Sigmund Freud arguing that women and weaving were intimately connected through the secondary sexual characteristic of pubic hair.[722] While it is easy to look back from our place in the twenty-first century and dismiss Freud's stance, echoes of his essentialist claims can still be heard in more recent studies of women and textiles in medieval contexts specifically. I explored how critics looking at the representation of early medieval textiles in Old English and Old Norse literature are too focussed on maintaining the connection between women and textile-making processes, with arguments ranging from hypothetical linguistic connections between gender and everyday roles in the Old English *crencstre* ('crank operator') and *seamstre* ('seamstress'), to symbolic associations between textile-making processes and the ability to conceive – and birth – a child.[723]

---

[721] Roszika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine,* (London: The Women's Press, 1984, reprnt., 1986, 1989, rev. 1996), pp. 82-209.
[722] Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity' in *The Essentials of Psychoanalysis,* ed. by Anna Freud, trans. by James Strachey, (London: Hogarth, 1986, reprnt. 2005).
[723] Christine Fell, Cecily Clark and Elizabeth Williams, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of 1066,* (London: Colonnade Books, 1984), p. 41; Karen Bek-Pedersen, *The Norns in Old Norse Mythology,* (Edinburgh: Dunedin, 2009). pp. 110-11.

One of the consequences of this association between textiles, women and femininity is that the skill required to produce textiles is somehow diminished, although there are also issues of class that contribute to the overall devaluation of 'craft', as I discussed in Chapter Four. A similarly reductive attitude towards the relationship between women, femininity and appropriate gender roles can be seen in the recent debate regarding the 'warrior' identity of the woman buried in grave 581 at Birka, Sweden.[724] While archaeologists argue for or against her status as a 'warrior woman', I suggested that it is not her sex that we are most interested in, but rather the 'male flavour' of her burial and, by extension, the inferred 'male flavour of her life, a pattern which is reflected in the critical reception of women in Old Norse literature.[725] Through an examination of how women characters and textile-making pursuits (*hannyrðir*) are represented in the heroic poems of the *Poetic Edda,* I suggested that Old Norse literary sources convey a more complex relationship between women, femininity and textiles than has, so far, been permitted. I maintained that while normative feminine behaviour is often represented by a woman's textile-based occupation, the women characters just as often subvert that expectation as they adhere to it, as evidenced by Guðrún, Grímhildr, and Sigrdrífa/Brynhildr in the *Poetic Edda,* and Steingerðr and Dalla in *Kormáks saga.* I concluded that textiles have a relationship with power, something that is often reflected in gendered power dynamics, but also interacts with other social and cultural identities. In focussing solely on the 'special relationship' between textiles and women, critics have occluded these avenues of potential significance. In order to remedy this critical oversight, I argued that a more nuanced understanding of textile terminology was required.

I proposed a method for uncovering the significance of textile terminology in Chapter Two, through the adaptation of Roland Barthes' semiological approach to written textiles, the 'vestementary code'.[726] By reading textile terminology as individual instances ('dress', or *parole*) that draw from a wider, abstract body

---

[724] Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson, Neil Price, et. al., 'A female Viking warrior confirmed by genomics', *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 164 (2017), 853 – 860; 'Viking warrior women? Reassessing Birka chamber grave Bj. 581', *Antiquity* 93 (2019), 181-198.
[725] Sue Brunning, *The Sword in Early Medieval Northern Europe. Experience, Identity, Representation,* Anglo Saxon Studies 36 (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2019); c.f. Jóhanna, *Women in Old Norse Literature*: *Bodies, Words, Power,* The New Middle Ages Series, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
[726] Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*, trans. by Matthew Ward and Richard Howard, (London: Vintage, 2010).

('Fashion', or *langue*), I demonstrated that it is possible to uncover a wealth of personal, social and cultural significances within specific Old Norse textile terms. I argued that Peter Stallybrass's observations regarding cloth's ability to inscribe and be inscribed upon is applicable here, as textiles function as a site of material memory and identity, qualities which facilitate the function of the Old Norse vestementary code.[727] Through a targeted exploration of the terms *kápa* and *kufl*, I illustrated how a systematic approach to textile terminology can be used to uncover a more nuanced understanding of certain ambiguous interactions, events and displays of emotion within saga narratives. I showed that although physically similar, the *kápa* and *kufl* were not interchangeable in terms of social and cultural signification, as the *kápa* conveyed status, power and social sanction while the *kufl* conveyed more morally ambiguous qualities such as stealth and disguise, both of which were required for survival as an outlaw in the Saga Age.

This methodology was deemed necessary because, up until Anita Sauckel's book-length study, textiles in the *Íslendingasögur* have received very little attention.[728] Rather, they were summarily dismissed by saga scholars as 'unnecessary', or thought to be merely authenticating details that created cohesion and a sense of verisimilitude. Sauckel's work counters this dismissal by tangibly demonstrating the *Signalfunktion* ('literary function') of textiles in over fifty texts from across the *Íslendingasögur* and *Íslendingaþættir*. However, in an attempt to counter the overly-specific nature of the small number of studies that focus on textiles in the sagas, Sauckel's work is itself too generalised. Furthermore, as she is more concerned with establishing the importance and legitimacy of studying the literary function of textiles, she is not always able to engage critically with the social and cultural contexts in which textiles appear, which is particularly evident in her treatment of the supposed relationship between textiles, women and femininity. In this chapter I agreed with Sandra Baliff Straubhaar that, so far, there has been a problematic and sweeping approach to the significance of dark

---

[727] Peter Stallybrass, 'Worn Worlds: Clothes, Mourning and the Life of Things' in *The Textile Reader,* ed. by Jessica Hemmings, (New York, NY: Berg Publishers, 2012); Anne Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[728] Anita Sauckel, *Die Literarische Funktion von Kleidung in den* Íslendingasögu*r and* Íslendingaþættir, Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanishen Altertumskunde 83, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014).

coloured clothing in the *Íslendingasögur.*[729] Straubhaar argues that it is not always the case that when a character dresses in 'dark' clothing that they intend to kill; rather, she suggests that 'dark' clothing conveys a range of significations in which 'intention to kill' is just one of many potential meanings. In the same way, my proposed methodology can only reveal so much about a written garment's significations, and it is only when used in conjunction with a close reading of the narrative contexts in which textile terminology occurs that we are able to make the most effective use of the Old Norse vestementary code.

In Chapter Three I extended the approach explored in Chapter Two by examining a variety of Old Norse terms that could be translated into the modern English 'cloak', paying particular attention to the terms *feldr* and *skikkja*. I demonstrated that, as a translation, 'cloak' is too generic a term because it does not convey the full range of significations that have been inscribed on to the Old Norse originals. Through a detailed analysis of the narrative contexts in which the Old Norse textile terms appear, I was also able to show that these original significations play an important role in the *Íslendingasögur.* I showed that not all cloaks are suitable in all situations. For example, the compound *silkiskikkja* or *skarlatskikkja* indicates that the *skikkja* is made of fine materials (silk or scarlet), which further suggests the wealth, power and status of the individual clothed in either of the two garments. However, I argued that through the application of the vestementary code and close attention to narrative contexts – particularly when they interact with already well-established social and legal rituals, such as gift-exchange or the *hólmganga* – it is possible to determine the 'value' of the simplex *skikkja*. I demonstrated that while a *skikkja* could be a good-quality, everyday type of garment, it was also associated with luxury materials, ostentatious decoration and people of power. In a similar way I was also able to show subtleties of meaning at work in the terms *feldr, loðkápa* and *röggvarfeldr,* all of which convey a similar range of significations, even as they simultaneously fulfil unique functions, depending on their material composition and culture of origin.

In addition to their semiological function, I argued that written textiles also serve as cultural and emotive markers in the *Íslendingasögur,* drawing on Sif's

[729] Sandra Baliff Straubhaar, 'Wrapped in a Blue Mantle: Fashion for Icelandic Slayers?', *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* 1 (2005), 53-65.

recent work on Old Norse emotion.[730] I suggested that this was possible because of the permeability of cloth and its ability to both absorb and transmit embodied meanings and identities.[731] With these functions in mind, I showed that paying closer attention to textiles and garments opened new avenues of understanding with regards to ambiguous social interactions or unusual moments of emotive performativity, such as Flosi's reaction to the *slæðr* in *Njáls saga*, or Helga's last act before she dies in *Gunnlaugs saga*, when she spreads out the *skarlatskikkja* known as *Gunnlaugsnautr.* I also analysed how the fluctuation of power dynamics in Hallfreðr and Ólafr's relationship are mapped on to the 'gifts' they give each other in *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds*. I concluded that Ólafr's final gift to Hallfreðr, a *pellskikkja,* is a signpost that conveys a broad range of emotions that otherwise do not find expression, due to the generic 'horizons of feeling'.[732]

Finally, in Chapter Four I introduced a new theoretical approach to written textiles in the *Íslendingasögur.* The stitch act is a phenomenon that is closely related to its linguistic counterpart, the speech act, but draws on the symbiotic relationship between 'textiles' and 'text' in order to affect change in a narrative.[733] In Chapter One I observed that the association between women, femininity and textiles was problematic because of the subsequent devaluation of both the end product and those who made the product. I also suggested that class, wealth and status contribute to this devaluation. I returned to this argument in Chapter Four and explored the artificial division between 'art' and 'craft'.[734] I suggested that certain cultural products, such as painting or works of literature, are imbued with more social and cultural value than others, such as metalwork or textile-production, in all of its iterations and at all levels of production, whether personal or industrial. I argued that such a divide needed to be negotiated, particularly because the etymological and material relationship between text and textiles is

---

[730] Sif, *Emotion in Old Norse Literature*: *Translations, Voices, Contexts,* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017).
[731] Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*; c.f., William Ian Miller, 'Is a Gift Forever?', *Representations* 100 (2007), 13-22.
[732] Sif, *Emotions in Old Norse Literature.*
[733] J. l. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words,* The William James Lectures, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).
[734] Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*; Parker and Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology,* (London: Pandora Press, 1982, reprnt. London, I. B. Tauris, 2013).

itself symbiotic and fluid.[735] Drawing from Victoria Mitchell, who identifies this relationship as the 'textuality of thought and matter', as well as from the creative and scholarly work of Kathryn Rudy, I argued that the text-textile complex meant that acts of textile creation and should be read as acts of narrative actualisation.[736] While Rudy compares instances of authoritative stitching to speech acts, I maintained that they should be called stitch acts, so as to avoid the hegemonic privileging of text and words over textiles and weaving.

In the remainder of the chapter I explored moments of textile-creation, as well as scenes in which textiles play a prominent role to determine whether or not they could be defined as a stitch act. I identified that, although rare, depictions of textile-creation occur within the narrative motif of fate, and argued that even if certain textiles do no fulfil the formal criteria for a stitch act, they are still significant. I found this to be true in the case of Hildigunnr's use of the bloody *skikkja* in her incitement speech in *Njáls saga* 116. The cloak is integral to the success of her speech act, as argued by William Ian Miller, Carol Clover and Jóhanna, but I argued that the absence of textile creation – the act of 'stitching' – meant that the *skikkja* should be read as an agent of fate.[737] I then went on to explore the fatalistic spinning and weaving in *Laxdæla saga* 49 and the poem *Darraðarljóð.* Through close reading I was able to show that depictions of textile-creation in the *Íslendingasögur* and some poems from *The Poetic Edda* are, in fact, stitch acts, which is why they also work as moments of narrative and fatalistic actualisation.

In terms of wider implications, this thesis has shown that written textiles play an integral role in the *Íslendingasögur* and various texts of the *Poetic Edda.* It has taken a cross-disciplinary overview, covering a wide range of theoretical concepts and potential avenues of approach to written textiles, from the

---

[735] Mitchell, 'Textiles, Text, and Techne'.
[736] Kathryn M. Rudy, *Woven Manuscripts: A soft installation by weaver and medievalist Kathryn Rudy,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Library, 2017)*;* 'Dirty Books: Quantifying Patterns of Use in Medieval Manuscripts using a Densitometer', *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 2 (2010), DOI:10.5092/jhna.2010.2.1.1.; 'Sewing as Authority in the Middle Ages' in *ZMK Zeitschrift für Medien und Kulturforschung, 6/1/2015: Textil,* ed. by Lorenz Engell and Bernhard Siegert, (Hamburg: Felix Meiner verlag GmbH, 2015), pp. 117-131.
[737] William Ian Miller, 'Choosing the Avenger: Some Aspects of the Bloodfeud in Medieval Iceland and England', *Law and Society* 1 (1983), 159-204; Carol Clover, 'Hildigunnr's Lament' in *Cold Counsel: The Women in Old Norse Literature and Myth,* ed. by Sarah M. Anderson and Karen Swenson, (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, 2012), pp. 15-54; Jóhanna, *Women in Old Norse Literature.*

semiological to the art-historical, archaeological to the purely textual. At first glance the concept of 'written textiles' appears to be fraught with tension: textiles resolutely occupy the physical, material realm, so it is only natural that they are the focus of disciplines concerned with materiality. However, I have demonstrated that this materiality is rich with meaning, a meaning which is enhanced when it is translated into the spoken or written word and deployed across the many narratives of the *Íslendingasögur.* I have shown that the etymological and cultural relationship between 'text' and 'textile' – the 'text-textile complex' – is integral to our understanding of written textiles. However, I have also shown that, through a process of social and cultural exaltation of art and the written word at the expense of craft and the non-verbal, the significance of the text-textile complex has been lost, forgotten or ignored. In this thesis I have demonstrated that, upon reunification, the text-textile complex can be used to delve deeper into the social, cultural and even emotional landscape of the *Íslendingasögur* and, by extension, the social, cultural and emotional environment of the later medieval society that co-created these narratives.

Despite the diverse ways in which text and textile have been separated from each other, and regardless of the motivations (or lack thereof) for this separation – many of which have been explored in this thesis – I repeatedly found myself returning to the concept of power. Jóhanna has tangibly demonstrated that 'power' is not a straightforward category, and can manifest itself in myriad ways depending on a variety of intersecting social, cultural and personal factors.[738] Her redefinition of power has demonstrated that instead of being either scapegoats or victims, women in Old Norse literature are complex, multi-faceted characters who negotiate their socio-cultural environment with more agency than has, until recently, been permitted. The way we approach women in literature is relevant to the way in which we approach textiles, both written and material. Even though I have shown that the relationship between textiles and women is complicated, and yet another social and cultural product, its artificiality does not make it any less impactful or 'real'. The devaluation of textile-making skills and those who are

[738] Jóhanna, *Women in Old Norse Literature,* pp. 135-138.

traditionally thought to practise them is just one of the consequences of the classism and misogyny that operates at all levels of society.

The disempowerment of textiles and textile-making, however, is a temporary anomaly. A renewed and increased interest in the lives of women during particular historical periods has led to a plethora of contemporary adaptations, translations and fictions rooted in ancient and medieval cultures.[739] Women's narratives are closely interwoven with the textiles they produce and, as I have demonstrated in this thesis, the text-textile complex means that neither should be studied without consideration for the other. While this modern push for a more focussed attention on women's words – imagined or otherwise – should be celebrated, it should not come at the price of dismissing their work. As I have shown in this thesis on textiles in the *Íslendingasögur*, women have been speaking through their weaving, spinning and embroidery even before the narratives of men were committed to the page.

[739] Including Maria Dahvana Headly's queer and feminist retelling of *Beowulf*, *The Mere Wife,* (New York, NY: MCD, 2018), as well as her revisionist translation, *Beowulf: A New Translation*, (New York NY: MCD, 2020); Emily Wilson's translation of Homer's *The Odyssey,* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2018); Madeline Miller, *Circe* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018); Pat Barker*, The Silence of the Girls,* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2018); Natalie Haynes, *A Thousand Ships*, (London: Mantel, 2019).

Bibliography

Note: Due to Icelandic naming conventions, bibliographic entries for works by Icelanders will be organised by first name. Furthermore, This thesis was largely written up and edited during the COVID-19 pandemic, so access to resources was limited to what was available online and digitally. As a consequence, some of the bibliographic entries will be missing specific page details.

Primary Resources

Attwood, Katrina C., (trans.), *The Saga of Gunnlaug Serpent-Tongue*, in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders Including 49 Tales*, (5 vols.), Viking Age Classics Series ed. by Viðar Hreinsson, Terry Gunnell, Keneva Kunz and Bernard Scudder, Reykjavík, Iceland: Bókaútgáfan Leifur Eiríksson, 1997), I., pp. 305-333.

Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson (eds.), *Vestfirðinga sögur, Gísla saga Súrssonar, Fóstbroeðra saga, Þáttr Þormóðar, Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings, Auðunar Þáttr Vèstfirzka,* Íslenzk Fornrit (Íslenzk Fornrit) 6 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1958).

Bragi Halldorsson et. al., (eds.), *Islendingasogur og pottir* (Reykjavik: Svart á hvitu, 1987).

Chambers, R. W., Max Förster and Robin Flower (eds.), *The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry,* (London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Co. Ltd., 1933).

Cook, Robert, (trans.), *Njal's Saga,* in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* III., pp. 1-220.

Dennis, Andy, Peter Foote and Richard Perkins, (trans.), *Laws of Early Iceland, Grágás*, 2 vols., (Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 1980, 2002).

Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (ed.), *Laxdæla saga*, ÍF 5 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1934).

Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthias Thórtharson, (eds.), *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Brands þáttr qtva*, *Eiríks saga Rauða*, *Groenlendinga saga*, *Groenlendinga þattr*, ÍF 4 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1957).

Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ÍF 12 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1954).

Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Vatnsdœla saga, Hallfreðar saga, Kormáks saga, Hrómundar Þáttr Halta, Hrafns Þáttr Guðrúnarsonar*, ÍF 8 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1958).

Finlay, Alison, (trans.), *The Saga of Bjorn, Champion of the Hitardal People*, in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders* I., pp. 255-304.

Finnbogi Guðmundsson (ed.), *Orkneyinga saga* 11, ÍF 34 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1965), pp. 3-300.

Finnur Jónsson, (ed.), *Sæmundar Edda: Eddukvæði,* (Reykjavík: Kostnaðarmaður Sigurður Kristjansson, 1926).

Finsen, Vilhjálmur, (ed.), *Grágás efter det Arnamagnænske Haandskrify Nr. 334 fol.,* Staðarhólsbók, (Nordiske Literature-Samfund, 1879; reprnt., by Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1974).

Guðni Jónsson, (ed.), *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar, Bandamanna saga, Odds þáttr Ófeigssonar*, ÍF 7 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1956).

Guðni Jónsson (ed.), *Hrólfs saga kraka ok kappa hans* in *Fornaldar sögur Norðulanda,* 4 vols., (Reykjavík: Íslendingasaganaútgáfan, 1954), I., pp. 1-105.

Harmer, F. E., (ed.), 'The Will of King Alfred' in *Select English Historical Documents of the Ninth and Tenth* Centuries, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914).

Homer, *Odyssey,* 2 vols.*,* trans. by A. T. Murray, rev. by George E. Dimock, Loeb Classical Library 104 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919).

Hostetter, Aaron K., *Old English Poetry Project,* https://oldenglishpoetry.camden.rutgers.edu/maxims-i/

Jónas Kristjánsson, (ed.), *Eyfirðinga sögur, Víga-Glúms saga, Ógmundar þáttr dytts, Þorvalds þáttr tasalda, Svarfdæla saga, Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds, Valla-Ljóts saga, Sneglu-Halla þáttr, Þorgríms þáttr Hallasonar,* ÍF 9 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1956).

Kunz, Keneva, (trans.), *Eirik the Red's Saga* in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* I., pp. 1-18.

Kunz, Keneva, *The Saga of the People of Laxardal,* in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, V, pp. 1-120.

Lange, Christian C. A. , (ed.), *Diplomatarium Norvagicum,* 22 vols., (Oslo, 1847).

Larrington, Carolyne, *The Poetic Edda,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- *Sayings of the High One*
- *The First Poem of Helgi Hundingsbani*
- *Brynhild's Ride to Hell*
- *The Second Poem of Gudrun*
- *The Poem of Atli*

Lethbridge, Emily, 'Saga Map', http://sagamap.hi.is/is/ [accessed 13th May 2019].

McKinnell, John, (trans.), *Killer Glum's Saga,* in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* II., pp. 267-314.

McTurk, Rory. (trans.), *Kormak's Saga,* in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, I., pp. 179-224.

Neckel, Gustav, (ed.), *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern,* rev. Hans Kuhn, 5th edn. (Heidelberg, 1983), http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etcs/germ/anord/edda/edda.htm
- *Hávamál*
- *Helgakviða Hundingsbana in Fyrri*
- *Helreið Brynhidar*
- *Guðrúnarkviða (Qnnor)*
- *Atlakviða*

Ólafur Halldorsson, (ed.), *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta,* 2 vols., (Copenhagen: Editiones Arnamagnaeanae, 1958).

Olsen, Magnus, *Völsunga saga ok Ragnars saga loðbrókar,* (Copenhagen: Kongelige Bibliotek, 1906-1908).

Orchard, Andrew, *The Elder Edda: A Book of Viking Lore,* (London: Penguin, 2011).

Regal, Martin S., (trans.), *Gisli Surrson's Saga*, in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders Including 49 Tales*, II., pp. 1-48.

Scudder, Bernard, (trans.), *Egil's Saga,* in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* I., pp. 33-178.

Scudder, Bernard, *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*, in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, II, pp. 49-192.

Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, (eds.), *Borgfirðinga sogur, Hænsa-Þóris saga, Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu, Bjarnar saga Hítdælakappa, Heiðarvíga saga, Gísls þáttr Illugasonar,* ÍF 3 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1951).

Sigurður Nordal, (ed.), *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, ÍF 2 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1933).

Tacitus, *Germania*, trans. by J. B. Rives, Clarendon Ancient History Series, ed. by Brian Bosworth, Miriam Griffin et. al., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

Tolkien, Christopher, (trans. and ed.), *saga Heiðreks konnungs in vitra/ The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise,* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1960).

Vilhjálmur Finsen (ed.), *Grágás: Islãndernes lovbog I fristatens tid,* (Copenhagen: Berling, 1852; rpt. Odense: Odense Universitestsforlag, 1974).

Whaley, Diana, (trans.), *The Saga of Hallfred the Troublesome Poet,* in *The Complete Sagas of* Icelanders, I., pp. 225-253.

Secondary Sources

Adderson, James C., 'Aural Interlace in the "Battle of Brunanburh"' *Language and Style: An International Journal* 15 (1982), 267-276.

Austin, J. L., *How to Do Things with Words*, The William James Lectures, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

Auther, Elissa, 'Fiber Art and the Hierarchy of Art and Craft, 1960 – 1980', *The Journal of Modern Craft,* 1 (2008) 13-34.

Ármann Jakobsson, 'Masculinity and Politics in *Njáls* saga', Viator 38 (2007), 191-215.

Bampi, Massimiliano, Carolyne Larrington and Sif Rikhardsdottir (eds.), *A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre*, (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020).

Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida: reflections on photography,* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

Barthes, Roland, *The Language of Fashion,* ed. by Michael Carter, trans. by Andy Stafford, (London: Bloomsbury, 2006).

Barthes, Roland, *The Fashion System,* trans. by Matthew Ward and Richard Howard, (London: Vintage, 2010).

Bek-Pedersen, Karen, 'Fate and Weaving: Justification of a Metaphor', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 5 (2009), 23-39.

Bek-Pedersen, Karen, *The Norns in Old Norse Mythology,* (Edinburgh: Dunedin, 2009).

Belanoff, Patricia A., 'Women's Songs, Women's Language: *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Wife's Lament*', in *New Readings of Women in Old English Literature*, ed. by Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 193-203.

Bender Jørgensen, L., *North European textiles until A.D. 1000,* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1992).

Bouman, A. C., *Patterns in Old English and Old Icelandic Literature,* (Leiden: Universitaire Pers Leiden, 1962).

Brunning, Sue, *The Sword in Early Medieval Northern Europe. Experience, Identity, Representation,* Anglo Saxon Studies 36 (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2019).

Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, 'Emotions of a Vulnerable Viking: Negotiations of Masculinity in *Egil's saga*' in *Masculinities in Old Norse Literature,* ed. by Gareth Evans and Jessica Clare Hancock, pp. 146-163.

Bullough, Vern L., 'Transvestites in the Middle Ages', *American Journal of Sociology* 79 (1974), 1381-1394.

Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble,* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990, reprint 2008).

Cadden, Joan, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture*, Cambridge History of Medicine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

Cavell, Megan, 'Looming Danger and Dangerous Looms: Violence and Weaving in Exeter Book *Riddle 56*, *Leeds Studies in English New Series* 42 (2011), 29-42.

Cavell, Megan, *Weaving Words and Binding Bodies: The Poetics of Human Experience in Old English Literature,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).

Clark, David, 'Undermining and En-Gendering Vengeance: Distancing and Anti-Feminism in the *Poetic Edda*', *Scandinavian Studies* 77 (2005), 173-200.

Clark, David*, Between Medieval Men: Male Friendship and Desire in Early Medieval English Literature,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Clark, David, *Gender, Violence and the Past in Edda and Saga,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Clark, David and Jóhanna, 'The representation of gender in eddic poetry' in *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia,* ed. by Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn and Brittany Schorn, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 331-348.

Clover, Carol, 'Hildigunnr's Lament' in *Cold Counsel: The Women in Old Norse Literature and Myth,* ed. by Sarah M. Anderson and Karen Swenson, (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, 2012), pp. 15 – 54. (An earlier version of this essay appears as: 'Hildigunnr's Lament', in *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New Approaches to Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism*, ed. by John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth and Gerd Wolfgang Weber (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986), pp. 141-83

Clover, Carol, 'Maiden Warriors and Other Sons', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 85 (1986), 35-49.

Clover, Carol, 'Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe', *Representations* 44 (1993), 1-28.

Clunies Ross, Margaret, *Skáldskaparmál: Snorri Sturluson's ars poetica and Medieval Theories of Language*, The Viking Collection 4 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1987).

Clunies Ross, Margaret, 'Realism and the Fantastic in Old Icelandic Sagas', *Scandinavian Studies* 74 (2002), 443-454.

Clunies Ross, Margaret, 'The transmission and preservation of eddic poetry' in, *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia,* ed. by Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn and Brittany Schorn, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 12-32.

Connell, R. W., 'Social Organization of Masculinity' in *Masculinities* 2nd edn., (Berkley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1995, reprnt. 2005).

Damico, Helen, 'The Valkyrie Reflex in Old English Literature', in *New Readings* (1990), pp. 167-190.

Derrida, Jacques, *Given Time/ I, Counterfeit money*, (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

Derrida, Jacques*, The Gift of Death*, 2nd edn., (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

Dronke, Ursula, 'Narrative Insights in *Laxdœla saga*', in Mary Salu and Robert T. Farrell, (eds.), *J. R. R. Tolkien, Scholar and Storyteller: Essays 'In Memoriam',* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 120-137.

Dronke, Ursula, *The Role of Sexual Themes in Njáls Saga*, The Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture in Northern Studies, (London: University College London, 1980).

Durkheim, Emile and Marcel Mauss, 'Essi sur quelques forms primitives de classification', *Année Sociologique,* 6 (1901-2), 1 – 72. For a critical volume in English, see: *Primitive Classification*, trans. by Rodney Needham, (London: Routledge, 2009).

Elsa E. Guðjónsson, "Járnvaðr yllir: A Fourth Weapon of the Valkyries in *Darraðarljóð*', Textile History 20, 185-197.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo "Gifts", in *Essays, Second Series,* 1884, https://emersoncentral.com/texts/essays-second-series/gifts/

Engels, Friedrich, *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigenthums und des Staats* (*The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*), trans. by Alick West (London: Penguin, 2010).

Evans, Gareth Lloyd, *Men and Masculinities in the Sagas of Icelanders,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Evans, Gareth Lloyd, and Jessica Clare Hancock, (eds.), *Masculinities in Old Norse Literature,* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020).

Evans, Ruth, 'Gender does not equal genitals', *postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* 9 (2018), 120-131.

Evison, Vera I., *Dover: The Buckland Anglo-Saxon Cemetery,* Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England Archaeological Report 3 (London: 1987).

Fell, Christine, Cecily Clark and Elizabeth Williams, *Women in Anglo Saxon England and the Impact of 1066,* (London: Colonnade Books, 1984).

Foote, Peter, and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement. The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia,* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1970).

Forster, E. M., *Aspects of the Novel,* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2016).

Franquemont, Abigail, *Respect the Spindle: Spin Infinite Yarns with One Amazing Tool* (Loveland, CO: Interweave Press, 2009).

Frantzen, Allen J., *Before the Closet: Same-Sex Love from* Beowulf *to* Angels in America, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

Freud, Sigmund, 'Femininity' in *The Essentials of Psychoanalysis,* ed. by Anna Freud, trans. by James Strachey, (London: Hogarth, 1986, reprnt. 2005).

Garber, Marjorie, *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, (London: Penguin, 1993).

Gardela, Leszek, '"Warrior Women" in Viking Age Scandinavia? A Preliminary Archaeological Study', *Analecta Archeologica Ressoviensia* 8 (2013).

Gilchrist, Roberta *Gender and Archaeology: Contesting the Past*, (London: Routledge, 1999).

Goldberg, P. J. P., *Women, Work and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire, c. 1300 – 1520*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992).

Grant, M. H., *Flower Painting Through Four Centuries,* (Leigh-On-Sea, Essex: F Lewis, 1952).

Grimm, Jacob, *Teutonic Mythology,* 4th ed., 4 vols., trans. by James Steven Stallybrass, (Massachusetts NY: Peter Smith, 1976, 1883).

Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Frederick York Powell, (eds. and trans.), *Corpus Poeticum Boreale: The Poetry of the Old Northern Tongue from the Earliest Times to the Thirteenth Century,* 2 vols., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1883).

Gurevich, A. Ya., 'Wealth and Gift-Bestowal Among the Ancient Scandinavians', *Scandinavica* 7 (1962), 126-139.

Halberstam, J., *Female Masculinity,* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

Härke, Heinrich, '"Warrior Graves"? The Background of the Anglo-Saxon Burial Rite', *Past and Present* 126 (1990), 22-43.

Härke, Heinrich, 'Changing Symbols in a Changing Society: The Anglo-Saxon Burial Rite in the Seventh Century', *The Age of Sutton Hoo: The Seventh Century in North-Western Europe,* ed. by Martin O. H. Carver, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1992).

Härke, Heinrich, 'Early Saxon Weapon-Burials: Frequencies, Distributions and Weapon Combinations', *Weapons and Warfare in Anglo-Saxon England,* ed. by Sonia Chadwick Hawkes, (Oxford: Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, 1989).

Härke, Heinrich, 'Swords, Warrior-Graves and Anglo-Saxon Warfare', *Current Archaeology* 16 (2004), 556-61.

Head, Pauline E., *Representation and Design: Tracing a Hermeneutics of Old English Poetry,* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

Hedenstierna-Jonson, Charlotte, Neil Price, et. al., 'A female Viking warrior confirmed by genomics', *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 164 (2017), 853-860.

Hedenstierna-Jonson, Charlotte, Neil Price, et. al., 'Viking warrior women? Reassessing Birka chamber grave Bj. 581', *Antiquity* 93 (2019), 181-198.

Hoffmann, Marta, *The Warp-Weighted Loom: Studies in the History and Technology of an Ancient Implement,* (Oslo: Robin and Russ Handweavers, 1964).

Holck, Per, 'The Oseberg Ship Burial, Norway: New Thoughts on the Skeletons from the Grave Mound' *European Journal of Archaeology* 9 (2006), 185-210.

Holtsmark, Anne, 'Vefr Darraðar', *Særtrykk av Maal og Minne* 2 (1936), 74-96.

Hyer, Maren Clegg, 'Text/Textile: "Wordweaving" in the Literatures of Anglo-Saxon England', *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* 15 (2019), 33-52.

Hyer, Maren Clegg, and Gale R. Owen-Crocker (eds.), *The Material Culture of Daily Living in the Anglo-Saxon World*, (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2011).

Irigaray, Luce, 'Women on the Market' in *This Sex which is not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

Jesch Judith, *Women in the Viking Age,* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1991).

Jesch Judith, 'Let's Debate Female Viking Warriors Yet Again' (2017), http://norseandviking.blogspot.com/2017/09/lets-debate-female-viking-warriors-yet.html

Jochens, Jenny, *Women in Old Norse Society,* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).

Jochens, Jenny*, Old Norse Images of Women,* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words, Power,* The New Middle Ages Series, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir*, Valkyrie: The Women of the Viking World,* (Bloomsbury Academic: London, 2020).

Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Viking Friendship: The Social Bond in Iceland and Norway, c. 900 – 1300*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017).

Jones, Anne Rosalind and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Jones, Gwyn, 'Some Characteristics of the Icelandic 'Hólmganga'', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 32 (1933), 203-224.

Kellogg, Robert, 'Introduction' in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders Including 49 Tales*, (5 vols.), Viking Age Classics Series ed. by Viðar Hreinsson, Terry Gunnell, Keneva Kunz and Bernard Scudder, (Reykjavík, Iceland: Bókaútgáfan Leifur Eiríksson, 1997), I., pp. xxix-lv.

Kershaw, Nora, *Anglo-Saxon and Norse Poems,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922).

Kopytoff, Igor, 'The Cultural Biography of things: commoditization as process', in *The Social Life of Things: commodities in cultural perspective,* ed. by Arjun Appadurai, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 64-91.

Kuhn, Hans, *Das alte Island,* (Düsseldorf: Diederichs, 1971).

Larrington, Carolyne, 'Eddic poetry and heroic legend', in *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 147-172.

Laqueur, Thomas, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

Lethbridge, Emily, 'The Sagasteads of Iceland: A 21st-century Pilgrimage', http://sagasteads.blogspot.com

Levis-Strauss, Claude, *Les Structures élémentaires de la Parenté* (*The Elementary Structures of Kinship),* trans. by James Bell et al. (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2016).

Leyerle, John, 'The Interlace Structure of *Beowulf*', *University of Toronto Quarterly* 37 (1967), 1-17.

Lönnroth, Lars, *Njáls Saga: A Critical Introduction,* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1976).

Louis-Jensen, Jonna, 'A Good Day's Work: *Laxdæla saga,* ch. 49', in *The Cold Counsel: Women in Old Norse Literature and Myth,* pp. 189-199.

Makin, Alexandra Lester, *The Lost Art of the Anglo-Saxon World: The Sacred and Secular Power of Embroidery,* Ancient Textiles Series 35, (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2019).

Makin, Alexandra Lester, 'Cuthbert Recreation Project' https://alexandramakin.com/2019/11/20/cuthbert-recreation-project/

Mauss, Marcel, *Essai sur le don: forme archaique de l'échange,* (*The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies),* trans. by Ian Cunnison (London: Routledge, 1966).

McNeil, D., 'So You Think Gestures are Nonverbal?' *Psychological Review* (1985), 350-371.

Mencej, Mirjam 'Connecting Threads', *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* 48 (2011), 55-84.

Merkelbach, Rebecca, *Monsters in Society: Alterity, Transgression, and the Use of the Past in Medieval Iceland,* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019).

Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben, *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society,* trans. by Joan Turville-Petre, (Odense: Odense University Press, 1983).

Miller, William Ian, 'Choosing the Avenger: Some Aspects of the Bloodfeud in Medieval Iceland and England', *Law and Society* 1 (1983), 159-204.

Miller, William Ian, 'Gift, Sale, Payment, Raid: Case Studies in the Negotiation and Classification of Exchange in Medieval Iceland', *Speculum* 61 (1986), 18-50.

Miller, William Ian, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

Miller, William Ian, 'Emotions and the Sagas' in *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland,* ed. by Gísli Pálsson, (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1992), pp. 88-109.

Miller, William Ian, *Humiliation and Other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort, and Violence*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993, repr. 1995).

Miller, William Ian, 'Is a Gift Forever?', *Representations* 100 (2007), 13-22.

Mitchell, Bruce, and Fred C. Robinson, *A Guide to Old English* 6th edn., (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011).

Mitchell, Victoria, 'Textiles, Text and Techne', in *The Textile Reader,* ed. by Jessica Hemmings, (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 7-13.

Mundal, Else, 'Sigrdrífumál Strofe 1', *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi,* 87 (1972), 122-129.

Norrman, Lena Elisabeth, *Viking Women: The Narrative Voice in Woven Tapestries,* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2008).

O'Donoghue, Heather, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Short Introduction*, Blackwell Introductions to Literature, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

O'Donoghue, Heather, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Olsen, Magnus, 'Gísla saga og heltediktningen', in Johs. Brøndum-Nielsen et. al., (eds.), *Festskrift til Finnur Jónnson, 29 Maj 1928,* (Copenhagen: Levin & Munksgaard, 1928), pp. 6-14.

Østergård, Else, *Woven into the Earth: Textiles from Norse Greenland,* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2009).

Owen-Crocker, Gale R., *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England,* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1986, rev., 2004).

Owen-Crocker, Gale R., *The Bayeux Tapestry: Collected Papers,* (Ashgate: Variorum, 2012).

Parker, Roszika, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine,* (London: The Women's Press, 1984, reprnt. 1986, 1989, rev. 1996).

Parker, Roszika and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology,* (London: Pandora Press, 1981, reprnt. London, I. B. Tauris, 2013).

Phelpstead, Carl, 'Hair Today, Gone Tomorrow: Hair Loss, the Tonsure and Masculinity in Medieval Iceland', *Scandinavian Studies* 85 (2013), 1-19.

Poole, R. G., *Viking Poems on War and Peace: A Study in Skaldic Narrative*, (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

Price, Neil, *The Viking Way: religion and war in late Iron Age Scandinavia,* (Uppsala: Aun. 31, 2002).

Price, Neil, *The Children of Ash and Elm: A History of the Vikings,* (London: Allen Lane, 2020).

Propp, Vladimir, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. by Laurence Scott, The American Folklore Society Bibliographical and Special Series 9, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1958, rev. 1968, reprnt. 2009).

Quinn, Judy, '*Darraðarljóð* in *Njáls saga', Die Faszination des Verborgenen und seine Entschlüsselung: Raði säR kunni. Beiträge zur Runologie, skandinavistischen Mediävistik und germanischen Sprachwissenschaft*, ed. by Jana Krüger et al., Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde 101 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), pp. 299-313.

Riello, Giorgio and Prasannan Parthasarathi, (eds.), *The Spinning World: A Global History of Cotton Textiles, 1200 – 1850,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Ross, Margaret Clunies, 'Realism and the Fantastic in Old Icelandic Sagas', *Scandinavian Studies* 74 (2002), 443-454.

Rubin, Gayle, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex' in *Toward an Anthropology of Women,* ed. by Rayna Reiter (New York, NY; Monthly Review Press, 1975).

Rudy, Kathryn M., 'Dirty Books: Quantifying Patterns of Use in Medieval Manuscripts using a Densitometer', *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 2 (2010), DOI:10.5092/jhna.2010.2.1.1.

Rudy, Kathryn M., 'Sewing as Authority in the Middle Ages' in, *ZMK Zeitschrift für Medien – und Kulturforschung, 6/1/2015: Textil*, ed. by Lorenz Engell and Bernhard Siegert, (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag GmbH, 2015), pp. 117-131.

Rudy, Kathryn M., *Woven Manuscripts: A soft installation by weaver and medievalist Kathryn Rudy*, (exhibition catalogue), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Library, 2017).

Sauckel, Anita, *Die Literarische Funktion von Kleidung in den* Íslendingasögur *and* Íslendingaþættir, Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanishen Altertumskunde 83, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014).

Schach, P., 'The Use of the Simile in the Old Icelandic Family Sagas', *Scandinavian Studies* 24 (1952), 149-165.

Schaup, Lisa A., 'Blurring the Boundaries: Applying Gender Studies and Material Culture Studies to "Fine Art", Decorative Art, and Craft' (unpublished Master's project, University of Oregon, 2005).

Scheil, Andrew P., 'Somatic Ambiguity and Masculine Desire in the Old English *Life of Euphrosyne', Exemplaria* 11 (1999), 345-361.

Schneider, Jane and A. Weiner, *Cloth and Human Experience,* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989).

Sif Rikhardsdottir, *Emotions in Old Norse Literature: Translations, Voices, Contexts,* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017).

Skulte, L. John, '*Freoðuwebbe* in Old English Poetry', in *New Readings on Women in Old Norse Literature,* ed. by Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennesey Olsen, (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 204-210.

Smith, Michele Hayeur, 'Weaving Wealth: Cloth and Trade in Viking Age and Medieval Iceland', in *Textiles and the Medieval Economy: Production, Trade and Consumption of Textiles, 8th – 16th Centuries,* ed. by Angela Ling Huang and Carsten Jahnke, Ancient Textiles Series, 16 (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2015), pp. 23-40.

Snell, Gesa, 'Der höfischen Züge - insbesondere die Kleidungsbescreibung - als Stilmittel in der *Laxdœla saga*' in *Arbeiten zur Skandinavistik: 13. Arbeitstagung der deutschsprachigen Skandinavistik 29.7-3.8.1997 in Lysebu (Oslo),* ed. by Paul Fritz, Texte und Untersuchnungen zur Germanistik und Skandinavistik 45, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 249-247.

St Clair, Kassia, *The Golden Thread: How Fabric Changed* History, (London: John Murray, 2018).

Stallybrass, Peter, 'Worn Worlds: Clothes, Mourning and the Life of Things' in *The Textile Reader*, ed. by Jessica Hemmings, (New York, NY: Berg Publishers, 2012), pp. 68-77.

Stig Sørensen, Marie Louise, *Gender Archaeology,* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

Straubhaar, Sandra Baliff, 'Wrapped in a Blue Mantle: Fashion for Icelandic Slayers?' *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* 1 (2005), 53-65.

Thomas, Dana, *Fashionopolis: The Price of Fast Fashion and the Future of Clothes,* (New York, NY; Apollo, 2020).

Tomkin, Sylvan, 'Script Theory: Differential Magnification of Affects', in *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation 1978,* vol. 26, ed. by Herbert E. Howe and Richard A. Dienstbier (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), pp. 201-36.

Turner, Marion, (ed.), *A Handbook of Middle English Studies,* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

Twigger Holroyd, Amy, *Folk Fashion: Understanding Homemade Clothes,* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

Valtýr Guðmundsson, '*Lítklædi*', *Arkiv för nordiak filologi* 9 (1893), 171 – 198.

von See, Klaus, 'Das Walkürenlied', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 81 (1959), 1-15.

von See, Klaus, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda,* 7 vols. (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 1997).

Walton Rogers, Penelope, *Cloth and Clothing in Early Anglo-Saxon England, AD 450 – 700,* (York: Council for British Archaeology, 2007).

Weber, Max, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology (Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie)*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, 2 vols., (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1978).

Weissberg, Liliane, 'Ariadne's Thread', *MLN No.3., German Issue: Literature and the Sense of Possibility/ Der Möglichkeitssinn von Literatur* (2010), 661-681.

Williams, Howard M., 'Viking Warrior Women: An Archaeodeath Response Part 1' (2017), https://howardwilliamsblog.wordpress.com/2017/09/14/viking-warrior-women-an-archaeodeath-response-part-1/

Wolf, Kirsten, 'Some Comments on Old Norse-Icelandic Color Terms', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 121 (2006): 173-192.

Wolf, Kirsten, 'The Color Blue in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature', *Scripta Islandica* 57 (2006): 55-78.

Wolf, Kirsten, 'Snorri's Use of Color Terms in *Gylfaginning'*, *Skandinavistik* 37 (2007): 1-10.

Wolf, Kirsten, 'The Colors of the Rainbow in Snorri's *Edda*', *Maal og minne* (2007): 51-62.

Wolf, Kirsten, 'The Color Grey in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 108 (2009): 222-238.

Wolf, Kirsten, 'Towards a Diachronic Analysis of Old Norse-Icelandic Color terms: The Cases of Green and Yellow', *Orð og tunga* 12 (2010), 109-130.

Wolf, Kirsten, 'Basic Color Terms in Old Norse-Icelandic: A Quantitative Study', *Orð og tunga* 15 (2013): 141-161.

Wolf, Kirsten, 'Somatic Semiotics: Emotions and the Human Face in the Sagas and *þættir* of Icelanders', *Traditio* 69 (2014), 125-145.

Wolf, Kirsten, 'Non-basic Color Terms in Old Norse-Icelandic', in *New Norse Studies: Essays on the Literature and Culture of Medieval Scandinavia,* ed. by Jeffrey Turco, Islandica 58 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Library Press, 2015), pp. 389-433.

Wolf, Kirsten, 'The Color Brown in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature', *Nowele* 70 (2017): 22-38.

Zachrission, Inger and Verner Alexandersen, *Möten i gränsland: samer och germaner i Mellanskandinavien,* (Stockholm, Sweden: Statens Historiska Museum, 1997).

Zanchi, Anna, 'Melius abundare quam deficere': Scarlet clothing in *Laxdœla saga* and *Njáls saga, Medieval Clothing and Textiles* 4 (2008), 21-37.

<u>Dictionaries, Databases and Encyclopaedias</u>

Anti-Defamation League ('ADL'), 'Hate on Display', https://www.adl.org/hate-symbols

Bosworth, Joseph and T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* https://bosworthtoller.com/

Cleasby, Richard, Gudbrand Vigfússon and Sir William A. Craigie, (eds.), *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* 2nd edn., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957).

Finnur Jónnson and Sveinbjörn Egilsson (eds.), *Lexicon Poeticum Antiquæ Linguæ Septentrionalis: Ordbog Over det Norsk-Islandske Skjaldesprog*, (København: S. L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri, 1931).

Hicks, Carola, 'Migration Period', *Grove Art Online* (2003), https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T057909.

Latham, R. E., D. R. Howlett and R. K. Ashdowne, (eds.), *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, (Oxford: The British Acadamy, 1975 – 2013).

Lewis, Charlton T. and Charles Short (eds.), *A Latin Dictionary,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1879, reprnt., 1933).

Lexis of Cloth and Clothing Project http://lexissearch.arts.manchester.ac.uk/

Munro, John, 'Medieval Woollens: Textiles, Textile Technology and Industrial Organisation, c. 800 – 1500', in *The Cambridge History of Western Textiles,* 2

vols., ed., by David Jenkins, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), I., pp, 181 – 227.

Online Etymology Dictionary, http://www.etymonline.com/index.php

Ordbog over det norrøne prosaprog, (*Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*) ed. by Aldís Sigurðardóttir et. al. https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php

Owen-Crocker, Gale, Elizabeth Coatsworth and Maria Hayward, (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Medieval Dress and Textiles of the British Isles c. 450-1450,* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

Oxford English Dictionary Online, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), http://www.oed.com.ezproxy3.lib.le.ac.uk/

Saga Map, http://sagamap.hi.is/is/

Snerpa, https://www.snerpa.is/net/fornrit.htm

Sveinbjörn Egilsson, (ed.), *Lexicon Poeticum Antiquæ Linguæ Septentrionalis: Ordbog Over det Norsk-Islandske Skjaldesprog*, (København: S. L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri, 1931).

Wilson, Eva 'Interlace', *Grove Art Online* (2003), https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T041412