On the Threshold

Experiencing Liminality in the *Íslendingasögur*

Anna Katharina Heiniger

Dissertation towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
May 2018

UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES
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On the Threshold: Experiencing Liminality in the Íslendingasögur

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ABSTRACT

The present thesis explores how the anthropological concept of liminality can be applied to the corpus of the *Íslendingasögur* and how this unprecedented, interdisciplinary discussion contributes to the understanding of the sagas themselves as well as their historical context. The theoretical framework builds on the works of the anthropologists Arnold van Gennep (1873-1957) and Victor W. Turner (1920-1983) who introduced, defined and developed liminality, a phase that denotes the temporary position of being caught between two social statuses.

A direct application of the concept onto the *Íslendingasögur* poses, however, intricate difficulties not least regarding the evasive nature of liminality or the gap between a modern anthropological concept and medieval (fictional) literature. Only careful interpretations of individual saga episodes can reveal whether instances of liminality can be detected and how liminality can be approached and defined in this literary context.

ÁGRIP

Í þessari rannsókn er kannað hvernig má beita hugtakinu *liminality*, sem ættað er úr mannfræði, á Íslendingasögur og hvað sú þverfaglega umræða, sem er án fordæma, getur lagt af mörkum til betri skilnings á sögunum sjálfum og sögulegu samhengi þeirra. Fræðilegur rammi rannsóknarinnar byggir á verkum mannfræðinganna Arnold van Gennep (1873-1957) og Victor W. Turner (1920-1983) sem kynntu til sögunnar, skilgreindu og þróuðu hugtakið *liminality*, en það merkir það að vera tímabundið staddur á milli tveggja félagslegra sviða.

Að beita hugtakinu á Íslendingasögur er ýmsum vandkvæðum bundið, ekki síst vegna þess hve loðið það er en einnig vegna bilsins sem þarf að brúa milli nútímamannfræða og miðaldabókmennta. Eingöngu nákvæmar túlkanir á einstökum sagnaþáttum leiða í ljós hvort finna megi dæmi um *liminality* og einnig hvernig megi dýpka skilninginn á hugtakinu í bókmenntalegu samhengi.

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1 INTRODUCTION

There are things known
and there are things unknown;
in between there are doors.
(Jim Morrison, 1943-1971)

Tracing the source of this introductory quote is rather challenging as it is attributed to several famous people, namely the musician Jim Morrison (1943-1971), and the writers Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) and William Blake (1757-1827). Most likely though, it was Jim Morrison (or his co-writer Ray Manzarek) who composed the lines.[1] With regard to the context of the topic of my doctoral thesis, however, it does not matter who of the three men put down those words because in their works both Morrison as well as Huxley eventually refer to and are inspired by the English printer, painter and poet William Blake and in particular his work *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790). While Morrison admired Blake for his mystic and symbolistic poetry and his "Glauben an die befreiende Kraft der Fantasie,"[2] Aldous Huxley wrote his philosophical essay *The Doors of Perception* (1954) in reference to Blake's *Marriage*. Both Morrison and Huxley take up Blake's idea that humans are always subjected to a limited and narrow perception of the world around them. It is impossible to see and understand everything in a single effort, and there will always be things beyond our present reach. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), William Blake formulates this idea of an incomplete perception as follows: "If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite. / For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern."[3] These statements are part of Blake's vision of the cosmos which he presents in his highly influential work, *Marriage*, which was composed, printed and published by Blake himself between 1790 and 1793. Coloured by the ideals and thoughts of the Romantic literary period, the prose text imitates the style of Biblical revelations and – inspired by the French Revolution – also expresses Blake's revolutionary ideas.

At the beginning of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* Blake takes up the traditional Christian division of Good and Evil before he breaks with these associations and even inverts their values. He is particularly opposed to a stigmatising and stereotypical division between body and soul, in which the former is said to be subjected to evil desire. Instead Blake argues for the following approach:

[1] O'Toole [2017].
[2] Margry 2010, 124.
[3] Blake 2006, 116.

> 1. Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that calld Body is a portion of Soul discernd by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age. 2. Energy is the only life, and is from the Body; and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy. 3. Energy is Eternal Delight.[4]

Unlike the hegemonic Christian view, Blake does not consider body and soul as two contrary elements but rather as two essential and closely related components which define the source of life-energy (i.e. the body) and its outward boundary (i.e. reason). Even though some of the passages of Blake's work might suggest giving evil a voice,[5] he actually promotes a figurative marriage of the oppositions: "Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence."[6] Despite causing tensions, it is only this union – a marriage of Heaven and Hell – which Blake eventually considers "the real Good."[7] Only when these opposites merge, are human beings able to undergo a transformation, and only then can they step through the doorway and access previously unknown things: "The 'doors of perception' are cleansed by an apocalyptic transformation of categories so that contraries meet in newly energetic formations."[8]

Admittedly, these introductory words may seem out of context and with no obvious connection to the title of this doctoral thesis, which promises a discussion of anthropological ideas and Old Norse literature. Nevertheless, the quote by Jim Morrison and the excursus on Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* offer not only a poetic but also an apt starting point to a discussion of liminality.

It goes without saying that Blake's ideas are not informed or influenced by the theoretical work on liminality which was conducted from the end of the 19th century onwards. Still, his words are rather suggestive of liminality to the extent that he speaks of two seemingly conflicting spheres which can only exist in combination and which mutually influence each other. At the very moment of one sphere shading off into the other, liminality – a blurry, transitional phase – evolves and dominates the situation until the second sphere manifests itself.

The concept of liminality was first introduced to academic discourse by the French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (1873-1957) in his probably most famous monograph, *Les rites de passage* (1909). Rites of passage offer guidance and assistance when individuals or groups pass from one social state or position into a new and (structurally) higher or more prestigious one. Such social shifts include, for example, getting married, being socially accepted as a woman or a man, or assuming a higher social position. While the pre- and the

[4] Blake 2006, 112, spelling as in the original.
[5] In *Marriage*, Blake not only assumes the voice of the devil in the eponymous section and writes the "Proverbs of Hell" (Blake 2006, 112 and 113), he is also inspired by John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) where – in Blake's opinion – Milton is "of the Devil's party without knowing it" (Sanders 2004, 358).
[6] Blake 2006, 112, spelling as in the original.
[7] Blake 2006, 110.
[8] Sanders 2004, 358.

post-ritual statuses are clearly defined and encompass a certain set of values, rules and partly prescribed behaviour, the liminal mid-phase leaves the ritual subject in an ambiguous and non-categorisable space. During this time the previous state has been abandoned and the future social-structural state has not yet been attained; hence the ritual subject hovers in a figurative interstice which lacks clear definition and structure. It is this period of being in-between which van Gennep termed *liminal*. The most crucial liminal time everybody experiences is the period of adolescence when the subject is no longer a child but not yet an adult either. Similarly, a couple's engagement is a liminal time, because the partners are no longer single and yet still not married.

Van Gennep visualises rites of passage as a passage from one room to another. Speaking in Morrison's terms, room A includes the 'things known', because the liminal, ritual subject is familiar with this pre-ritual state, while room B – Morrison's 'things unknown' – provides the subject with a different social context and role. While the rooms on either side of the threshold are clearly defined and adhere to social norms and expectations, the threshold is the place or phase where the subject undergoes the preparatory transformation. Only by stepping over the figurative threshold and passing through a doorway can the ritual subject move on in society. So, the threshold simultaneously separates and connects the adjacent rooms. Because of this ambiguity, van Gennep considers the threshold the epitome of liminality, which is reflected by the etymology of the technical term, as *liminality* has its roots in the Latin neuter noun for 'threshold' (Lat. *limen, liminis*).

Van Gennep's work remained neglected for several decades until the Scottish anthropologist Victor W. Turner (1920-83) re-discovered it in the 1960s and shaped it according to his understanding of society. Famously calling it the *betwixt and between*, Victor Turner has probably done the most research on liminality in modern scholarship. Initially, Turner approaches liminality by looking at rites and ritual-like processes of indigenous people, but in the course of his intensive research he soon expands his focus and applies his theories to data from a wide variety of cultural contexts, such as (single) historical (European) events or (modern) theatre. Nevertheless, Turner's core ideas and his understanding of how a society develops and how liminality is characterised and manifests itself remain the same: societies are never stable but in continuous flux. The impetus for this movement has its origins in the alternating presence of what Turner calls structure and anti-structure. The former refers to everyday life which is hierarchically organised and characterised. Structure's heterogeneity and inequality are expressed in names, ranks, titles, status distinctions, etc. Anti-structure on the other hand, thrives only when all traces of structure are eliminated, and it encompasses all processes and relationships which take place outside of daily structural life. In phases of anti-structure all (ritual) subjects are considered equal and they form a homogeneous group as they are stripped of names, titles, ranks and offices. They experience in most cases some kind of a transformation during this period.

Unfortunately, Turner's definitions and demarcations of his key terms often prove somewhat blurry and his usage of terms can be deemed inconsistent. While Turner mostly uses *anti-structure* as an umbrella term for *liminality* and *communitas*, he tends to use *anti-structure* and *liminality* synonymously. Communitas is a social modality and denotes the homogeneous relationship among the (ritual) subjects. Liminality refers exclusively to the transition the ritual subject undergoes while passing through the anti-structural phase (of a rite of passage). All three key concepts share the fate of terminability, since anti-structure can never manifest itself and become a stable condition. Eventually it always has to give way to structure and heterogeneity. Though mutually exclusive, structure and anti-structure are related in a dialectical process and thus form an incessantly changing and shifting society or community. Together, structure and anti-structure form "an essential and generic human bond, without which there could be *no* society."[9]

Turner's dialectical process is basically a reformulation of van Gennep's tripartite structure of the rites of passage: 1) In the phase of separation, which belongs to Turner's structure, the ritual subject is separated from the structural environment he is familiar with; 2) he then enters Turner's anti-structure and experiences van Gennep's transitional, liminal phase; 3) he is re-integrated into Turner's structural society and is assigned a new position embedded in a new social and heterogeneous context. Both Arnold van Gennep as well as Victor Turner emphasise that (almost) all societies in the world are in one way or another familiar with the concepts of anti-structure, communitas and liminality. To varying degrees, they make (sub-)conscious use of them in their social-structural life. This rather universal presence through time and space suggests that it should be possible to transfer and apply the concept also to Old Norse culture and literature.

Within the rich literary and cultural heritage of medieval Scandinavia, this thesis discusses the concept of liminality in the context of the *Íslendingasögur* ('Family Sagas' or 'Sagas of the Early Icelanders'), which present a rich and highly diverse corpus of saga narratives regarding subject matter, language and style:

> Sie [die *Íslendingasögur*] erwecken auf den ersten Blick den Eindruck, als ob diese eine recht homogene Gruppe bildeten, … doch zeigt sich bei näherem Hinsehen ein weites Spektrum von Erzähl- und Sprechweisen, von Möglichkeiten, den Erzählstoff zu strukturieren, zu perspektivieren und auch zu aktualisieren.[10]

While the plots of the *Íslendingasögur* cover the time span from the *landnám* (the settlement period; ca. AD 870-930) until the time shortly after the conversion (ca. AD 1000), the writing period spreads from the early 12th century onwards. The writing period thus overlaps with the historic struggles of the Age of the Sturlungs (1262/64), when Iceland lost its independence to

[9] Turner 1969, 97, italics in the original.
[10] Böldl 2011, 198.

Norway. It must therefore be assumed that these crucial experiences from the mid-13th-century also influenced and shaped the rendering of the saga narratives.

Albeit coloured by and to some extent based on vague links to a palpable historical period, it is mostly agreed on nowadays that the *Íslendingasögur* are fictional narratives. Nonetheless, they employ a very convincing tone for rendering the stories and make the audience believe that they are historically accurate and trustworthy reports presenting unaltered facts. For the purpose of this illusion of realism, the sagas attempt to fix all events on a traceable timeline and repeatedly make reference to actual historical events, such as reigns of foreign kings, papacies, large battles, etc. To a modern audience the fictional character of the sagas also shows in their use of the fantastic and the borrowing of elements from other saga-subgenres such as the *fornaldarsögur* (the Legendary Sagas).

In view of the multifarious nature of the *Íslendingasögur*, it is not feasible to include the whole corpus (40 sagas and *þættir*) in this discussion. In order to gain a solid overview and a balanced impression of how liminality shows in these narratives, a selection of 14 sagas have been made which are analysed in this thesis. The choice has been based on, firstly, the dating of each saga's major manuscripts, and secondly, where in Iceland the story is set. The resulting compilation maintains and represents the variety of the narratives. The selected sagas reveal a considerable spectrum of storylines, styles, central topics and represented mind-sets. Hence there is ample space and scope left to trace and explore representations of liminality.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to delimit the analysis to specific aspects of the narratives. Both based on my interest in the spatial turn (cf. Heiniger 2010), and in Arnold van Gennep's statement that all rites of passage are essentially territorial passages, the focus of the thesis has been placed on liminal places in the *Íslendingasögur*. Guided additionally by the notion that Western European literature often makes use of particular sites which are associated with some unusual connotations and events, the following six, partly connected or mutually dependent sites have been selected: doors and thresholds; islands and the sea; glaciers and caves.

Although the doors of, or rather to, liminality have been pushed open over the past 10-15 years within Scandinavian studies, this thesis counts itself among the first larger investigations into liminality within Old Norse studies. It is therefore advisable to elaborate a basic understanding of liminality in this literary context. The work by van Gennep and Turner form the theoretical background of this study, and as this thesis is intended as a base-line study, it has been decided to keep close to their definitions of liminality. The *Íslendingasögur* have been considered helpful as a corpus because they are relatively easy to comprehend and relate to from a modern perspective, and the narratives they offer are a seemingly good platform for studying an anthropological concept as they portray all aspects of human life. Despite liminality's alleged universality and the *Íslendingasögur*'s puzzling and at times

misleading realistic depictions of life in (early) medieval Iceland, a direct and unmodified application of van Gennep's and Turner's understandings of liminality is neither advisable nor feasible. Nevertheless, liminality can bear fruit and provide a more nuanced understanding of the medieval Icelandic mindset and its representations in literature.

Often neglected by scholars, the use and modification of the anthropological concept requires a careful handling and has to take the nature of the concept as well as the target texts into account. The first obstacle to be considered is the fact that van Gennep and Turner based their observations and theories on rituals. However, the *Íslendingasögur* are, much to the disappointment of many scholars, very unrevealing when it comes to depictions of rituals. Therefore, an approach and starting point different from rituals has to be found and defined. This is done by crystallising seven main qualities of liminality as described and defined by van Gennep and Turner. Informed by extensive readings on the theoretical, anthropological background, the following seven major characteristics of liminality are employed: 1) spatial segregation from daily life; 2) temporary suspension of daily life; 3) the intrusion of a sense of otherness, some kind of a connection to the world beyond; 4) momentary invisibility or even presumed death of the liminal subject; 5) changes and transformations are taking place; 6) the scene includes paradoxical and/or ambiguous elements; and 7) the plot or rather the changes taking place are irreversible. In close readings, many saga episodes will be combed for these liminal qualities. Ultimately, the discussion will reveal to what extent constellations of these liminal qualities can be found and expected in the *Íslendingasögur*.

The formulations of the seven qualities above reveal that some of them do not apply as much to sites as they do to individuals. This already hints at the fact that it tends to be very difficult to decide whether it is the place, the time or the individual(s) involved that is/are liminal or whether it is all these elements that melt into a liminal unit. So the initial question of whether there are genuinely liminal places must be reformulated in a more nuanced fashion: are there particular sites in the *Íslendingasögur* which (repeatedly) trigger or host liminal experiences?

Assessing a plethora of examples for each of these places on the basis of the seven abovementioned liminal qualities will show that it is possible to trace liminality despite the absence of rituals in the *Íslendingasögur*. However, working with the concept of liminality entails walking a thin line and it is often tempting to quickly overgeneralise findings or to blur the concept's definitions, for example by using it synonymously with concepts such as the supernatural, hybridity or magic. Every episode thus requires careful and individual analysis and liminality has to be determined situationally; there is no single masterkey to liminality but rather a variety of liminal manifestations in the *Íslendingasögur*.

On a more general level it must therefore be asked whether an absolute definition relying entirely on the complete set of qualities as described by (anthropological) theoretical works

should be used,[11] or whether liminality can or should exclusively be 'measured' and defined on a relative scale which is based on specific contexts of saga-episodes. If the first option is preferred, how is the relationship between the former, situational definition of liminality and the latter theoretical background to be defined? To what extent are the theories then still of relevance to the definition? Analyses like the present one thus find themselves in a rather difficult dilemma: On the one hand we can employ a context-bound re-definition of liminality which, however, might run into the danger of undermining the original concept or, on the other hand, we can opt for an unchanged use of the anthropological concept that might prove too restrictive and consequently prevent an application to data other than strictly anthropological data sets.

Having said that, it is again emphasised that this thesis is a purely literary study. All observations made on the topic of liminality apply to the depictions in the *Íslendingasögur* only. No claim is made to the notion and perception of liminality on a historical level, because no matter how careful a study is conducted, it will never be possible to extract how aware Norse people were of the idea of liminality and what they arguably considered *liminal*. All our approaches, models and interpretations in context of liminality are informed by and rooted in an academic and above all modern point of view.

EXPLANATORY NOTES

Some guidelines regarding the general understanding and usage of terms and their spelling:

- In footnotes and brackets, saga titles that appear frequently, are replaced with abbreviations (cf. list of abbreviations below).
- Male pronouns are repeatedly used in a context of generalisation and can thus also refer to women. Whenever a statement explicitly concerns a woman, this is of course indicated with female pronouns.
- Passages and terms in Old Norse follow whenever possible the spelling in the *Íslenzk fornrit* volumes (ÍF), which, however, differ somewhat in their spelling, e.g. regarding *ö* vs. *ǫ*.
- With regard to supernatural beings such as monsters, trolls, giants, etc., the Old Norse terms, as they are found in *Íslenzk fornrit*, are used in the context of specific episodes, since the definition of the single terms is difficult and hence intricate to translate adequately into English. When referring to supernatural beings on a general level, English terms are used.

[11] Although both Arnold van Gennep as well as Victor Turner have described liminality extensively, they have never established what basic criteria need to be met to term something liminal. Albeit they acknowledged that not all characteristics need to be developed equally strongly in a liminal phase, neither scholar explicitly states that he considers liminality a relative quality. Given the fact that they both look at liminality in ritual(-like) contexts, liminality is rather an absolute quality that is either present or not, but does not allow for varying shades.

ABBREVIATIONS

For references in the footnotes and partly in the main text the following abbreviations of titles are used:

BáS	=	*Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*
DlsS	=	*Droplaugarsona saga*
EbS	=	*Eyrbyggja saga*
EgS	=	*Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*
FbS	=	*Fóstbræðra saga*
GíS	=	*Gísla saga Súrssonar*
GS	=	*Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*
GÞs	=	*Gull-Þóris saga*
HsF	=	*Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*
Ísb	=	*Íslendingabók*
JvS	=	*Jómsvíkinga saga*
JþB	=	*Jǫkuls þáttr Búasonar*
KjS	=	*Kjalnesinga saga*
KmS	=	*Kormáks saga*
KRs	=	*Króka-Refs saga*
Lnb	=	*Landnámabók*
LvS	=	*Ljósvetninga saga*
LxdS	=	*Laxdæla saga*
NjS	=	*(Brennu-)Njáls saga*
VdS	=	*Vatnsdæla saga*
Þsh	=	*Þórðar saga hreðu*

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND THE PRIMARY CORPUS

2.1 THE CONCEPT OF LIMINALITY IN SCHOLARSHIP

At the beginning of research on liminality lies Arnold van Gennep's monograph *Les rites de passage* (1909), where the concept of liminality is first introduced to scholarship. After van Gennep, Victor Turner was the scholar who worked most extensively on liminality and published his thoughts and findings in numerous publications. Since the thesis's main interest does not lie as much on the question of how liminality is defined than whether and how this modern concept can be transferred and applied to Old Norse sagas, the theoretical aspects introduced in this thesis are mainly based on van Gennep and Turner. Their work and especially Turner's publications are most central to the topic. I am aware though, that other scholars have also engaged with the concept of and contributed to the discussion on liminality.

Before and mostly after Turner various scholars from different fields have taken up the notion of liminality in their work, however, the uses and understanding of liminality differ considerably among the studies. Indeed liminality's evasiveness has invited scholars to bend the concept according to their subjective perceptions and understanding. This development was partly possible because liminality as described by van Gennep and Turner is neither a fixed framework nor a concrete (theoretical/methodological) tool. Leaving thus ample scope for individual interpretations, there have never really been attempts to put forward a more (theoretical and) systematic approach to and definition of liminality.[1]

On the one hand a strict, theoretical definition narrows the scope of applicability of liminality considerably; but on the other hand, the flexibility easily (mis-)leads one to a plethora of individual and isolated definitions, which are at times rather different from the initial notion. Few scholars make an effort and go back to van Gennep and Turner as a point of reference but rather take the liberty of freely using the term, often without providing a solid definition of their use of the concept. It cannot be denied that such individual dealings have resulted in misunderstandings of the term, and studies on liminality can hardly be subsumed under a single heading and a set of keywords.

As there is no overarching framework of liminality which acts as a point of reference or orientation for scholars, it is impossible to outline a development of the theoretical work. I thus refrain from providing a classic state of the art chapter, such as is usually made available in a scholarly work. It is neither possible nor helpful to the point that this thesis does not aim

[1] To my knowledge it is only Terence S. Turner (1977) who attempted to theorise van Gennep's view on liminality (see ch. 2.1.1).

at developing the concept further on a theoretical level. Instead a selection of works which employ the concept of liminality in one way or another will be presented (see ch. 2.3.1).

2.1.1 ARNOLD VAN GENNEP (1873-1957)

Born in 1873 in Ludwigsburg[2] as the son of parents of Dutch descent, Charles-Arnold Kurr van Gennep was an eager reader from an early age on and soon became highly interested in languages.[3] Because of his talent for languages, he considered entering the diplomatic service and enrolled at the *École des langues orientales* (School of Oriental Languages) at the Sorbonne in Paris. During his time at university his interests in studies of religion and folkloristics were kindled. In 1904 and 1906, van Gennep completed and published his PhD thesis in two parts.[4] In this early work, he merged his two main fields of interest: ethnology and folklore.[5] Apart from defining these two fields differently to most other scholars, van Gennep made a strong stand for folkloristics and ethnography being closely bound up with the literal meaning of *biologia*, that is, "sciences of living"[6] and therefore termed them "la biologie sociologique."[7]

Only three years later – in 1909 – Arnold van Gennep integrated all his major theoretical convictions and concerns in the famous monograph *Les rites de passage* (1909),[8] which proved his most important work and the one he held dearest. Van Gennep starts his discussion of the rites of passage from the premise that "each larger society contains within it several distinctly separate social groupings."[9] He visualises this view of society's structure by comparing society "to a house divided into rooms and corridors."[10] The various rooms represent the social groups that an individual stays in and passes from, or to, throughout life. Thus, the basis of all passage rites is the (physical) territorial passage.[11] Based on the association with an architectural structure, the threshold (or indeed the whole door frame) marks the very point where the subject leaves the familiar environment and ventures into something new: "Precisely: the door is the boundary between the foreign and domestic worlds

[2] For a detailed biography of Arnold van Gennep, see Zumwalt (1988) and Belmont (1974).

[3] Van Gennep was convinced that by the year 2000, every child would speak (at least) a Roman, a Germanic, a Slavic, a Semitic, a Mongol and a Bantu language!

[4] The two parts of van Gennep's doctoral thesis are *Tabou et totémisme à Madagascar* (1904) and *Mythes et légendes d'Australie* (1906).

[5] Arnold van Gennep is here referred to as ethnographer and folklorist as these were his main fields of interest and research. He and his French colleagues were also called (or, called themselves) sociologists. Their field of research is today known as functional anthropology (Kimball 1960, viii).

[6] Zumwalt 1988, 80.

[7] Gennep in Zumwalt 1982, 308. For this approach van Gennep was heavily criticised and misunderstood. It was far from his intention to make ethnography and folkloristics branches of biology, nor did he agree with Herbert Spencer's approach that society should be seen as an organism. Rather van Gennep emphasised that all three fields are interested in living things, unlike history which is mostly concerned with 'dead facts'.

[8] Zumwalt 1982, 80.

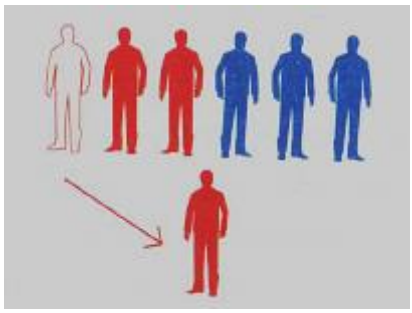
[9] Gennep 1960, 1.

[10] Gennep 1960, 26.

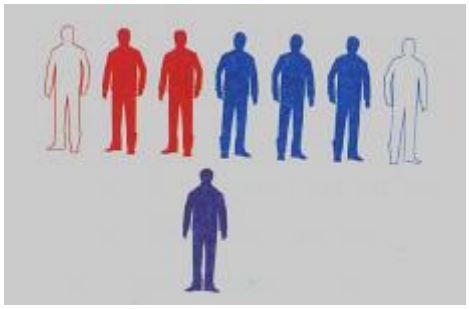
[11] Gennep 1960, 15.

... Therefore to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world."[12] In order to get from one room (or a social group respectively) to another, the subject either has to meet certain prescribed requirements or undergo some kind of assessment.

In the course of his research, van Gennep had come to realise that irrespective of occasion and modality, the rites observed share a similar and recurring structure: "The underlying arrangement is always the same. Beneath a multiplicity of forms, either consciously expressed or merely implied, a typical pattern always recurs: *the pattern of the rites of passage*."[13] This famous threefold sequence[14] consists of rites of separation, transition rites and rites of incorporation. The rites of separation isolate the ritual subject from his or her former group; during the transition rite the ritual subject is caught between the pre-ritual and post-ritual category and hence "does not belong either to the sacred or to the profane world."[15] In this intermediate phase, the ritual subject undergoes changes and thus gets prepared for the integration into the new group. And finally the rites of incorporation ensure that the ritual subject safely assumes the new social position and status. The figure below visualises a rite of passage from status 1 (red group) to status 2 (blue group) with the liminal mid-phase (purple figure):

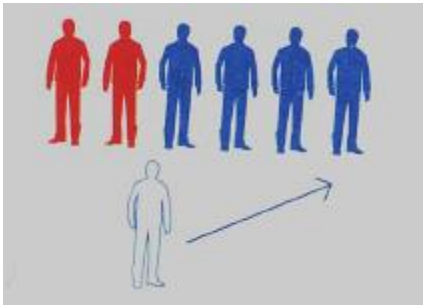


Separation:
The neophyte is separated from group 1 (red), i.e. he no longer occupies the position and role in society he used to.



Transition:
During the liminal phase, the neophyte undergoes profound changes. Here the transitional phase is visualised in two ways:
1) The purple figure indicates that the neophyte is dangling between status 1 and 2 (i.e. between red and blue).
2) One position in each group is no longer or not yet assumed.

[12] Gennep 1960, 20.
[13] Gennep 1960, 191.
[14] Gennep 1960, 11.
[15] Gennep 1960, 186.



Reintegration
The neophyte has passed through the liminal phase and has gained the knowledge required for the new status in the blue group. Now he is ready to be reintegrated into society, this time as member of group 2 (blue).

Figure 2.1 Visualisation of rites of passage.[16]

Despite this basic structure, the elaboration and importance of the three phases differ from rite to rite and depend entirely on a society's understanding of a rite. It may well be that in a particular ritual performance one of the phases is more elaborate at the expense of another one. Especially the intermediate transitional phase shows a strong tendency to turning into a rather autonomous and detached phase:[17] "These three subcategories [i.e. rites of separation, transition rites and rites of incorporation] are not developed to the same extent by all peoples or in every ceremonial pattern."[18]

In line with the metaphor of the house, van Gennep emphasises the highly symbolic value of the threshold: "It will be noted that the rites carried out on the threshold itself are transition rites."[19] It is also most probable that this association of the threshold with the transitional phase is why van Gennep decided on the technical term *liminal*,[20] with which he refers to the intermediate phase of the rites of passage. In a very unspectacular fashion van Gennep introduces the term *liminal*:

> The rites of the threshold are therefore not 'union' ceremonies, properly speaking, but rites of preparation for union, themselves preceded by rites of preparation for the transitional stage. Consequently, I propose to call the rites of separation from a previous world, *preliminal rites*, those executed during the transitional state *liminal (or threshold) rites*, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world *postliminal rites*.[21]

[16] The Museum of Communication in Bern/Switzerland ran an exhibition on rituals from November 8, 2013 until July 20, 2014. The exhibition booklet is entitled *Ritual: Ein Reiseführer zum Leben*. The illustrations above are taken from p. 35.

[17] Although often assigned to Victor Turner, it was actually van Gennep who realised the transitional phase's relative autonomy. He was astonished that nobody had noticed the peculiarity and generality of the intermediate liminal phase before him (Gennep 1960, 191).

[18] Gennep 1960, 11.

[19] Gennep 1960, 20.

[20] For a brief discussion of the term *limen* and its etymology, see *ch. 7 Appendix*. Interestingly, van Gennep neither explained nor justified why he decided on the Latin word *limen* to name the intermediate phase in rites of passage. Note that the word *liminal* has been attested both in French and in English before van Gennep's book (and its translation). For French, *Le trésor de la langue française* informs that *liminaire* was first mentioned in 1548 in Thomas Sébillet's *L'art poétique français*. For the English language, the *Online Etymology Dictionary* merely mentions that *liminal* was first documented in 1884 but does not state where.

[21] Gennep 1960, 20-21.

By drawing on a wide spectrum of examples from almost every part of the world,[22] van Gennep traces the most central phases of human life and groups rites accordingly. This is indeed a sensible approach and an elegant solution as the basic and most crucial phases and aspects of human life are shared universally. Individuals' as well as society's life is structured by periodicity, which is both connected to and influenced by celestial and seasonal changes as well as human activity: "The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another."[23] In this way van Gennep does not interlink his approach with specific cultural features.[24]

Being familiar with works by other ethnologists, van Gennep is aware that rites all over the world differ too much on various levels to allow for one general way of categorising.[25] Therefore he aims at collocating rites of a similar kind without, however, insisting on the grouping's universal validity: "I am trying to group all these rites as clearly as possible, but since I am dealing with activities I do not expect to achieve as rigid a classification as the botanists have, for example."[26]

Often concerning both individuals as well as groups, he dedicates chapters to rites taking place during pregnancy and childbirth, birth and childhood,[27] initiation rites of all kinds,[28]

[22] As is often the case with older studies, van Gennep does not specify what data and sources he uses for his analyses. Hence the origin of the data cannot be traced, nor is it possible to reconstruct whether the data (esp. if provided by a third source) have already been processed in any way.

[23] Gennep 1960, 2-3.

[24] Michael Prosser-Schell (2011, 36) misunderstands van Gennep when it comes to the universal validity of rites of passage and related concepts. He sees in van Gennep's work traces of "der Suche nach einer 'Volksseele' und einem kollektiven Volks-Charakter," which get expressed in various cultural activities. Rosemary Zumwalt, on the other hand, writes: "Van Gennep was opposed to the romantic notion of the 19th century that the folk create as a communal activity, as a reflection of their *volksgeist* or group spirit" (1982, 304). Van Gennep was interested in and wanted to trace universal categories of social action and not universal categories of thought (Zumwalt 1988, 27). Although he maintained that the structure of the rites of passage is universally applicable, he never claimed that the structures and formats of ritual are always elaborated in the same way. The scheme of rites of passage was deliberately left flexible so that it could be adapted culturally, spatially and temporally. Rites of passage are therefore not connected to an idea of *volksgeist.*

[25] Gennep 1960, 10.

[26] Gennep 1960, 11. Van Gennep briefly introduces four sets of binary opposites describing the modality of rites. Accordingly, rites can be animistic or dynamistic, sympathetic or contagious, positive or negative, and direct or indirect. When combined, sixteen different kinds of rites evolve. Despite this relatively diversified set of ritual modalities, van Gennep stresses that one rite can be interpreted in various ways as well as one interpretation can correspond to more than one kind of rite (ibid., 6ff).

[27] This is not a repetition of the previous group. While 'pregnancy and childbirth' focus on the rites for the mother, 'birth and childhood' centre on the rites for the child.

[28] Under the heading of 'initiation rites', van Gennep subsumes various types of initiations, as e.g. baptism as an initiation into a religious group; an initiation of a child into adulthood; initiations of magicians or kings. His understanding of the term is a rather literal one: it refers to any kind of being received into special subgroups or secret societies. Due to this spectrum of initiations, van Gennep strongly objects to 'initiation rites' and 'puberty rites' being used synonymously. He points out that 'social puberty' and 'physiological puberty' are not necessarily the same and thus should not be confused. As an example van Gennep refers to the marriage situation in Rome: girls can be married off at the age of twelve, but the majority of them do not menstruate until they are fourteen or fifteen, hence social and physiological puberty are not congruent (Gennep 1960, 66).

betrothal and marriage, mourning and funerals, and he ends his discussion by looking at miscellaneous rites which can be observed in many societies but are not immediately tied to a certain period of life (e.g. rites pertaining to hair).

Rites are not simply a nice side-effect of passages in life but accompany and support the ongoing transformations and thus ensure that neither the ritual subject(s) nor the public are harmed during or by the change(s). Even though the pre-ritual and post-ritual states are clearly defined by a culture (e.g. being a child vs. being an adult), it is the transition which causes serious disturbances: the ritual subject ventures on a journey into the unknown, and the surrounding group experiences a change in the social constellation and power balance: "Such changes of condition do not occur without disturbing the life of society and the individual, and it is the function of rites of passage to reduce their harmful effects."[29]

While many of his colleagues and predecessors had remained on a descriptive level and focused on what kinds of elements could be observed in specific rites and ceremonies, van Gennep's interest and research had a broader scope. Apart from the relative sequence of elements within rites, he was also concerned with their social importance and meaning: "Our interest lies not in the particular rites but in their essential significance and their relative positions within ceremonial wholes – that is, their order."[30] With regard to the significance of rites, van Gennep – unlike his peers – insisted on looking at rites in their cultural context and by no means removing them from their 'natural' surroundings.[31]

Repeatedly van Gennep criticised contemporary scholars heavily for methodological shortcomings and reproached them for too hasty generalisations and theorisations based on superficial and incomplete comparisons, which he termed "metaphysical speculations."[32] Being rooted in positivism, van Gennep strongly objected to many scholars' tendency to select and discuss data out of context in order to make them fit the pre-established theoretical framework.[33]

Nevertheless, Arnold van Gennep was rather liberal and tolerant in his approaches and definitions of terms and concepts in contrast to many of his fellow-scholars. Having criticised many other scholars for allowing only for a single method of categorising data, van Gennep succeeds in keeping a very cautious and nuanced view on his newly gained insight: "I want to reiterate that I do not claim an absolute universality or an absolute necessity for the pattern of

[29] Gennep 1960, 13.
[30] Gennep 1960, 191.
[31] When it comes to methodology, van Gennep promoted and applied, throughout almost all his scholarly work, a comparative method. In his opinion a valid comparison must be based on an extensive corpus of unmediated data and observations, which have not been torn out of context and which are handled non-judgementally. Approached in this way, a comparison is concerned with a culture's representative features, or more precisely, with abstractions of similar phenomena which are closely related in time and place (Zumwalt 1988, 80 and 83).
[32] Kimball 1960, vii.
[33] Kimball 1960, vi.

rites of passage."[34] He explicitly states that the label *rite of passage* is only one attribute of a rite among others and replaces by no means a rite's specific and culturally dependent purpose:

> It is by no means my contention that all rites of birth, initiation, marriage and the like, are only rites of passage. For, in addition to their over-all goal – to insure a change of condition or a passage from one magico-religious or secular group to another – all these ceremonies have their individual purposes. … All these rites, which have specific effective aims, occur in juxtaposition and combination with rites of passage.[35]

The relativity of his approaches surfaces in various scholarly concerns. One of them is van Gennep's proclaimed "pivoting of the sacred" (i.e. the relativity of the sacred),[36] which assumes a central role in his scholarly thinking. While he joins fellow researchers in the call for a strict separation of the sacred and the profane as one of the two universal dichotomies,[37] he regards sacredness, however, as a relative quality, a quality which can only be determined for each situation and depends on the point of view: "Characteristically, the presence of the sacred … is variable. Sacredness as an attribute is not absolute; it is brought into play by the nature of particular situations."[38] Consequently, the sacred is neither temporally nor spatially a stable quality and thus has the potential of bringing about changes. Driven by powerful forces, such changes are often perceived as threatening or dangerous, and rites are designed to keep the secular and sacred spheres clearly apart, so that no harm is done on either side.[39]

Not only was van Gennep an attentive observer and had a keen sense for anthropological patterns and details, he also allowed for relativity and flexibility in his concepts and thus enhanced their very widespread spatio-temporal applicability. In light of his dislike of rigid patterns and theories,[40] it is conjecturable whether this is why he refrained from putting

[34] Gennep 1960, 161.

[35] Gennep 1960, 11 and 12.

[36] Gennep 1960, 12.

[37] Van Gennep (1960, 189) considers the two sexes as well as the separation between the profane and the sacred as the two primary divisions in all societies.

[38] Gennep 1960, 12.

[39] In close relation to the view on the sacred, van Gennep's definitions of religion and magic call for attention as they are more open and flexible and thus allow for a much wider scope of application than, e.g. the definitions by Bronisław Malinowski or Émile Durkheim respectively (see Zumwalt 1988, 23-24, and Kimball 1960, ix). In contrast to many other scholars, van Gennep argues that religion consists of a theoretical and a practical aspect: "The latter [i.e. magic] comprises the techniques – ceremonies, rites, services – which, when accompanied by metaphysical theory, constitute religion" (Kimball 1960, ix). While the theoretical components bereft of the corresponding practices results in metaphysics, complementing a sort of magic with a different theory would result in science (Gennep 1960, 13).

[40] Van Gennep was particularly loath to put any kind of data into fixed categories and thus was not in favour of theories based on Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory (*On the Origin of Species*, 1859) and its ethnological branch of evolutionism, which promotes, *inter alia*, the idea that every society develops from *savagery* to *civilisation*. Van Gennep joined the general criticism of evolutionism and always called for a very critical and cautious use of cultural evolutionary theory. He neither liked the school's prevalent eurocentrism, nor the labels *primitive* or *highly developed societies*. He advocated considering *primitiveness* a relative factor, which can only be established in comparisons. Along the same line, van Gennep also refused the idea of intellectual progress and

forward an elaborate theory on liminality so as to maintain the flexibility of the concept.[41] Indeed he described his work on the structure of rites and liminality as presented in *Rites of Passage* as 'merely' a "rough sketch of an immense picture."[42] Even though his ideas were not enthusiastically received, van Gennep kept working on and applying his ideas of liminality etc. in his countless publications.[43]

Throughout his life, Arnold van Gennep never participated in hegemonic, academic trends and groups for the sake of acceptance and thus (often) remained a scholarly outsider, who lived and worked a fair amount in seclusion. The reason for this lies also to a large extent in his open and often merciless professional criticism of fellow scholars and his reluctance to be subjected to dominant academic currents and politics.[44] He made a strong stand for his own ideals and ideas. As a result, he became a *persona non grata* in French academia and was never appointed to a position at a French university.[45]

It was his major academic rival,[46] Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), who claimed the floor for himself and got all the prestigious positions. From 1896 to 1902, he filled the first French position of a professor in sociology at the University of Bordeaux; and after having changed to the Sorbonne in 1902, he was appointed to a professorship in Science of Education in 1906. Durkheim was thus given the opportunity to consolidate his position and influence both on a

made a strong stand for the equality of intellect among peoples: "One can talk of general progress of civilization in technical matters, but not in matters of intelligence or of art" (Gennep in Zumwalt 1988, 85).

[41] Throughout his career, van Gennep has never formed nor intended to form a school.

[42] Gennep 1960, 189.

[43] *Les rites de passage* is clearly the most famous work by van Gennep. It is often not known though that van Gennep is the author of an extensive work which he published during almost 60 years of research.

[44] Zumwalt 1982, 309.

[45] Arnold van Gennep was only once granted an academic position. In 1912 he accepted a position at the Université de Neuchâtel (CH) where he was appointed the first chair of ethnography in Switzerland. After the beginning of World War I, however, van Gennep was expelled from Switzerland for reproaching the Swiss government for being German friendly (Zumwalt 1982, 301). Indeed, van Gennep's accusations were not far-fetched. During World War I, the Swiss Army was headed by General Ulrich Wille (1848-1925), a confirmed soldier who never made a secret of his sympathies for the German Empire. On a professional level, Wille's attitude can easily be detected by his zeal for reforming the Swiss Army according to Prussian examples; in his private life Wille's pro-German stance is reflected in his marriage to the German Clara von Bismarck. Due to his bias, Ulrich Wille was also within Switzerland a controversial person. The Swiss took especial objection to Wille's army reforms which were deemed as not being in line with Swiss democracy (Specifics on Ulrich Wille based on Jaun 2013).

[46] In her biographical sketch of van Gennep, Rosemary Zumwalt correctly points out that there are many misinterpretations and misunderstandings regarding van Gennep. With respect to his contemporaries, van Gennep is often wrongly associated with scholars he was never close with in any way. Most prominent is the (mis)association of van Gennep with Émile Durkheim. Although these two big names are often mentioned in the same breath, their opinions on many central topics were in fact diametrically opposed. Whereas van Gennep rather openly attacked Durkheim, the latter never publically acknowledged van Gennep and his work (Zumwalt 1982, 306). Rooted in these animosities, van Gennep eventually objected to (almost) the whole Durkheimian school and eventually to the whole French academic system.

scholarly as well as personal level, and he became one of the leading figures in French university politics.[47]

As van Gennep refused to give up his convictions and ideas in order to gain favours in the politics of academia, he remained a scholarly outsider. Despite his disappointment with these developments, the independence afforded him the opportunity to excel in scholarship and develop concepts according to his own beliefs and convictions: "We must have complete freedom to think, and this includes liberty to digress."[48] With particular reference to the discovery of liminality, Justin Stagl comments on van Gennep's situation as follows: "Es ist vielleicht nicht zufällig, dass gerade ihm als einem 'zwischen den Stühlen' sitzenden akademischen Aussenseiter dafür [i.e. für liminale Phasen] der Blick geschärft war."[49]

Scholars who have worked on Arnold van Gennep (e.g. Zumwalt (1982/1988), Belmont (1974), Kimball (1960)) agree that van Gennep and his work have not been paid the attention they deserve, even though the concept of rites of passage and related terms are by now well-known in the field of humanities. The publication of *Les rites de passage* back in 1909 did not stir much interest among scholarship. It was only 14 years later that van Gennep's work was first received and discussed by the American anthropologist Alfred M. Tozzer in his *Social Origins and Social Continuities* (1925). Almost 20 years after Tozzer, Eliot D. Chapple and Carleton S. Coon presented their *Principles of Anthropology* (1942) where they take up van Gennep's rites of passage. Although Chapple and Coon appreciate van Gennep and the structure of the rites of passage, they still consider themselves most influenced by Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown and Durkheim.[50]

With respect to translations of *Les rites de passage*, it took almost half a century before the monograph was first translated into English in 1960.[51] In his introduction to the first English edition, Solon T. Kimball rightly calls for more translations of van Gennep's work and adds:

> The need for a translation of Arnold van Gennep's *Les rites de passage* has long been felt by those who were appreciative of the significance of his theoretical formulations. Although his influence has been considerable in some anthropological circles, his contribution, in general, has failed to reach the other social sciences. This is an unfortunate circumstance, since these other disciplines would have been greatly enriched by his analysis of ritual behavior in its relation to the dynamics of individual and group life.[52]

[47] Gabriel Tarde in Zumwalt 1982, 307.
[48] Gennep in Zumwalt 1982, 309.
[49] Stagl 1986, 90.
[50] Chapple/Coon 1942, vii-viii.
[51] See Gennep 1960, translated by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee and with an introduction by Solon T. Kimball.
[52] Kimball 1960, v.

The English translation brought about some change in the scholarly landscape and paved the way for the work's accessibility and dissemination, especially among British and American anthropologists. One of the most prominent representatives thereof is certainly Victor W. Turner. A discussion of his work follows in chapter 2.1.2.

Thanks to Victor Turner and his work, the rites of passage were given the attention and prominence they deserve: "Frequently, it is the interpretation of van Gennep's work presented by other anthropologists with which the scholar is familiar."[53] Generally speaking, mediations such as this, however, introduce the problem that (today's) scholars tend to forget or neglect where a concept or a term actually stems from and in what context it was developed.[54] This leads to inaccuracies which are repeatedly copied in scholarship; as chapter 2.1.3 will show, this is also the case with the concept of liminality. Zumwalt thus cautions about the difference between a general understanding of the concept of rites of passage and the familiarity with van Gennep's work: "However, a general acceptance of the term rites of passage and a general knowledge of the three stages does not assure a familiarity with van Gennep's work."[55]

In the late 1970s Terence S. Turner went back to van Gennep.[56] T. S. Turner seeks to reformulate and theorise upon van Gennep's model while accepting the threefold pattern of the rites of passage, including the liminal, transitional phase.[57] While van Gennep and later on Victor Turner work from the premise that rites of passage include two interacting spheres (i.e. structure and anti-structure), Terence S. Turner argues for one big basic unit, namely, "a very large class of social and cultural structures, which includes not only social structures *per se* but also the rituals that mediate them."[58] Within this all-encompassing structure he differentiates between a lower and a higher level: The lower level corresponds to van Gennep's and later on Victor Turner's social structure and thus is the location of well-defined statuses. The higher level, on the other hand, hosts all transformative and generative processes and corresponds to van Gennep's and Turner's liminal phase. The two levels are in an asymmetrical relationship because the higher level depends on the elements from the lower level and, even more so, on the rituals and transformations which mediate between the levels.[59] In the case of a transformation, the ritual subject does not merely 'switch' from the lower to the higher level, rather T. S. Turner claims that during the liminal phase the ritual

[53] Zumwalt 1988, 119.
[54] Zumwalt 1988, 119.
[55] Zumwalt 1988, 118.
[56] See Terence S. Turner 1977. In order not to confuse Terence S. Turner and Victor W. Turner, the former is henceforth referred to as T.S. Turner.
[57] To what extent T. S. Turner's article was later on taken up by scholars is not known to me. Throughout my research on liminality I have come across references to Turner's article but no (re-)evaluation or application of his four-point-model with the lower and higher level.
[58] T.S. Turner 1977, 57. T. S. Turner's premise nicely bridges to Lauri Honko (1979, 386) who is critical about whether something outside of structure (i.e. anti-structure) can exist at all. See also ch. 2.1.3.
[59] T.S. Turner 1977, 57-58.

subject integrates two (lower level) statuses at the same time. It is therefore essential that such a transformation is situated at the higher level and safeguarded by rituals.[60]

Based on these analyses and observations, T. S. Turner argues for the following reformulation of van Gennep's model: "Rather than a simple triadic sequence, in short, the elementary structure of *rites de passage* identified by Van Gennep is really composed of a pair of cross-cutting binary contrasts. These can be conceived as intersecting vertical and horizontal axes."[61] On the horizontal axis the different structural statuses are arranged, while on the vertical axis the exchange between the higher and lower levels are negotiated. Terence S. Turner adds that his model leaves enough room for the variability of rites and that "the contents of the liminal stage are thus defined by the model as situationally and culturally dependent variables."[62]

Despite the astonishingly poor general reception and acknowledgement of van Gennep's work, Stagl (1986), Prosser-Schell (2011) as well as Kimball (1960) emphasise the importance, influence and modernity of the concept of the rites of passage. According to Stagl, van Gennep's research is still important to modern and interdisciplinary scholarship because it is widely applicable and not limited to a specific type of society in the spatio-temporal continuum. He thus considers the rites of passage to be part of a ritual grammar:

> Man wird den Ansatz van GENNEPs am besten verstehen, wenn man davon ausgeht, dass er das Ritual als eine universale menschliche Ausdrucksform jenseits der sich in der Geschichte wandelnden Sprachen verstand. Er musste demnach die Existenz immer und überall gültiger und nur durch einen raum-zeitlich universellen Vergleich zu entschleiernder Gesetze des Rituellen annehmen. 'Les Rites de passage' ist also ein Stück ritueller Grammatik.[63]

In connection with Stagl's ritual grammar, Michael Prosser-Schell points out that van Gennep's approaches can be applied to ancient and/or indigenous peoples as well as modern societies. Hence van Gennep's work is only 'elementary' to the extent that it cannot be reduced anymore and serves both as preliminary conclusions as well as a starting point for further research: "Elementar erscheinen sie [i.e. van Genneps Ansätze] in dem Sinne, dass sie kaum reduziert werden können und zunächst als Befund, als empirisch-systematisches Beobachtungsresultat und dann als Ausgangsüberlegungen von Untersuchungen tauglich werden."[64]

What is more, Prosser-Schell makes a very interesting suggestion as to how van Gennep's rites of passage can be applied to modern life and data. He ponders whether scandals should be considered the modern expression and way of dealing with crises and infringement of rules and (re-)gaining control over an issue that has (temporarily) gone out of hand: "Heute ist zu

[60] T.S. Turner 1977, 56.
[61] T.S. Turner 1977, 68.
[62] T.S. Turner 1977, 68.
[63] Stagl 1986, 85, capitals in the original.
[64] Prosser-Schell 2011, 48.

überlegen, ob Skandale unter den wie Gesetzmässigkeiten wirkenden Medienpublikationen als eine Art von Übergangsriten ablaufen. Die Abläufe lassen den Versuch erkennen, das Ärgernis der Aufdeckung und die Thematisierung der Normverletzung zu ritualisieren, in rituelle Handlungsformen einzubinden, um es damit … kontrollierbar zu machen."[65]

Kimball argues for van Gennep's modernity from a different angle. He emphasises that rituals are as relevant as ever in present day society. Despite the increasing secularisation of the modern world there is no reason for neglecting "the need for ritualized expression of an individual's transition from one status to another."[66] Kimball goes as far as to argue that the lack of public rituals might be a reason for the increasing numbers of mental illnesses. People are forced to accomplish crucial transitions in private and thus have neither society's active support nor a generally acknowledged set of symbols to fall back on.[67]

Van Gennep's concept of the rites of passage is by no means dated: his concept of the rites of passage as well as other parts of his work excel and convince by flexible and adaptable approaches and definitions. Thanks to these properties they offer a manifold applicability on an interdisciplinary level.

2.1.2 VICTOR WITTER TURNER (1920-1983)

In 1920, Victor Witter Turner was born in Glasgow, Scotland, the son of an electrical engineer and an actress.[68] The fact that his mother was an actress is often held accountable for Turner's life-long interest in drama and performance. Aged eighteen (1938), he enrolled at University College London (UCL), but his literary studies with a focus on poetry and classics were interrupted by World War II. After the war, Turner experienced a phase of disorientation and pondered what direction he wanted to take in life. When he discovered Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) and Alfred Radcliffe-Brown's *The Andaman Islanders* (1922) his decision was made, and he took up anthropology at University College London (UCL). After finishing his studies in 1949, he went to Manchester University to graduate under the supervision of Max Gluckman, the head of the prominent Manchester School of Anthropology.

Having entered Gluckman's circle of influence, Turner's early work bears witness to a structural-functionalist approach.[69] The Manchester School of Anthropology set itself apart from other (British) ethnological institutes through its particular methodological approaches,

[65] Prosser-Schell 2011, 48.
[66] Kimball 1960, xvii.
[67] Kimball 1960, xvii-xviii.
[68] The bibliographical part on Victor Turner is based on Bräunlein (2012), Rochberg-Halton (1989) and McLaren (1985). Note that this introduction of Victor Turner only covers his work to the extent that it is relevant to the present PhD thesis. This includes first and foremost Turner's concepts of anti-structure, communitas and liminality. The present chapter neither aims at giving a close reading on how his work developed over the years nor at evaluating the work in detail.
[69] McLaren 1985, 19-20.

the topics discussed as well as the way research questions were formulated.[70] In addition – and in contrast to most other schools – the Manchester School also promoted its own political affiliation with Marxism. This political orientation entailed colonial criticism and a strong solidarity with the working class.

In 1950, Gluckman offered Turner a PhD position at the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in Zambia, which he accepted. Together with his wife Edith and their three children, he moved to Africa. Gluckmann wanted Turner to scrutinise acculturation among the Mambwe. Shortly after the Turners' arrival, Gluckman changed the focus of Turner's project and sent him to the Ndembu and suggested that Turner study their rituals. Being a convinced Marxist, Victor Turner was not very keen on taking up ritual studies.[71] Turner's scepticism soon vanished, as he and his wife attended more Ndembu rituals. Tuner came to experience the ritualistic and spiritual aspects which go far beyond the rational approaches he had been exposed to in London and in Manchester.[72] While still following Gluckman's basic instructions of working on the ecology, social structure and political system of the Ndembu, Turner added and stressed the importance of ritual and the essential role it plays in social processes.[73] For the publication of his doctoral thesis[74] Turner was urged, however, to move his interpretations closer to the ideals and opinions of the Manchester School.

Not being satisfied with the adaptations made, though, Turner kept searching for a more rewarding and coherent interpretation of the Ndembu rites. Finding himself in a scholarly as well as a personal crisis, he stumbled on van Gennep's *Rites of Passage*, which immediately caught his attention and triggered his life-long interest in the subject. Both van Gennep and Turner advocate that rituals are a shared universal form of communication beyond the linguistic level and that it should therefore be possible to establish a universal grammar of ritual that applies irrespective of spatial, temporal and social properties, that is, of how complex or 'primitive' a society is.[75] In reaction to van Gennep and fascinated by the liminal mid-phase, Turner soon published his famous essay "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*."[76] Turner aims to get a grasp on the continuous and often hardly noticeable changes and transformations in human life. He devotes special attention to what

[70] Bräunlein 2012, 31.

[71] While some Marxists view rituals as incompatible with the enlightened-rationalist spirit of communism, others allow for rituals as long as they strengthen solidarity and the sense of community (Stollberg-Rilinger 2013, 130-131).

[72] Bräunlein 2012, 35.

[73] Bräunlein 2012, 35.

[74] Victor W. Turner's PhD thesis is entitled *Schism and Continuity in an African Society* (1957). The present thesis refers, however, to the reprint from 1996.

[75] Bräunlein 2012, 53.

[76] The article "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*" was first published in 1964 and was reprinted various times, including as chapter 4 in Turner's *The Forest of Symbols* (1967), which will be quoted in this thesis. – Turner's interest in van Gennep was looked upon critically because the latter had not worked in the Durkheimian spirit and so was not seen as fit for the Manchester School.

emerges once the normal social structure has fallen away, or in other words: he attempts to shed light on how liminality shows itself.[77]

It was the (re)discovery of van Gennep's work which finally made Turner abandon his initial scholarly position of (British) structural-functionalism. Instead he turned to regarding society as something in flux, something dynamic that is constantly re-built and re-organised through various processes.[78] Central to these incessant processes are two major driving forces and social modalities: structure and anti-structure. The relationship between them is a paradoxical one as the modalities of social life are at the same time juxtaposed as well as closely interlinked. They complement one another meaningfully and are related in a dialectical process, and so dominate society alternatingly and cyclically. "Society (*societas*) seems to be a process rather than a thing – a dialectical process with successive phases of structure and communitas."[79]

Before turning to the discussion of Turner's key terms, I would like to prewarn the reader: Victor Turner is unfortunately neither very clear nor consistent when it comes to the definition and use of key terms as well as the relationship among them. Especially with regard to anti-structure, definitions do not crystallize easily. Throughout his works which are considered here,[80] Turner repeatedly revisits his major concepts and discusses them anew or in slightly different ways without, however, ever putting forward fixed definitions or linking previous and newly gained insights. The individual concepts are thus rather difficult to handle and keep apart. Indeed, it could be said that Turner's concepts are as equally in flux as the phenomena he aims to describe. Tobias Benzing formulates things very aptly when he says that Turner viewed much of his work as experimental and that he worked more creatively than systematically: "Turner, der sich und viele seiner Aussagen als noch in der Entwicklungsphase stehend bezeichnete, war weniger systematisch als ein inspirativ und kreativ arbeitender Ethnologe und Kulturanthropologe."[81]

ON STRUCTURE

Although most of his work focuses on anti-structure, Turner starts by expounding what he means by structure. Being well aware that numerous scholars before him have provided definitions of structure, he compares a selection of definitions in *The Ritual Process* (1969) and *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* (1974). Turner concludes that all definitions are based on the ideas of miscellaneous statuses and roles which form groups and institutions that persist

[77] Rochberg-Halton 1989, 203.

[78] In line with this re-orientation, Turner became rather cautious about the meaning and use of the term *society*. In his opinion, this term fosters the misconception of society as a static concept and does not express the central feature of society's constant reshaping and fluidity (Turner 1974, 24). Although he introduces the term *societas*, which he actually prefers to *society*, he mostly uses *society*. Turner is equally cautious regarding the term *community* as he is of *society*. Accordingly he prefers the term *communitas* to *community*, see below.

[79] Turner 1969, 203.

[80] These are Turner 1967, 1969, 1974, and 1982.

[81] Benzing 2007, 16.

over time.[82] While Turner dismisses the structure definitions by Radcliffe-Brown,[83] Lévi-Strauss (see below), and others, he agrees in part with Robert Merton who conceives of structure as "'the patterned arrangements of role-sets, status-sets, and status-sequences' *consciously* recognized and regularly operative in a given society."[84]

In Turner's understanding, structure is in the first place characterised and organised by a clear cut hierarchy, which involves the presence and general acceptance of heterogeneity and inequality, as expressed in names, ranks, titles, status distinctions, etc. An individual participates in most differently oriented groups and institutions and thus is only with certain aspects of his personality involved in each group. "By 'structure' I mean … 'social structure' … a more or less distinctive arrangement of specialized mutually dependent institutions and the institutional organization of positions and/or of actors which they imply."[85] It is the sum of all these groups that eventually amounts to the whole personality of an individual.

It is especially Lévi-Strauss's take on structure that Turner is opposed to because he considers it as being too abstract and structuralist. More particularly, Turner does not agree with Lévi-Strauss for two main reasons: Fistly, Lévi-Strauss argues for structure encompassing aspects which the human mind cannot consciously perceive despite being governed by them. Turner, on the other hand, includes in his definition only those parts of structure that are widespread in society and which can be perceived consciously. Secondly, Turner is critical of Lévi-Stauss's equation of *society* and *structure*. He is critical of this equalisation because he is convinced that non-structural social relationships are also possible.[86] He therefore considers society to be *social-structural*[87] and not merely *structural*. By using the term *social-structural*, Turner emphasises that society does not collapse completely when structure falls away or is removed because there is still the social aspect, which holds people together through deeply social feelings of connectedness.[88]

Victor Turner maintains that studying structure alone is not very rewarding because of society's constant flux and changes: "The social world is a world in becoming, not a world in being … and for this reason studies of social structure *as such* are irrelevant."[89] The fluidity of society points to the fact that there is more than one element at play. Structure is not in perpetual motion and would eventually petrify without the dialectical relationship with a

[82] Turner 1969, 126.

[83] Radcliffe-Brown and his British followers considered structure to consist of "repeated patterns of action", hence forming "an observable uniformity" that can always be empirically observed (Turner 1974, 235f). This view conflicts considerably with Turner's idea of a fluid and constantly changing structure.

[84] Turner 1974, 237, inside quote by Robert Merton. Turner also renders Merton's definitions of the terms: "By 'role-sets' Robert Merton designates 'the actions and relationships that flow from a social status'; 'status-sets' refers to the probable congruence of various positions occupied by an individual; and 'status-sequences' means the probable succession of positions occupied by an individual through time" (ibid.).

[85] Turner 1969, 166-167.

[86] Turner 1969, 131.

[87] Turner 1969, 131.

[88] Turner calls these feelings "socially positive forces" (1974, 251).

[89] Turner 1974, 24, italics in the original.

complementary sphere. Turner therefore considers society as being influenced and shaped by two forces, which he calls *structure* and *anti-structure*.

Turner compares society to a mathematical formula or equation which needs "its minus signs as well as its pluses."[90] He associates the pluses with the social-structural and the minuses with the social anti-structure, and so balances the formula of society: "The equivalence of two expressions is affirmed by a formula containing negations. It may be said that positive structuralism can only become processualism by accepting the concept of social anti-structure as a theoretical operator."[91] Despite being mutually exclusive, the signs refer to each other and enter into a dialogue, which initiates a continuous process.

ON ANTI-STRUCTURE

As mentioned above, Turner is not always very clear when it comes to definitions, and this is also the case with his use of the term anti-structure. In the first place, he defines this concept *ex negativo*: anti-structure comprises everything structure has not or is not. The negative connotation of the prefix *anti-* is, however, misleading. *Anti-* does not imply utter opposition to and the intentional and active destruction of structure, rather, the prefix is to be understood non-judgementally in the sense of simply expressing anti-structure's complementary difference to structure. Anti-structure is neither inherently evil nor destructive. Only from the perspective of the positively connoted structure is anti-structure conceived as being disruptive.[92]

Equally opaque is how Turner portrays the relationship between the concepts of anti-structure, communitas and liminality.[93] In most cases Turner uses anti-structure as an umbrella term for communitas and liminality: "Roughly, the concepts of liminality and communitas define what I mean by anti-structure."[94] While communitas is a social modality and refers to the direct and unmediated relationship among the people involved, liminality describes the transition which a ritual subject undergoes in the course of a rite of passage. All three key concepts share the fate of terminability since anti-structure and its related phenomena can never manifest themselves and become stable. Eventually they all have to give way to structure and heterogeneity.

ON COMMUNITAS

Victor Turner prefers the term *communitas* to *community*, because in his opinion the latter denotes a rather general "area of common living," whereas *communitas* refers to a special

[90] Turner 1974, 44.
[91] Turner 1974, 44-45.
[92] Turner 1974, 50.
[93] Tobias Benzing (2007, 72 fn257) points out that Turner often uses the terms *anti-structure* and *communitas* synonymously, which reflects his inconsistency in the use of technical terms.
[94] Turner 1974, 273.

"modality of social relationship,"[95] which also leaves room for Turner's idea of an organically shifting society.[96] In contrast to structure's rigid and prescriptive organisation and the focus on an individual's position within a hierarchy, which is basically a mode of exclusion, communitas is essentially a mode of inclusion and embraces everybody irrespective of structural backgrounds, positions, attributes, etc.: "Essentially, communitas is a relationship between concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals,"[97] and the boundaries of communitas are thus "ideally coterminous with those of the human species."[98] Due to communitas's focus on the sentiment of humanity, Turner calls it a "primordial mode of human interlinkage,"[99] without which nobody can exist.

Calling communitas a "primordial mode of human interlinkage" does not mean, however, that communitas is prevalent among only archaic or indigenous peoples.[100] In all ages, places and societies, human life has included alternating phases of structure and communitas, irrespective of a society's 'primitivity' or 'complexity'. The human being is not solely a "homo hierarchicus"[101] but can and in fact needs to live without structure for a limited period of time.[102] Like this, growing tensions in one modality (particularly in structure) are periodically released by switching to the other modality.[103] Even if it appears paradoxical at first sight, it is only through this constant momentum that a society remains stable and thriving and does not run into the danger of petrifying or decaying. The crucial and dominant factor in this relationship of structure and communitas, or indeed in any kind of anti-structure, is time: "The basic and perennial human social problem is to discover what is the right relation between these modalities at a specific time and place."[104]

Victor Turner introduces three types of communitas: 1) existential or spontaneous communitas, 2) normative communitas, and 3) ideological communitas.[105] Turner emphasises

[95] Both quotes from Turner 1969, 96. Nevertheless, communitas must not be confused with structure's community and other social activities within structure (ibid.).
[96] Turner 1969, 96 and 1974, 24.
[97] Turner 1969, 131.
[98] Turner 1969, 132.
[99] Turner 1974, 266. Viewing communitas as a basic human need, Turner also compares it to the religious notion of love, that is, "the love of man and the love of God" (ibid.).
[100] Turner 1969, 130.
[101] Turner 1974, 250.
[102] Turner points out that people go crazy and societies enter crises when being deprived of phases of communitas (1974, 266).
[103] Nowadays, among the best known phases of communitas in the Western world are the carnival festivities. For a couple of days actions, behaviour and statements are allowed which would be considered highly impolite and inappropriate in times of structure. Prominent among such acts is the open and trenchant criticism of important persons in high offices, as well as exposing persons and institutions to ridicule. During the festivities such (mis-) behaviour is not punished and so nobody has to fear any consequences. In former times it was the court jester alone who was constantly given the privilege to criticise and make fun of the ruler and the members of the high society.
[104] Turner 1974, 266.
[105] Turner 1969, 132f.

though that it is only the first type, the existential or spontaneous communitas, which is proper communitas and shows all the relevant features such as spontaneity, immediacy and equality among the participants. Normative communitas (type 2), on the other hand, evolves when existential communitas is either kept up too long, often in an attempt to preserve it. In this case communitas automatically starts developing an idiosyncratic structure,[106] and tries to set up an alternative social system.[107] In this regard, normative communitas borders the ideological communitas (type 3), which is most prominent in sketches of utopian societies. Evidently, these three categories are not equally well rooted in communitas. Although inspired by existential communitas, type 2 and type 3 should be considered structure rather than communitas. As Edenic as (existential) communitas may sound and while essential both for individuals and societies, it is elusive because it cannot be provoked or triggered by special behaviour or actions. Rather, it happens spontaneously and without people's active interaction: "Communitas is, existentially speaking and in its origins, purely spontaneous and self-generating."[108]

In this context, Tobias Benzing mentions the philosophical concept of *Unverfügbarkeit* (indisposability).[109] In theology *Unverfügbarkeit* expresses the idea that aspects like luck and indeed life itself lie beyond man's reach. They cannot be influenced or changed through human intervention and are thus considered to be steered by a divine power. Turner is not as explicit in his observations; all the same he states that communitas is a question of mercy and not of law.[110] So, communitas is neither bound to nor can it be conjured up through specific premises or measures. Communitas's temporal and spatial occurrence can only be defined – again – *ex negativo*: it arises whenever and wherever structure has fallen away.[111]

While Turner makes it quite explicit that his concept of communitas is neither to be confused with Durkheim's *solidarity*,[112] nor with Georges Gurvitch's *Einswerdung*[113] (communion), he sees many parallels between communitas and Martin Buber's *das Zwischenmenschliche* (sentiment of humanity).[114] In 1923 the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber (1878-1965) published his programmatic work *Ich und Du* (*I and Thou*) where he

[106] Turner 1969, 132.
[107] This is for example the case with religious orders. Turner (1969, 140ff.) refers in this regard to the Franciscan order and its very beginnings.
[108] Turner 1974, 243.
[109] Benzing 2007, 95. The concept of the *Unverfügbarkeit* was first introduced to philosophy by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) in the early 1920s.
[110] Turner 1982, 49.
[111] Turner 1969, 126.
[112] Turner's communitas is based on the principle of inclusiveness and is thus not in accordance with Durkheim's *solidarity*, which always involves "an in-group/out-group contrast" (Turner 1969, 132).
[113] Unlike Gurvitch's notion of *communion*, Turner's communitas does not aim at reaching deep(er) layers of the self through widening one's consciousness. Communitas is first and foremost an expression of and interest in a direct and unmediated relationship between human beings.
[114] Turner 1969, 111.

introduces the *Philosophie des Zwischen* (philosophy of intersubjectivity).[115] He sees the unity of *I-Thou*[116] as one – or actually the initial – primary word in human society. Neither component of this unit can exist alone, both the *I* and the *Thou* depend on each other: "Es gibt kein Ich an sich, sondern nur das Ich des Grundworts Ich-Du."[117] Only in this immediate relationship of *I-Thou* is real life present and only then can the human being actually become an *I*.[118] Buber's interest therefore concerns first and foremost the *I* seen in relation to its counterpart *Thou*.

Buber's notion of intersubjectivity is also what Turner refers to with his concept of communitas: seeing and accepting the other in his highly individual nature, and based on that entering an immediate and egalitarian relationship. What is more, both Buber's *I-Thou* relationship as well as Turner's communitas are products of spontaneity and so subjected to the notion of indisposability. Very similar to Turner (see above), Buber also sees in the interaction *I-Thou* an act of mercy: "Das Du [*Thou*] begegnet mir von Gnaden – durch Suchen wird es nicht gefunden."[119] In his opinion, entering an *I-Thou* relationship includes thus a transcendental element which can be described as an instance of encountering God.[120]

In order to underline the necessity, or rather usefulness of communitas, and Buber's intersubjectivity, Victor Turner introduces Lao Tze's famous meditation on the wheel:[121]

> We put thirty spokes together and call it a wheel;
> But it is on the space where there is nothing that the usefulness of the wheel depends.
>
> We turn clay to make a vessel;
> But it is on the space where there is nothing that the usefulness of the vessel depends.
>
> We pierce doors and windows to make a house;
> And it is on these spaces where there is nothing that the usefulness of the house depends.
>
> Therefore just as we take advantage of what is, we should recognize the usefulness of what is not.[122]

In his poem Lao Tze draws our attention to the fact that usefulness does not necessarily lie in the tangible and material aspects of things such as the wheel, the pottery vessel and the architecture of houses, but that the value lies just as much in the emptiness of these objects. Turner describes the Chinese poem's relation to communitas and Buber as follows:

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[115] Gabriel Marcel (1991, 42) translates Buber's German term *Philosophie des Zwischen* as "philosophy of intersubjectivity".

[116] Buber's second primary word *I-It* is left out here.

[117] Buber in Wehr 1995, 81. The passages on Martin Buber as well as the German quotes are based on and taken from Wehr (1995); as an English translation of Buber's *I-Thou*, I recommend Smith (1937).

[118] Buber in Wehr 1995, 82.

[119] Buber in Wehr 1995, 82.

[120] Buber in Wehr 1995, 83.

[121] Turner 1969, 127. The poem is part of Lao Tze's *Tao Te Ching* (The Book of the Way of Virtue), which is often dated to the 6th c. BC.

[122] Waley 1994, ch. 11.

> Just because the communitas component is elusive, hard to pin down, it is not unimportant. … Communitas, with its unstructured character, representing the 'quick' of human interrelatedness, what Buber has called *das Zwischenmenschliche*, might well be represented by the 'emptiness at the center,' which is nevertheless indispensable to the functioning of the structure of the wheel.[123]

ON LIMINALITY

Van Gennep's notion of liminality fascinates Turner early on in his academic career and he famously terms it the *betwixt and between*. Turner does not merely absorb the concept, but elaborates on and extends it. In contrast to van Gennep, who defines liminality solely as the mid-phase in rites of passage, Turner conceives of liminality as an inter-structural situation that occurs in any transitional period between two stable, structural states.[124] In a Lévi-Straussian fashion, Turner lists the opposing binary properties of structure and liminality respectively, as follows:

LIMINALITY	STRUCTURE
transition	state
totality	partiality
homogeneity	heterogeneity
communitas	structure
equality	inequality
anonymity	systems of nomenclature
absence of property	property
absence of status	status
nakedness or uniform clothing	distinctions of clothing
sexual continence	sexuality
minimization of sex distinctions	maximization of sex distinctions
absence of rank	distinctions of rank
humility	just pride of position
disregard for personal appearance	care for personal appearance
no distinctions of wealth	distinctions of wealth
unselfishness	selfishness
total obedience	obedience only to superior rank
sacredness	secularity
sacred instruction	technical knowledge
silence	speech
suspension of kinship rights and obligations	kinship rights and obligations
continuous reference to mystical powers	intermittent reference to mystical powers
foolishness	sagacity
simplicity	complexity
acceptance of pain and suffering	avoidance of pain and suffering.
heteronomy	degrees of autonomy

Figure 2.2 Juxtaposition of the characteristic features of liminality and structure according to Victor Turner.[125]

[123] Turner 1969, 127.
[124] Turner 1967, 93-94.
[125] Turner 1969, 106-107.

This characterisation of liminality and structure is reminiscent of the binary opposites of nature and culture. When making this comparison,[126] Turner sees a twofold relationship of liminality to nature and culture. On the one hand, liminality is associated with chaos or nature because of its prevalent and hard to control forces. On the other hand, Turner considers culture to be the driving force in these relationships because it both sets up structure as well as triggers anti-structural phases: "It is culture that fabricates structural distinctions; it is culture too that eradicates these distinctions in liminality."[127] Hence, both nature and culture evolve as paradoxical forces as either of them both destroys and creates. So, if nature/liminality and culture/structure enter a dialogic relationship and alternately dominate the scene, it is actually two paradoxical forces that interact. This train of thought will not be considered further here though.

When it comes to the definition and segregation of communitas and liminality, Turner is not always as strict and straightforward as scholars would wish for. The main difference between these two notions lies in the fact that communitas is a social modality and thus describes the relationship of people among each other, while liminality refers to a non-structural, transitional phase which is often embedded in a rite (of passage): "What I call liminality … is a sphere or domain of action or thought rather than a social modality [i.e. like communitas]. Indeed, liminality may imply solitude rather than society, the voluntary or involuntary withdrawal of an individual from a social-structural matrix."[128] Nevertheless communitas and liminality are fairly closely interconnected. This is due to the fact that a group of ritual, liminal subjects,[129] often experiences communitas: "It is in liminality that communitas emerges, if not as a spontaneous expression of sociability, at least in a cultural and normative form – stressing equality and comradeship as norms."[130]

Upon entering (Turnerian) liminality, ritual subjects (or, neophytes, as Turner calls them)[131] are levelled, that is, they are stripped of their names, titles, ranks and offices and are so turned into uniform and equal human beings without any individual features. Neophytes are not granted any possessions and are subjected to complete obedience towards the elder who is in charge of the ritual. What is more, neophytes are often treated as being either sexless or androgynous, which (additionally) emphasises their momentary ambiguity which is highly characteristic of liminality.

[126] Turner 1974, 252.
[127] Turner 1974, 253.
[128] Turner 1974, 52.
[129] Note that the adjective *liminal* describes both the transitional phase as well as the ritual subject undergoing it (Turner 1969, 94-95).
[130] Turner 1974, 232.
[131] Turner uses a number of synonymous terms when referring to individuals undergoing a liminal phase. He calls them *transitional beings*, *liminal personae*, *initiates*, *neophytes*, *novices*, and *initiands* (see Turner 1967, 94-95 and 1974, 232). Except for the misleading expression *initiand*, this PhD thesis will use the other listed terms by Turner interchangeably.

Bereft of all structural and individualistic features, the neophytes are 'reduced' to human "prima materia,"[132] which is ready for being shaped and formed into something new. It is on this premise that neophytes are considered ready for being taught society's sacra, traditionally a special corpus of predominantly numinous, religious, metaphysical, and philosophical knowledge: "In liminality resides the germ not only of religious *askesis*, discipline, and mysticism, but also of philosophy and pure science."[133] This newly gained knowledge grants the subjects insights into previously unfamiliar, obscure or even threatening issues. Even if parts of the newly obtained insights may at first seem out of context and thus meaningless, they unfold their deeper meaning and relevance in the course of time and so assume importance for the individual.

The simultaneous destruction and construction illustrate that liminality is, *inter alia*, characterised by paradoxical processes.[134] After an individual's complete de(con)struction[135] and reduction to the *prima materia*, where something, or rather someone, new is created who is eventually fully re-introduced and re-established in society. Intertwining both destruction and creation so closely demonstrates the wide range of potentiality with regard to liminality: it is a modality which is both far more destructive as well as far more constructive than structure could ever be.[136] In the context of (de-)construction it is not astounding that the images of birth, death and rebirth are present and apply to all liminal situations.[137] Hence, "Liminality may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise."[138] As liminality offers a wide spectrum of possibilities on what can happen during that phase, Victor Turner employs the terminology of

[132] Turner 1967, 98. Alternatively, Turner compares neophytes also to a "tabula rasa" or a "blank slate" (1969, 103).

[133] Turner 1974, 242, italics in the original. Although liminality belongs to the realm of anti-structure, Turner acknowledges this phase as an underlying structure in Lévi-Strauss's sense to the extent that it is a phase of learning and thus features a structure of "symbols and ideas, an instructional structure" (ibid., 240).

[134] On the paradoxes in the context of liminality Turner comments: "This coincidence of opposite processes and notions in a single representation characterizes the peculiar unity of the liminal: that which is neither this nor that, and yet is both" (Turner 1967, 99).

[135] The aspect of destruction is at times emphasised or increased when (physical) suffering, torturing or self-sacrifices are involved in the procedure (Turner 2003, 126 and 129). In Old Norse literature, this aspect of self-sacrifices features prominently: Old Norse mythology reports that Óðinn sacrifices himself twice in order to gain knowledge. First, he gives one eye as a pledge for knowledge and mystic vision; the second time he obtains runic knowledge through self-hanging on the world tree Yggdrasill.

[136] Benzing 2007, 81.

[137] Turner (1967, 99) observed that in liminal situations (indigenous) people often use one single symbol to express both decay and growth. Among such symbols, are the bear (being 'dead' while hibernating and 'reborn' in spring), the snake ('death' and 'rebirth' when moulting), the tunnel (standing both for a tomb and a womb), and nakedness (being associated both with a dead body and with a newborn).

[138] Turner 1967, 97.

linguistics and calls liminality "the subjunctive mood" which hosts "all that may be, might be, could be, perhaps even should be."[139]

Due to its powerful indeterminacy, liminality "is almost everywhere held to be sacred or 'holy', possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency."[140] Nevertheless liminality is not associated with safety, peace and purity, but with danger and pollution. In this context, Turner refers to Mary Douglas and her famous work *Purity and Danger* (1966). Douglas's definition of dirt is strongly reminiscent of Turner's liminality. This is not to mean that liminality is '(social) dirt' rather that both notions include or refer to elements which fall between categories and are thus not integrated into a given structure:

> If we can abstract pathogenicity and hygiene from our notion of dirt, we are left with the old definition of dirt as matter out of place. … Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt, there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements.[141]

It is Douglas's conviction that man's reaction to (material) dirt is equivalent to the reaction to any kind of (symbolical) ambiguity or anomaly.[142] Especially those in charge of structure fear liminality's close connection to the magico-religious and its seemingly subversive and transformative powers. Being located between classificatory boundaries, liminality presents a major source of danger and pollution and thus must be hedged off from structure as any other source of (material) pollution, too. In case of (ritual) liminality, any separation between the sacred and the profane always fulfils two functions: on the one hand, prohibitions prevent the sacred from being defiled by the profane, but on the other hand, the very same prohibitions also make sure that the power of the sacred cannot immediately 'contaminate' the profane.[143] Because of this fragile balance, both the boundary between the two spheres as well as the liminal neophyte himself require careful treatment and protection: "The person who must pass from one [state] to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others."[144] Transitional phases are therefore accompanied by rituals in order to protect the two spheres from each other, and to safeguard the neophyte during the ritual journey.

ON THE SOCIAL DRAMA

As early as in his PhD thesis, *Schism and Continuity in an African Society: A Study of Ndembu Village Life* (1957),[145] Victor Turner first described the concept of the social drama.

[139] Turner 2003, 123.
[140] Turner 1969, 128.
[141] Douglas 2002, 44.
[142] Douglas 2002, 5-6.
[143] Douglas 2002, 9.
[144] Douglas 2002, 119.
[145] Turner's PhD thesis, *Schism and Continuity* (1957), will always be quoted from the 1996-reprint.

While staying with the Ndembu he soon discovered that the tribe dealt with situations of crisis in an organised manner of a re-occurring sequence of phases.[146] It is far from being Turner's opinion that the social drama is restricted to the Ndembu only. While acknowledging variations of the basic pattern, he claims "that the social drama is well-nigh universal processual form and represents a perpetual challenge to all aspirations to perfection in social and political organization."[147]

The social drama is triggered by a breach (phase 1) which mostly encompasses "the infraction of a rule of morality, law, custom, or etiquette, in some public arena."[148] This infringement disrupts a community's equilibrium. Through such disturbances, however, a community sharpens its awareness of shared values and foundational principles: "Beneath it [i.e. the breach] there becomes slowly visible the less plastic, more durable, but nevertheless gradually changing basic social structure, made up of relations which are relatively constant and consistent."[149] During the second phase, the situation aggravates. In extreme cases, the crisis can even become co-terminous with already existent tensions and conflicts.

In order to limit the social gap, adjustive and redressive mechanisms come into play and seek to solve the conflict and restore the equilibrium in the third phase of the social drama. At this point a society is forced to reflect on itself, make sense of what has happened and to select redressive tools according to the nature and extent of the disturbances.[150] Considering that a society is constantly in flux, regularising processes are never conclusively completed and so defined positions as well as gaps of indeterminacy[151] are continuously generated.[152] The major task of the redressive phase is to spot and clarify aspects which were insufficiently defined prior to the crisis and thus caused the breach. It is the tension between the determined and undetermined elements which is threatening and not the indeterminacy per se. Hence indeterminacy should not be considered something negative, "rather, it is potentiality, the possibility of becoming."[153] It goes without saying that the redressive phase of the social drama is immediately associated with liminality or the transitional phase in rites of passage

[146] Turner 1996, 91.
[147] Turner 2003, 118.
[148] Turner 2003, 116.
[149] Turner 2003, 116.
[150] Turner 2003, 122. Agreeing with W. Dilthey, Turner argues that it is only possible to make sense of a social disruption when considering what has happened in the past: "Dismembering may be a prelude to remembering, which is not merely restoring some past intact but setting it in living relationship to the present" (ibid., 131).
[151] Turner 2003, 122ff. Despite using the term *indeterminacy*, Victor Turner neither mentions nor connects his use of the term to Wolfgang Iser's *gap of indeterminacy* (Iser 1989), nor does Turner explicitly equate liminality with indeterminacy. A connection would not be far-fetched though: for both Turner and Iser, the recipient is urged to decipher a written or social narrative respectively by making sense of *gaps of indetermincay* on the basis of previous experiences. Similar to liminality, indeterminacy is thus an instance of "that which is not yet settled, concluded, and known" (Turner 2003, 123).
[152] Turner 2003, 122-3.
[153] Turner 2003, 123.

respectively. It is the period which offers a platform to shape and steer the outcome of the on-going process, a key period of transition and (re-)creation.

The title of Turner's PhD thesis, *Schism or Continuity*, actually refers to the fourth and final phase of the social drama and suggests that disturbances do not necessarily result in a happy ending. Turner sketches two possible endings: either the former equilibrium[154] is restored or the community accepts that the social drama has inevitably caused an "irreparable breach"[155] which forces the community to come up with a new structure and organisation. In either case, the crisis and the newly found agreements serve as an ideal opportunity to consolidate social rules and values. Consequently, the process of the social drama also allows for insights into the underlying set of rules and conventions which form the backbone of social interaction: "The social drama is a limited area of transparency on the otherwise opaque surface of regular, uneventful social life."[156]

Despite this statement which suggests that daily life is monotonous, it has to be kept in mind that Turner strongly advocates a (spatially and temporally) dynamic understanding of social life. The social dramas crucially contribute to a community's flux: "I [Victor Turner] tend to regard the social drama in its full formal development, its full phase structure, as a process of converting particular values and ends, distributed over a range of actors, into a system (which is always temporary and provisional) of shared or consensual meaning."[157] It is above all, the (self-)reflection of initially disrupting factors in phase 3 that eventually makes the social drama a constructive and meaningful process. As the possible results in phase four of the social drama illustrate, accompanying ritual performances are not merely endless repetitions of the ever-same acts but they undergo changes themselves because they (have to) adapt to a community's newly established or confirmed social equilibrium.[158]

In his concise and critical overview of Turner's life and work, Peter Bräunlein (2012) calls Victor Turner a transitional figure whose ideas and work exerted considerable influence on modern ritual studies.[159] Inspired by the ongoing (social) changes during the 1960s Turner not only broadened scholarship's scope by analysing a wide spectrum of data but also modernised the field by coming up with new concepts and key terms and testing their epistemic value in a playful manner.[160] It is especially Turner's creative methods and his multi-disciplinary studies which facilitate the access for scholars from different fields. It is thus not astonishing that his concepts of anti-structure, communitas and liminality have quickly found their way into many

[154] Turner states though that "the new equilibrium is seldom a replica of the old" because "it is necessary to remember that after disturbance has occurred and readjustments have been made, there may have taken place profound modifications in the internal relations of the group" (1996, 161).
[155] Turner 1996, 92.
[156] Turner 1996, 93.
[157] Turner 2003, 121.
[158] Bräunlein 2012, 143.
[159] Bräunlein 2012, 151.
[160] Bräunlein 2012, 150.

other disciplines. The adoption of Turner's concepts is also facilitated by the fact that similar to van Gennep, Turner's work does not present a self-contained school: "Victor Turner hat weder ein geschlossenes Denksystem noch eine 'Schule' hinterlassen. Der Modus des Unabgeschlossenen ('unfinishedness') war charakteristisch."[161]

This state of being unfinished, however, makes it difficult to summarise and to formulate concluding remarks on Turner's ideas and concepts. Due to these circumstances, Turner's work has hardly ever faced fundamental criticism. Rather, it is his categories of analysis that have been criticised with regard to their relevance and distinctiveness.[162] Bräunlein lists the following five major points of criticism:[163]

1. Turner tried in vain to leave structural functionalism behind.[164] The problem lies in the fact that Turner cannot escape the (trained) structuralist thinking even more so as he attempts to trace and describe the structure and regularity of social phenomena. Even though he wants to open up the understanding of rituals' function and advocates a more flexible approach to society, he must admit that rituals fulfil a stabilising function in a community. In addition, Turner's concept of society has been reproached for being cyclical and not well rooted in a historical continuum.
2. The analogies used by Turner tend to make his concepts appear rather vague and can therefore easily be applied to diverse fields and data.[165] Some scholars have therefore criticised Turner for having tested his approaches on too many cultures through time and space. In search of a formula that holds universally true, Turner kept his key concepts rather general which, paradoxically enough, does not leave enough possibilities to tailor them to a community's individual system of symbols and idiosyncratic cultural features.
3. Turner's analyses tend to be ideologically coloured by idealisation, mysticism,[166] ahistorical deductions and his open adhesion to Catholicism. Several scholars criticise Turner for closely interweaving his personal religious convictions and opinions with his studies. Robin Horton reproaches Turner in particular for using African religions in order to reconstruct 'the one religion'[167] which, however, is strongly influenced by Jewish-Christian features. Also Paola Ivanov (1993) is quite critical of Turner's concepts, especially regarding his methodology as well as the strong influence of his personal convictions. His approach to data suggests "dass die in eine Kette

[161] Bräunlein 2012, 150. Schomburg-Scherff (2000, 205) mentions though that scholars have criticised Turner for his often blurry definitions of terms and concepts.
[162] Bräunlein 2012, 152.
[163] Bräunlein 2012, 152.
[164] Paragraph based on Bräunlein 2012, 152-153.
[165] Paragraph based on Bräunlein 2012, 153.
[166] Turner's tendency to idealise and mysticise things appears in many places, and surfaces especially when he uses poetry (e.g. by William Blake) to underline his argument.
[167] Bräunlein 2012, 154.

wechselseitiger Bestätigungen eingebauten Schlussfolgerungen weniger von den dargestellten Tatsachen bestimmt sind als vielmehr von Turners innerer Überzeugung."[168] Also some of Turner's key concepts such as communitas and liminality have been influenced by personal experiences, in this case his interest in and conversion to Catholicism. Lacking a solid, scientific foundation, Turner's concepts lose their scientific value and efficaciousness as (widely applicable) tools. Turner's work is thus rather an expression of his "spekulative Philosophie"[169] rather than embedded in anthropological research.[170]

When it comes to symbols it has been pointed out that their interpretation is often more important to the analyst than to the performer, to whom the correct performance of the ritual is more relevant. This leads to the issue of what meaning and importance rituals have to different parties. Volker Barth (2002) rebukes Turner for the tacit assumption that all rituals are meaningful in themselves, in addition to being meaningful in their immediate social context. Barth questions whether it is feasible that the (original) meaning can be passed on and understood over a long period of time, and whether a ritual has the same meaning to all participants. He suggests that the original meaning slowly becomes diluted over time, even if rituals still get performed, and that individual belief is equally important to the process of creating meaning.[171]

4. Turner's concept of ritual does not take gender issues into account. Among others, Caroline Walker Bynum has pointed out that Turner's findings apply exclusively to the male social world. In her article "Women's Stories, Women's Symbols" (1992), Walker Bynum presents close readings of saints' lives, both male and female, and points out how differently liminality is handled for the two sexes. While male saints experience complete social dramas, female saints' social dramas remain incomplete.[172] Before becoming saints, males often lead what is considered a sinful life and thus need a climactic break in order to enter the path of virtue.[173] Women on the other hand do not face such an inversion in life; rather their role is focused on

[168] Ivanov 1993, 245.
[169] Ivanov 1993, 245.
[170] When it comes to Turner's selection and interpretation of data, Ivanov says: "Der reale Erkenntniswert von Turners Konzeptionen wird allerdings nicht nur von der weitläufigen, unsystematischen Art seiner Erörterung allzu oft verdeckt, sondern auch durch methdologische Schwächen und ideologische Voreingenommenheit verringert" (1993, 243). Ivanov makes the further criticism that Turner neither documents nor presents his sources in a scientific way. In addition, she considers problematic his rather random selection, unsatisfactory presentation and discussion of data. Firstly, Turner does not clearly make a distinction between the presentation and the interpretation of data, but does both simultaneously. Secondly the data does not form the basis on which he works towards his concepts, instead he selectively uses the data to illustrate his theories. On the problematic aspects of Turner's research on the Ndembu, see Ivanov 1993, 242-246.
[171] Barth 2002, paragraphs 21-24.
[172] Walker Bynum 1992, 43.
[173] Walker Bynum 1992, 43.

providing continuity in social life. Not featuring conspicuous structures and events, female saints' lives are rather conceived of as continuous communitas: "One either has to see the woman's religious stance as permanently liminal or as never quite becoming so."[174] This view has roots in the notion that women represent a different sphere and offer an "inner, often mystical repose."[175] This difference between male and female liminal experiences and the notion of women offering an inward oriented counter-sphere are views and opinions predominantly held by males. She explicitly makes the criticism that female liminality is in most cases both supervised and told by men.[176] Walker Bynum thus accuses Turner of joining the hegemonic approach and looking *at* women from a male perspective instead of assuming a female perspective.[177]

Walker Bynum therefore doubts the wide applicability of Turner's social drama and van Gennep's liminality, not least with regard to women's lives, and concludes:

> My work on late medieval religiosity thus indicates that Turner's notion of liminality, in the expanded, 'metaphorical' sense which he has used for nonprimitive societies, is applicable only to men. Only men's stories are full social dramas; only men's symbols are full reversals. Women are fully liminal only to men.[178]

5. Turner overemphasises the element of the transformational-religious, and he refuses to consider the 'dark side' of rituals, communitas, and liminality. He has repeatedly been criticised for portraying the processes of liminality and communitas as genuinely positive forces and sources of humanity, which always lead to a happy ending. It has been pointed out, though, that the ambivalence of anti-structure also affects its moral stand:

> Grundsätzlich, und das ist auffallend, schenkt er [Turner] den dunklen Seiten menschlicher Existenz keine Beachtung. Über Kriegs- und Tötungsrituale, Menschenopfer oder kultischen Kannibalismus etwa oder über Hinrichtungen als theatralische Inszenierungen, findet sich nichts bei Turner.[179]

It is mostly René Girard and Maurice Bloch who criticise Turner in this regard.[180] In *La violence et le sacré* (1972) Girard advocates the long-standing idea of negative violence being defused through the transformation into holy violence. The sacrifice which is necessary for this metamorphosis is at the same time violent and yet

[174] Walker Bynum 1992, 33.
[175] Walker Bynum 1992, 37.
[176] Bräunlein 2012, 158-159.
[177] "What I am suggesting is exactly that Turner looks *at* women; he stands with the dominant group (males) and sees women (both as symbol and as fact) as liminal to men" (Walker Bynum 1992, 33).
[178] Walker Bynum 1992, 49.
[179] Bräunlein 2012, 162.
[180] Bräunlein 2012, 160ff.

redeeming and essential; in this way, the transitional phase is not utterly positive but rather highly ambiguous in its moral stand.

Similar to Girard, Maurice Bloch regards violence as a key element in transitional phases. During this period, the ritual subject is subdued by and at the mercy of transcendental forces. According to Bloch transitional creativity springs from these forces and not from human (ritual) activity. In contrast to Turner, Bloch does not assign great importance to the transitional phase as it is merely a preparatory phase for the ensuing reintegration.

In spite of these points of critique, Turner's work still deserves attention. Indeed, the ongoing criticism proves that Turner's anthropological concepts are still dealt with, stir interest and, "dass Turners kulturtheoretische Vorschläge Tragfähigkeit aufweisen und weiterhin ernst genommen werden."[181] Schomburg-Scherff also makes the point that Turner's dynamic and processual rituals as well as the creative potential of liminality are still stimulating.[182]

2.1.3 LIMINALITY IN OLD NORSE STUDIES

Within Old Norse studies the concept of liminality has been stirring increased interest over the past few years. Nevertheless, relatively few scholars have taken up liminality, mostly in addition to the main topic of the study. Due to this rather marginal role, the term *liminality* and its particular usage remain in most cases insufficiently defined. To my current knowledge, however, both a suggestion on how to adapt liminality to the field as well as a systematic and comprehensive study of liminality are still lacking within Old Norse (literary) studies.[183] In consequence, academics have used and worked with their individual notions of liminality which has not only led to a multitude of detached understandings but also to debatable or even incorrect usages of the term *liminal*. It is often unclear what exactly scholars understand by liminality, namely whether they agree with van Gennep or Turner or whether they build on a different or adapted understanding of liminality. This rather free and individual use of the term *liminal* may fit single studies but neither allows for nor leads to a more overarching conceptualisation, which could be applied on a broader scale in the field. It is therefore challenging to trace general research tendencies within Old Norse (literary) studies. I refrain from discussing each single article which mentions the concept but focus instead on a few

[181] Bräunlein 2012, 163.

[182] Schomburg-Scherff 20002, 205.

[183] Up until now many scholars have turned to Jens Peter Schjødt's *Initiation between Two Worlds* (2008) when it comes to working with liminality in the field of Old Norse studies. For a brief discussion of Schjødt's study, see below.

overall issues which prove problematic, and refer for the sake of illustration to selected publications.[184]

One striking and admittedly astonishing observation that has been made while working on the present study is how unscholarly the approach towards the topic of liminality has been. When working with other large and delicate topics such as *magic*, *ritual*, or *the supernatural*, any scholar is immediately urged to discuss previous research and various approaches as well as to put forward his own definition of the concept in question. Liminality, in contrast, is treated as a collection vessel for many phenomena that are considered somewhat odd, difficult to categorise and vaguely 'between two things'. Only few publications show evidence of a thorough study of liminality prior to a particular case study. It can only be hoped for that the awareness of this difficulty increases and eventually results in more careful applications and analyses.

It is most likely the evasive nature of liminality and even more so its putative simplicity which tends to mislead scholars in their understanding, definition and usage of the concept. It goes without saying that at first glance, liminality appears as a rather simple and straightforward concept: it seemingly denotes anything that moves between two categories, anything that is difficult to define, or features qualities and characteristics of more than one related concept. Admittedly, such misunderstandings are to some extent also motivated by van Gennep and Turner themselves. While van Gennep does not really elaborate on or theorise the concept of liminality but merely introduces it in passing, Turner never sticks to one single definition but works rather freely with it and consequently suggests differing definitions in all his major works. It comes as no surprise then that many studies tend to work with scant definitions, (over-)simplified renderings and applications of liminality's characteristics and qualities. Paola Ivanov thus warns of the haziness and consequently the deficiency of Turner's concept, which easily tempts scholars to use it quite uncritically:

> Die deduktiv erzielten Ergebnisse [Turners] sind unscharf und beliebig übertragbar. Komplexe historische Abläufe und Ereignisse gelten – über die Grenzen der zulässigen Verallgemeinerung hinaus – als blosser Abglanz von 'Gegenstruktur'. … Unter diesen Voraussetzungen werden die inzwischen im ethnologischen Schrifttum eingebürgerten Begriffe Liminarität und Communitas zu nebulösen, schnell vernutzten Phrasen: Projektionsfelder einer metaphysisch gefärbten Grundstimmung, die den Blick auf die Realität versperren. Sollen die Begriffe in der Ethnologie gewinnbringend eingesetzt werden, so müssten sie vorher neu definiert und entsprechend empirisch überprüft werden.[185]

[184] Closely bound up with liminality is the topic of initiation. For scholars who wish to make themselves familiar, a survey of the most important contributors to studies on initiation and liminality both within and outside of Scandinavian studies should turn to Jens Peter Schjødt's monograph *Initiation between Two Worlds* (2008). In the chapter on research history, Schjødt presents a selection of scholarly work which "had a cross-cultural aim" (ibid., 22) and thus not only serves the purpose of Schjødt's book but is certainly also helpful for other scholars. Schjødt sheds light on the work of Arnold van Gennep (1909), Chapple and Coon (1942), Mircea Eliade (among others 1951, 1957, 1975), Victor Turner (among others 1967, 1969, 1977), Lauri Honko (1973), Terence S. Turner (1977), and Jean La Fontaine (1985). With specific reference to Old Norse sagas the following articles may be of interest: McTurk (1999), Motz (1973), and Danielli (1945).

[185] Ivanov 1993, 246.

Although Ivanov directs her criticism towards ethnographic studies, the problems she mentions hold true also for Old Norse studies. The majority of scholars use liminality as a generic term for anything in connection with or touching on issues such as *difference*, *otherness*, *the supernatural*, *marginality*, *hybridity*, *ritual* and *syncretism*.[186] Admittedly, all these terms and concepts are very close in their denotations, yet liminality must not be treated and used as a collection vessel for all kinds of evasive concepts which imply some kind of deviation from what is considered normal or standard.

This criticism should not be misunderstood, though: I neither suggest that scholars need to follow and apply van Gennep's and Turner's concepts rigidly nor that their work has lost its value or stimulus for present day scholarship. Before venturing towards an adaptation of the concept to the needs and modern state of the art, many studies would benefit greatly from a deeper engagement with the original concept of liminality as well as a lucid definition of the (individual) use of liminality.

In her book on *seiðr – Seid. Myter, sjamanisme og kjønn i vikingenes tid* (2002) – Brit Solli uses the terms *liminoid* and *liminal* rather freely. She initially introduces the term liminal in the context of initiation rites but soon switches to the term liminoid without offering much explanation and reasoning for this change. While Turner introduced liminoid to refer to liminal-like phases in modern, mostly de-ritualised societies (e.g. for theatre performances or games; see also the discussion in ch. 3.2 below), Solli provides a whole list of miscellaneous examples of what she considers liminoid, ranging from the medieval *Alþingi* to a Gay/Lesbian parade in 1978. Unfortunately she discusses neither these events nor her usage of liminal and liminoid any further in her book and thus leaves the reader somewhat puzzled and lost, at least with regard to liminality in Old Norse culture.

When it comes to the topic of liminality within Old Norse studies many scholars turn to Jens Peter Schjødt's PhD thesis *Initiation, liminalitet og tilegnelse af numinøs viden: en undersøgelse af struktur og symbolik i førkristen nordisk religion* (2003).[187] Right at the beginning, Schjødt clarifies what his study, which is conducted from the point of view of a historian of religion, aims for: "The purpose of this book is to apply theories and perspectives from the Study of Religion, or Comparative Religion as some would prefer, to the study of the pre-Christian culture in the North."[188] Schjødt's main focus lies on the acquisition of numinous knowledge in Old Norse mythological sources,[189] and such an acquisition happens first and foremost in initiation rites. He is convinced that many Old Norse myths are better

[186] The terms listed do not refer to any particular definition but are used here as umbrella terms for the sake of illustration. The relation of these terms and liminality require further and careful scrutiny but a direct equation with liminality is certainly not adequate.

[187] The English translation was published a few years later: Jens Peter Schjødt. 2008. *Initiation between Two Worlds. Structure and Symbolism in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religion*.

[188] Schjødt 2008, 9.

[189] Schjødt's corpus consists mainly of mythological material (e.g. Eddic Poetry, *Snorra Edda*, as well as further mythological texts). He is first and foremost interested in "whether the transmitted *ideas* and notions may be considered pagan" (Schjødt 2008, 98, italics in the original).

accessible and understandable when approached by the initiation model.[190] He is not so much interested in a reconstruction of initiation rituals as in "an attempt to reveal the semantic universe within which the structure and symbolism of initiation take place."[191]

In his chapter on research history, Jens Peter Schjødt traces and briefly introduces central scholarship on the topic of liminality and initiation. At the end, he puts forward his definition of initiation on the basis of four main criteria:[192] 1) irreversibility of the final state of the initiation, which is 2) preceded by a tripartite sequence according to van Gennep; 3) the presence of binary qualities which are associated with structure and liminality respectively; and 4) the acquisition of numinous knowledge during the liminal mid-phase.

This set of criteria strikes one as somewhat odd, since the tripartite (ritual) sequence as described by van Gennep already contains, or at least leaves room for Schjødt's criteria 1, 3 and 4. Passing through a liminal phase is always irreversible and – at least in a strictly ritual context – the ritual subject is exposed to some kind of numinous knowledge that is valid beyond the immediate situation. Knowledge or skills are very often taught or handed down in a rite of passage, even if it is not explicitly an initiation.

With regard to the presence of binary qualities, Schjødt runs into the danger of deeming liminal anything that is "an inversion of the understanding of the 'normal', 'the proper, the correct'."[193] As mentioned earlier in this chapter and as will be discussed below, calling anything out of the norm *liminal* is not advisable. Liminality may be fairly different to every day (social and/or religious) life, still this is no justification for associating it with any observation of issues out of the ordinary. Liminality encompasses a particular set of qualities, which can nevertheless vary in their formation, as described in the ethnographic writings.

As interesting as the overall aim of Schjødt's extensive study is, as problematic are its theoretical premises and at times single analyses. Schjødt tends to see evidence for initiations in a multitude of mythological episodes, because on an abstract level a great number of Old Norse myths include an acquisition of numinous knowledge, and thus feature the basic characteristics of initiation.[194] Not least due to these caveats mentioned, which can only be touched on superficially here, Jens Peter Schjødt's study needs to be used critically when it comes to liminality and initiation.[195]

Within Old Norse studies, the uncommented and incorrect use of *liminal* as a synonym of *supernatural* is fairly frequent. According to van Gennep and Turner, liminality pertains exclusively to human ritual subjects. Although the liminal, ritual subject gets in contact in

[190] Schjødt 2008, 12.
[191] Schjødt 2008, 13.
[192] Schjødt 2008, 72ff.
[193] Schjødt 2008, 75.
[194] Schjødt 2008, 456, 459 and 461.
[195] Moreover, Schjødt includes so much material and so many aspects in his study that the publication often lacks a thread and overall coherence. The reader also repeatedly stumbles over rather odd and puzzling phrasings which are not very substantial and telling, e.g. "Liminality is, therefore, characterised by being the opposite of everything that is non-liminal" (Schjødt 2008, 76).

most cases in with the world beyond in one way or another, this does not imply that liminality and the supernatural are one and the same sphere. Whereas liminality is a momentary condition which denotes that the liminal subject is undergoing a change or transformation so as to assume a different (and mostly higher) social position, the supernatural encompasses a stable though dissimilar world or mode, which we think parallel to our human world.[196]

When it comes to saga literature, however, the differentiation between liminal and supernatural is often easier said than done since the saga world does not share the strict modern binary perception of supernatural versus rational 'human reality'. Saga characters are hardly ever surprised to encounter a supernatural being and thus such interactions and interferences quickly blur the boundaries, if there are any at all.

Also, the dividing line between liminality and marginality is a thin one, not least because the etymology of *liminal* suggests semantics similar to the meaning of *marginal*. Liminality is not mainly defined through the opposites of centrality versus marginality although the liminal subject is often temporarily forced into a marginal or at least non-social space for the duration of the transformation. Marginality should only be associated with liminality as long as it refers to a temporally demarcated period which – in addition – brings about some kind of change or transformation in or for the ritual subject. Moreover, marginality proves a relative feature in the sense that its perception strongly depends on the point of view. As will be seen in the discussion on islands (see ch. 4.2), mainland Europe considered Iceland to be at the margin of the world whereas the descriptions in *Landnámabók* render a rather different picture with Iceland as a hub in the North Atlantic.

In his 2009 article on Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum* (AD 1075-76), Torstein Jørgensen focuses on Adam's description of Norway and Sweden. According to Jørgensen, Adam portrays these regions as liminal places both because of their seemingly remote geographical location as well as their qualities as a living environment. Because they are pagan, make use of magic and appear rather uncivilised to Christian standards, Jørgensen maintains that these people are "more liminal in their living, their ways of behaviour, skills and even physical apparition."[197] This statement is problematic: firstly, he does not offer any definition of how he understands and uses the term *liminal*, and secondly, if he meant to apply it in a Turnerian sense, he seems to have misunderstood it. Like the differences among the aforementioned three types of communitas (i.e. existential communitas, normative communitas, ideological communitas), liminality is a fleeting phase and cannot be prolonged or institutionalised as a way of living. Liminality proper always calls for movement and change, hence nobody can live in continuous liminality. What Jørgensen, and perhaps also Adam von Bremen, want(s) to express is that the people in Norway and Sweden live at

[196] I am aware that the field of 'the supernatural' is vast and has been stirring lively debate among scholars. I neither venture to join the discussion on the definition of the supernatural nor do I intend to scrutinise the relationship between liminality and the supernatural in detail.

[197] Jørgensen 2009, 51.

the edge of the known world and maintain a lifestyle *different* to what Adam might have been familiar with from his daily experience. In spite of the reported oddities, Adam presents the (Scandinavian) North also as "a pre-stage to heaven,"[198] where even the barbarous peoples sing Halleluja. With this description Adam adds an eschatological perspective to his work as Norway "opens a window from the present world into the next."[199]

Having said all that, my statements need to be put into perspective: Adam von Bremen's text must not be scrutinised as critically and meticulously as an ethnographic text. Jørgensen is certainly right when he claims that in Adam's Norway and Sweden "the orderly world meets its cosmic foundations, in which the known world faces the unknown and in which reality passes over into fantasy and fiction."[200] Nevertheless, Jørgensen's use of the term *liminal* remains debatable as he first and foremost refers to something that is different to the norm, something that borders the supernatural or even the (Christian) divine.

What Adam expresses and Jørgensen highlights is the coexistence of contradictory elements, that is of pagan and Christian elements. Therefore, the northernmost regions of Scandinavia would more aptly be described as hybrid – or with regard to religious orientation: syncretistic – rather than liminal because we are dealing with a seemingly stable status of mixed categories; that is at least our modern perception. Certainly, *Gesta Hammaburgensis* crosses many (thematic) boundaries and it can be said that it is a textual hybrid which draws on and refers to various kinds of sources. It is debatable though whether any crossing of boundaries and consequently any kind of mixture necessarily equates to an instance of liminality.

This raises the question as of to what extent hybridity and liminality are the same or merely similar phenomena. Both concepts suggest some kind of mixture of two complementary or even contradictory elements, yet the relationship between these two elements is perceived differently for liminality and hybridity. Liminality has a paradoxical and ambiguous relationship to its constituents as it is the undefined middle phase of a transformative process. Thus, the liminal object represents both, while at the same time neither, of the element(s) for a limited period of time.

Hybridity, in contrast, denotes a stable composition or conflation of two constituents. Depending on what aspect is emphasised, the hybrid mixture can have different implications and evaluations: a mixture can be advantageous because of the unusual combination which can either act as a linking element between two categories or act more autonomously because of its enhanced qualities. On the other hand, a hybrid mixture can also be considered a disadvantage as the hybrid element belongs to neither category involved completely. In view of this fact, it could be argued that liminality and hybridity hardly differ.

[198] Jørgensen 2009, 54.
[199] Jørgensen 2009, 47.
[200] Jørgensen 2009, 47.

The major difference between these two concepts lies in the duration of this state. Liminality is linked to movement in the sense of a transition, a temporal phase which eventually flows into a new (structural) state. Hybridity, however, is often a stable, long-lasting state, a fixed mixture of two different elements, such as a hermaphrodite, a cross-breed, or an amphibian vehicle. In the context of the sagas (e.g. *EbS, LxdS* and other *Íslendingasögur*), the eerie appearances of seals come to mind.[201] Many scholars agree with and have quoted Knut Odner's following statement on the liminality of seals: "[Seals] are considered liminal in two ways, first because they are more human than other animals, and second because they cross the boundary between land and sea."[202] Certainly, seals are outstanding narrative elements and their ability to move on land as well as in water easily catches our attention. Yet to call them liminal is disputable, not least because the seal never changes or transforms into a purely terrestrial or aquatic animal respectively. In addition, it is again the element of or the relationship with the supernatural that lures scholars into employing the term *liminal* inadequately.

In their well-known 1989 article on *Norna-Gests þáttr*, a narrative which dates to ca. AD 1300, Harris and Hill discuss the status of prime-signing in Old Norse (literary) culture. To prime-sign is a first step of conversion and a Christian act towards baptism. A prime-signed person moves in a religious interspace of no longer being properly pagan, but not yet truly Christian either. The Christian blessing is meant to protect the individual against 'evil', pagan spirits.

> The candidate for baptism who has been prime-signed but not baptized was in one of the few morally and spiritually ambiguous positions allowed by orthodox Christian thought. He belonged neither to the pagan diabolic world from which he had been temporarily and partially redeemed nor to the Christian community. He was between two worlds.[203]

Harris and Hill rightly emphasise that the liminal state, or the state of emptiness, is a temporal one and necessarily strives for a new, stable status, in this case baptism. In their use of

[201] I do not mean to discuss the role and nature of seals in the sagas. I merely use them for the sake of illustration.
[202] Odner 1992, 138. A similar problem can be detected with Clive Tolley's characterisation of bears. Tolley argues that the bear is often considered liminal because it acts as a mediator between various opposed spheres: "the sacred bear, a being believed to be intermediate between animal and human, between terrestrial and divine, in a way comparable to the liminal being of the shaman" (Tolley 2009, 1:551). It is debatable to what extent a mediating figure is liminal since the mediator does not undergo a change. A mediator should rather be viewed as a hybrid of some sort because he remains in the interstice, belonging to both sides simultaneously. In the case of the *berserkr*, which Tolley addresses later on in his very comprehensive publication, it is much more apt to talk of liminality even though a *berserkr* shifts from one man-shape into bear-shape and back. So the shape shifting is not part of an ongoing process but rather an instance of switching between two shapes: "The bear is still liminal, but in a very different sense: he functions as a metaphor for the warrior. The bear warrior *par excellence* was the *berserkr*: he would, it seems, rush into battle in a sort of ecstasy which has inclined some to see a shamanic element at play" (ibid., 1:587).
[203] Harris/Hill 1989, 116.

liminality, Harris and Hill adopt van Gennep's and Turner's understanding by emphasising the concept's social aspect and temporality.

As will be discussed in ch. 4.1.3, Kirsi Kanerva (2011) has detected a rite of passage in *Eyrbyggja saga*: she analyses the role of Kjartan at Fróðá in the context of the *Fróðárundr* (the Fróðá-wonders). She perceives in his dealings with the revenants at the *dyradómr* a rite of passage which leads Kjartan from being an unacknowledged child born out of wedlock into manhood and a socially accepted (new) master of Fróðá.[204] It is only towards the end of the saga, that Kjartan also receives the acknowledgement of his true father, Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi. It can thus be argued that Kjartan experiences a fairly long liminal period from his birth onward, at least until the *dyradómr* when he gains society's recognition and respect by restoring the social equilibrium at Fróðá. Kanerva employs the term 'rite of passage' but does not dwell at length on the term as it is not the focus of her study.

In her article from 1999, Margaret Clunies Ross looks into the development and career of the Icelandic court poet, Sighvatr Þórðarson. She describes how Sighvatr, still back in Iceland, leads an inconspicuous life which is partly reminiscent of a *kolbítr*.[205] It is only when an anonymous *austmaðr* takes him on a fishing trip that the young man literally internalises the skills of poetry by eating the head of an especially beautiful fish which is said to contain the source of wisdom. Being now endowed with poetic knowledge, Sighvatr travels to Norway and soon becomes the king's court poet.

Clunies Ross tests three different approaches to this narrative: Sighvatr and the fish as a wondertale, Sighvatr and the fish as a myth of initiation and a rite of passage, and myths of ingestion of special powers.[206] In the present context the aspect of the rite of passage is of greatest interest. The story of Sighvatr can be read as a rite of passage and an initiation in particular because it sees the protagonist move from youth into adulthood. Unlike the case of *Eyrbyggja*'s Kjartan, Sighvatr's liminal phase – the fishing trip which links the *kolbítr*-status and the post-liminal position as a court poet – is clearly discernible.[207] Clunies Ross does not explicitly use the term *liminality*, which, however, does not diminish her analysis.

Two further articles shall be mentioned at this point because they raise issues which will be taken up again towards the end of the thesis. The first article is Eldar Heide's *Holy Islands and the Otherworld* (2011). Heide works from the premise that holy islands (were thought to) have a connection to the Otherworld, since "the essence of holy islands is their location on the other side of water."[208] Building on that Heide introduces the term of "super-liminal islands" which "are either reachable on foot and thus belong to the mainland in a way, although they

[204] Kanerva 2011, 44.
[205] Clunies Ross 1999, 63.
[206] Clunies Ross 1999, 62.
[207] Furthermore it echoes Þórr's fishing trip with Hymir and thus has "a clearly initiatory aspect" (Clunies Ross 1999, 64).
[208] Heide 2011, 57.

are islands, and those that are sometimes submerged or surface only occasionally."[209] With regard to Heide's usage of liminality, there are two main aspects of interest: Firstly, the question is whether places in general and islands in particular can genuinely be liminal.[210] In Heide's examples islands act as gateways to a world beyond and thus link (and/or separate) two completely different spheres. Despite liminality's immediate vicinity to the supernatural, the latter is not a premise for liminality. Indeed, *liminal* and *supernatural* should neither be confused nor used synonymously. While liminality requires or triggers some kind of transformation, the island as a window to the beyond remains unaltered despite its proximity to the supernatural.

The second noteworthy aspect of Heide's article is the prefix *super-* in the context of "super-liminal (islands)". Heide argues that various kinds of islands reveal enhanced liminality. As well as the two types described in the abovementioned quote, Heide includes islands which offer an entrance to the Otherworld in form of a cave, a lake or a rock among super-liminal islands.[211] According to Heide, 'super-liminality' lies in the outstanding conditions of such islands.

So far liminality has been approached as an absolute quality as elements were considered either liminal or non-liminal and have left no scope for degrees of liminality. By introducing the term 'super-liminal', however, Heide actually goes beyond this yes/no-status and introduces a quality that is more than 'merely' liminal. In the course of the analyses to follow, the thesis will raise the question of whether it is sensible and feasible to treat and use liminality as a relative instead of an absolute quality (see ch. 3.3.4 and ch. 5).

Last but not least Lauri Honko's article "Theories Concerning the Ritual Process" (1979) is brought to the reader's attention. In addition to his critical review of Victor Turner's work, Honko poses another crucial question: is there liminality or anti-structure at all? "But I [Lauri Honko] do not believe that it would be particularly fruitful to try to explain liminal rites and communities as 'anti-structural' or as being outside the concepts of role-set, status-set, etc."[212] As heretical as this statement appears at first sight, it is justified. It must be kept in mind that both structure and anti-structure are defined and set up by man. It therefore turns into quite a philosophical question whether it is actually possible to step out of structure and experience true anti-structure at all. Although everyday social life gets interrupted by weddings, births, deaths and other (potentially) liminal experiences, those are fixed parts of people's lives.

Furthermore, it has been pointed out in ch. 2.1.2 that the powers of creation as well as destruction are inherent in both liminality and structure. Neither force is exclusively positive or negative and neither force can persist forever. It is thus legitimate (and tempting) to

[209] Heide 2011, 57.

[210] While Heide assigns liminality to islands only, it might be worthwhile pondering whether the crossing of the water itself should already be considered part of the liminal experience, because when setting off for the passage, the individual leaves the familiar space.

[211] Heide 2011, 74.

[212] Honko 1979, 386.

consider whether liminality exists at all or whether everything (or rather: nothing?) is in fact liminal since social life is never stable but continuously in flux. Liminal phases do not only affect the ritual subject undergoing the process but also the environment which must adjust to the new status and role of the ritual subject.[213] Hence even those witnessing a rite of passage from the outside are ultimately involved in it to some extent, and thus they do not truly belong to structure either.

Equipped with the theoretical background and newly gained insights regarding problematic issues regarding the application, the focus of the thesis turns now towards the corpus of primary texts – the *Íslendingasögur* – followed by a discussion of methodology on how to analyse the saga narratives from the perspective of liminality and liminal places in particular.

2.2 THE *ÍSLENDINGASÖGUR*

2.2.1 A GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE *ÍSLENDINGASÖGUR*

The focus of the case studies to follow lies on the *Íslendingasögur*, an Old Norse literary subgenre that is well-known and well-studied. Nonetheless, a short introduction touching on the most important issues shall be given for the sake of completeness and formal correctness.[214] Not only innumerable pages, but indeed countless books of secondary literature have been written about the *Íslendingasögur*. Even though some topics and methods have been considered outdated, new ones have entered the stage and thus provide the field with lively discussion topics.

The Old Norse literary corpus features three main literary forms: skaldic poetry, Eddic poetry and the sagas written in prose. Kept in the vernacular Old Norse and passed down anonymously, the saga corpus and hence also the *Íslendingasögur* are an extraordinary and unparalleled phenomenon of the European medieval literary landscape.[215] Interestingly, the term *saga* is not a generic term because the narratives that are counted among the sagas display a stunning variety regarding content, style, and form.

[213] Honko 1979, 374.

[214] For further reading the following works are (among others) recommended: Zernack (2011), Glauser (2006, 1-50), Clover (2005), Vésteinn Ólason (2005; 1998 a+b), Mundal (2004), Torfi H. Tulinius (2002).

[215] Due to their refined, literary artistry, the *Íslendingasögur* are the most popular Old Norse sagas, and they are an exceptional phenomenon within medieval (Western) European literature. They are unparalleled because no other contemporaneous literary corpus features equally long and elaborate prose narratives, which are – above all – written in the vernacular. The sagas' uniqueness also shows itself with regard to their selection of topics: "Mit Ausnahme der sogenannten Vorzeitsagas (isl. *fornaldarsögur*) … verarbeiten diese Erzählungen [die Isländersagas] niemals gemeingermanische Stoffe … sondern sie handeln von früh- und hochmittelalterlichen isländischen und zum Teil norwegischen Gestalten und Begebenheiten" (Böldl 1999, 197). Even though the saga narratives occupy a rather clearly demarcated niche, none of the saga subgenres is a product of geographical isolation or a cultural void (Vésteinn Ólason 1998b, 43). Apart from influences across (sub-)genre boundaries, shared motifs or narrative patterns from other (Western) European medieval works can be discerned: "Ein Spezifikum der altnordischen Literatur besteht in der Mischung der Medien und Genres: Es gibt … kaum ein Thema, das medial nicht multifunctional behandelt würde" (Glauser 2006, 6).

> 'Saga' bedeutet zunächst 'Mitteilung', 'Aussage', im weiteren aber auch 'Geschichte', und zwar sowohl im historischen Sinn wie auch im Sinn von 'Erzählung', wobei das Spektrum dieses letzteren Begriffes wiederum vom frei Erfundenen bis zum faktisch Verbürgten, von der spontanen und ungeformten Wiedergabe eines Geschehens bis zum durchkomponierten literarischen Kunstwerk reicht.[216]

The corpus of the sagas embraces a great number of prose narratives which are subdivided into several groups, such as the *Íslendingasögur*, *konungasögur*, *fornaldarsögur*, *biskupasögur*, etc.[217] Although the *Íslendingasögur*, which number around 40 sagas and *þættir*, form a subgenre, they represent anything but a homogeneous group:

> Die [Isländer-]Sagas sind keineswegs so einheitlich, wie es ihre Subsumierung unter dem Gattungsbegriff vermuten lässt. Einige sind von geringem Umfang, andere sehr ausführlich; einige kommen mit wenigen Personen aus, die längste Saga nennt um die 600 Personen. Einige gestalten grossartige Frauenpersönlichkeiten, andere verzichten gänzlich auf Frauen; einige sind stramm und zielstrebig komponiert, andere eher episodenhaft gereiht. Einige bieten eine Form von Regionalchronik, andere erzählen die Geschichte einer Familie, und wieder andere berichten von Episoden aus dem Leben dieses oder jenes Isländers.[218]

Depicting the life of the first Icelandic settlers and their descendants, the *Íslendingasögur* focus on events which allegedly happened shortly after the *landnám*, the settlement of Iceland (ca. AD 870) and cover the period until roughly AD 1050, a couple of decades after Iceland's Christianisation.[219] However, the actual writing down of the sagas happened only a few centuries later and is generally dated from the mid-13th to the early 14th century.

Regarding the narrative structure of *Íslendingasögur*, Theodore M. Andersson has contributed greatly to this aspect in his seminal studies. Against the contemporaneous trend of the 1960s to treat every saga as an individual, artistic work, Andersson focused on the (structural) similarities of *Íslendingasögur*. He was convinced that in order to form a homogeneous subgenre, these sagas also need a homogeneous definition. Following this train of thought, Andersson illustrates in his work(s) that the *Íslendingasögur* share a basic structure which distinguishes them from other Old Norse genres. The core narrative structure consists of six parts: a) introduction, b) conflict, c) climax, d) revenge, e) reconciliation, and f) aftermath.

What is more, the narratives are also similar with regard to "the manner in which that skeleton is fleshed out."[220] All *Íslendingasögur* tell of one or more serious conflict(s) between at least two (equally) powerful families or clans. The conflict often revolves around power struggles and is mostly triggered by an insult or a killing ensued by a feud. While some sagas

[216] Böldl 1999, 196.

[217] Over the past few years the traditional genre system has been subjected to criticism. Research suggests that many sagas are difficult to categorise as they show features of two or more subgenres. It has thus been suggested that the current system is rather restrictive and needs to be overcome.

[218] Uecker 2004, 115.

[219] Vésteinn Ólason 1998b, 17.

[220] Clover 2005, 275.

are more of a biography and centre on one main, almost exclusively male protagonist,[221] others portray several generations of a whole family or even a whole region.

At first glance, the sagas easily convince the audience that they present not only realistic but historically accurate material.[222] This impression is triggered by the way the sagas make use of space and time. The saga narrator informs the recipient in great detail about the whereabouts of saga figures, trips and farmsteads, etc., especially so within Iceland. This traceability enhances the sense of realism considerably and invites the audience to follow the saga plot and pin the settings on a map.[223] This use of landscape works as a projection screen for the processes of cultural memory. Indeed the early Icelanders literally inscribed their history into the landscape and thus manifested their presence and culture into a previously 'empty' space:

> Diese ätiologischen Sagen verleihen der namen- und zeichenlosen Landschaft Bedeutung, also Kultur. Die Konstruktion von Geschichte eines der Hauptanliegen der Gattung Isländersaga, erfolgt über die Erzählung kleiner Geschichten, die häufig ihren Anlass in eben solchen Ortsnamen [z.B. Brákarsund in *Egils saga*] haben.[224]

In view of the apparent realistic style, Glauser talks of refined, rhetoric means which are used to create the illusion of a factual report.[225] This ostensible factuality is strongly underlined by the calm and neutral voice of the narrator.[226] Hardly using figurative language and keeping an utterly unperturbed tone no matter what events are rendered the saga narrator can easily uphold the impression of detachedness while being closely linked to the saga world.

Although the sagas tricked most of 19th-century scholars and successfully made them believe that the narratives are historically reliable sources, they are now seen and treated as literary fiction that is partly based on or at least inspired by real events. It is thus debatable to what extent modern notions such as *fact* and *fiction* can sensibly be used in saga contexts: "Es ist fraglich, ob moderne Begriffe wie 'Historizität' und 'Fiktion' ohne Einschränkung auf Werke mittelalterlicher Autoren und insbesondere auf Isländersagas übertragen werden dürfen."[227]

[221] What is represented in the sagas is thus a male and aristocratic version of the Old Norse saga world.

[222] Indeed some of elements of the sagas appear also in other historical sources. Attested are for example the rule of Haraldr hárfagri or the heroes Egill Skalla-Grímsson and Grettir Ásmundarson in *Lnb.*

[223] Inspired by the *Íslendingasögur*'s accurate location of settings, Dr. Emily Lethbridge developed the highly interesting webpage *Saga Map*, which visualises all mentioned places in the *Íslendingasgöur* on a map. Thanks to various applications it is possible to get an overview of the places of a single saga as well as to research what places appear in various *Íslendingasögur*. In addition, more (comparative) material is continuously added to the database, such as historical texts (i.e. travel reports from the later half of the 19th century) by the Englishmen William Morris and W. G. Collingwood.

[224] Glauser 2006, 42.

[225] Glauser 2016, 42.

[226] Vésteinn Ólason 1998b, 186.

[227] Schier 1996, 335.

In his highly interesting article, "History and Fiction" (2017), Ralph O'Connor makes the criticism that in the context of the *Íslendingasögur*, scholars have used the term *fiction* rather freely, so that three main usages have emerged: firstly, fiction as referring to completely made-up stories; secondly, fiction in a somewhat looser sense including texts and narratives which include both historical as well as fictional elements; and thirdly, the literary-theoretical stance which deems everything constructed fictional.

It is not the concept of fictionality alone, however, that is problematic, but rather the binary pair of *fictionality* and *historicity* that needs consideration. Both categories or rather the distinction between them is strongly rooted in the modern world view and consequently they are not immediately helpful with regard to medieval literature in general and the *Íslendingasögur* in particular. Due to a different medieval perception of what is deemed fictional and historical respectively,[228] our modern definitions cannot be applied unmodified to medieval texts. It should therefore be refrained from making generalising and sweeping statements on a saga's factual and fictional elements. As the layers of fictionality and historicity are conflated, it is well-nigh impossible to dissect them. Besides, it is questionable if an identification and dissection of historical and fictional elements would make sense, since the *Íslendingasögur* distinguish themselves through this outstanding mixture: "Die Isländersagas leben geradezu von der inneren Spannung, die aus diesem Gegensatz [d.h. dem Gegensatz zwischen Historizität und Fiktionalität] entsteht, und fordern damit bis heute immer wieder zu ihrer Deutung auf."[229]

Similar to the issue of historicity and fictionality, the modern understanding of the fantastic or supernatural should not be confused with the medieval notions. Margaret Clunies Ross (2002) points out that in relation to literature the terms *realism* and the *fantastic*[230] are of rather recent origin. Realism is probably the most deceptive literary tool and entails as much make-believe as fiction and the fantastic do: "Realism, then, is a rhetorical trope and not a necessary guarantee that a text really is 'true to life'."[231] Narratives kept in a realistic style – like the *Íslendingasögur* – are often equated with being reliable, historically accurate and non-

[228] Indeed, the saga genre started out as historiography (*historia*), a type of texts which does not describe a clearly demarcated genre but encompasses "a range of overlapping genres" (O'Connor 2017, 88). In spite of the mixture of historical and fictional material, O'Connor emphasises that all sagas "share a fundamentally historical purpose" (ibid., 89). This basic intention of saga narratives, however, must not be confused with the question of the sagas' reliability as historical sources (ibid., 88). Having called attention to the fact that the sagas themselves discuss the issue of reliability and repeatedly make use of carefully constructed frames (ibid., 101), O'Connor suggests that the manuscript context should be taken into account for every text in order to to get a more accurate impression of a saga's intended reception: "The question of whether medieval sagas were composed, intended, and received as fiction or as history must be answered anew for each text as well as each so-called genre, and with reference to manuscript context as well as narrative content" (ibid., 102-103).

[229] Zernack 2011, 12.

[230] Clunies Ross uses the term *fantastic* in the sense of the OED: "that which is fantastic, strange, eccentric or odd" (2002, 448).

[231] Clunies Ross 2002, 448.

fantastic, and so foster the impression and expectation that it is "an accurate reflection of events."[232]

While the literary genre of the fantastic (i.e. fantasy) only joined the literary landscape as late as the mid-20th century, the literary mode of the fantastic made its way into narratives long ago and has assumed a firm place in medieval literature and art.[233] Clunies Ross characterises the fantastic as follows: "The hallmark of the fantastic as a literary mode is that it juxtaposes elements of both the realistic and the marvellous or improbable, often without comment, and thereby problematizes both."[234]

Since a concluding statement on the question of historicity and fictionality will never be achieved, Kurt Schier as well as Torfi H. Tulinius both advocate – for different reasons – putting less emphasis on the issue. Schier argues that the sagas constitute a closed-off system that is coherent in itself.[235] The sagas are thus seen as an entity representing a specific time-space continuum – or chronotope, to use Bahktin's term. When considering a saga or even all the *Íslendingasögur* as partaking in the same closed-off entity, the question of what is historical or fictitious loses importance.

Torfi H. Tulinius, on the other hand, suggests leaving this question unresolved and accepting the situation as it is, because "with just a slight stretch of the usual meaning of the word fictional, we can say that every historical narrative is *ipso facto* fictional, since we always seek to understand the past in light of our present preoccupations and interests." Consequently, "Any narrative, be it true or false, fictional or historical, is inevitably a construction."[236]

Despite these caveats revolving around the topics of historicity, fictionality, the fantastic and the supernatural, scholars have been wondering what epoch the sagas mirror, or what epoch they refer to. Although they make the audience believe they relate to the *landnámsöld* only, they feature a peculiar temporal double layer:

> The sagas may lie closer than other medieval literature to people's lives, but we do not know whether the 'reality' they reflect is the reality of the settlement period, or the writing period, or some period in between, or all of these periods in a syncretic combination – or whether indeed it is 'reality' at all, or some imaginative version of their pagan past to which the medieval Icelanders collectively subscribed.[237]

[232] Clunies Ross 2002, 448.

[233] Clunies Ross 2002, 448.

[234] Clunies Ross 2002, 448. This intricate relationship recalls liminality and two of its main characteristics, paradoxes and ambiguities. Further research on these similarities would certainly prove interesting.

[235] Schier 1996, 311.

[236] Both quotes from Torfi H. Tulinius 2002, 217. Diana Whaley argues along the same line as Torfi H. Tulinius: "Of especial relevance are the increasing realization of the selectivity and bias in all narrative history, and more broadly of the nature of language as a system of signs which does not directly represent reality, not to mention the constructivist claim that 'facts' are anyway human intellectual constructs rather than objective realities" (2000, 166).

[237] Clover 2005, 254.

It has also been argued for a more complicated relationship between rendered time and events: while the sagas portray life and conflicts experienced during the 13th and 14th centuries, that is, the tumultuous *Sturlungaöld* (the Age of the Sturlungs) which is also the time when most sagas were written down, they project them back in time and make them appear in the guise of the *landnámsöld*. In favour of this argumentation, it has been pointed out that some incidents in *Sturlungasaga* correspond to and are probably mirrored in the *Íslendingasögur*, as e.g. the burning of Flugumýri in the former source and the burning of Bergþórshváll in *Njáls saga*. If this kind of projection is the case, the sagas are actually more about the time when they were written down than the period they pretend to portray.[238] In any case, the picture that the sagas paint "of the ninth and tenth centuries is full of distortion, anachronism, folklore, and sheer fiction."[239]

Not least due to this dichotomy, the dating process of the sagas in general and the *Íslendingasögur* in particular is a difficult task and has stirred intensive discussions.[240] More often than not, the manuscript situation does not help in clarifying the dating issue. The state of text preservations is highly diverse, both regarding the number of manuscripts as well as the variations in length and content. No original manuscript – if such a thing has ever existed – has been preserved.[241] While the oldest preserved fragment of a saga manuscript dates to ca. AD 1250, some of the most important saga manuscripts stem from the 15th century or later.[242]

Judging on the basis of the form, the development of literary elements and the vocabulary used, the corpus of the *Íslendingasögur* has been divided into three chronological though not overly strict categories:[243] the early sagas (ca. AD 1200-1280), the classical sagas (ca. AD 1240-1310), and the late or post-classical sagas (ca. AD 1300-1450).[244] For sure, these

[238] Whaley 2000, 166.

[239] Clover 2005, 254. Although it is hardly possible to determine which elements or narrative traits are inspired by what time period, scholarship distinguishes between the *söguöld* and the writing period. In terms of narratology, the former is the narrated time, an early age of Icelandic settlement (ca. AD 870-1030) which is rendered in the sagas through the lens of a somewhat idealising retrospective. Set some 300 years after the *söguöld*, is the narrating time, the writing period when a great many sagas were put down on parchment.

[240] For further reading on the dating issues see the collection of articles edited by Else Mundal (2013): *Dating the Sagas: Reviews and Revisions*.

[241] Schier 1970, 36.

[242] Seelow 1998, 234.

[243] In Vésteinn Ólason's very helpful table of the *Íslendingasögur* and their dates of origin (2005, 114-115), it can be seen that no consensus has been, and probably never will be, reached regarding the exact dating of the sagas. Vésteinn Ólason (ibid., 116) points out that the dates suggested by the editors of the *Íslenzk fornrit* series (ÍF) tend to be somewhat earlier than the dates suggested by other scholars.

[244] After having been neglected for a fairly long time, the late or post-classical sagas have received more attention over the past few years. However, the only extensive study on post-classical sagas is Martin Arnold's monograph *The Post-Classical Icelandic Family Saga* (2003). It is mostly their distinctive use of fantastic and supernatural elements which has lead to the assessment that they are less artistic than the classical, typical *Íslendingasögur*, which feature ideological standards from the heroic *gullöld* (ibid., 7). The post-classical *Íslendingasögur* are thus often considered generic hybrids because they assume an intermediary position between the classical *Íslendingasögur, fornaldarsögur*, *lygisögur* and *riddarasögur*. Arnold therefore argues that the post-classical sagas are not deviant but should be regarded "as the products of a different consciousness from

categories are helpful tools for gaining an overview; still, there are some sagas which are difficult to categorise or which have been assigned to two different categories.[245] Not least because of recent observations and findings such as those just mentioned above, the tripartite model of dating has increasingly been criticised and considered outdated. In many regards this issue is interlinked with the aforementioned discussion on genre boundaries.

The dating issue is also complicated by the intricate relationship of literary and oral saga traditions. The question whether the sagas are of literary or oral origin has for a long time split saga scholars into the camps of the book-prose and the free-prose theory.[246] Both approaches, however, were abandoned quite some time ago. Instead more and more scholars try "å kombinere interessa for sogene som litterære kunstverk med interessa for tradisjonsgrunnlaget."[247] Vésteinn Ólason thus states that the *Íslendingasögur* are positioned at the intersection between oral narrative tradition and written literature.[248]

In connection with the question on the sagas' origin, it is their relationship with orality that is to a great extent based on speculation and hypotheses. It is generally agreed on that the sagas are products of a fluid literary tradition during which oral and literary traditions mutually influenced each other.[249] Else Mundal also points out that every genre features a different relationship between the oral and written medium. It is safe to assume though that the narrative contents were mostly taken from the oral tradition, whereas the narrative patterns were somewhat more influenced by literary works.[250] Yet, "Engar vísbendingar eru um að til hafi verið óskráðar sögur sem hafi verið jafnlangar og efnismiklar eða svo margbreytilegar sem skráðar Íslendingasögur, enda er engin ástæða til að gera ráð fyrir því."[251]

It has repeatedly been emphasised that the figures of *saga writer* and *saga author* must not be confused. The *Íslendingasögur* do not reveal their authors since they are without

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that of earlier generations" and that "[saga] authors reflected that difference both consciously and unconsciously" (ibid., 145).

[245] *FbS* is probably the most famous case: Initially considered an early saga written ca. AD 1200, Jónas Kristjánsson (1972) suggested that *FbS* should rather be considered a late saga. For further reading, see Clover (2005, 247f.), Jónas Kristjánsson (1972), Theodore M. Andersson (2013).

[246] In the early 20th century, Andreas Heusler published *Die Anfänge der isländischen Saga* (1913) where he introduced the terms freeprose and bookprose, two concepts which dominated the discourse in the origin of saga literature for quite some time. While freeprose postulated that in an oral stage the sagas existed already in a long(er) prose form and merely needed to be written down, bookprose, on the other hand, maintains that the sagas are literary constructs which were artistically composed on parchment though inspired by or based on single shorter saga-like narratives or narrative episodes. By now both approaches are considered outdated.

[247] Mundal 2004, 280.

[248] Vésteinn Ólason 1998b, 194. In light of the developments or changes that can be traced throughout the saga corpus, it is rather tempting to characterise the genre of the *Íslendingasögur* as liminal. However, hardly any literary form, and especially not a prose form, remains unchanged over a long period of time. Literature is always in flux and will never reach a concrete and well-defined end in its development.

[249] Vésteinn Ólason 1998b, 19.

[250] Mundal 2004, 279.

[251] Vésteinn Ólason 1998b, 19. "There is no evidence for the existence of fixed oral sagas of a length and complexity comparable to most of the written sagas" (Vésteinn Ólasson, 1998a, 19-20).

exception transmitted anonymously.[252] In her chapter on saga literature, Else Mundal (2004) states that the anonymity can partly be explained with a different consciousness or self-awareness on the part of saga writers: "Dette [anonymitet] har dels vore sett i samanheng med at den munnlege tradisjonen bak denne skriftlege sjangeren kan ha vore så omfattende at dei som førde sogene i pennen, ikkje har kjent seg som verkelege forfattarar."[253] Unlike today's prominence of authors, the people rendering sagas (in writing) did not consider themselves as 'owners' of a saga. Rather, they perceived themselves as part of a long-standing tradition of tale telling, which did not endow the storyteller or the scribe with the full authority over a narrative: "Sagnaritarinn var ekki að búa til nýja sögu heldur að 'setja saman' (orðasambandið var notað í fornu máli og er bein þýðing á latnesku sögninni *com-ponere*) og segja sögu sem hann hafði ekki full yfirráð yfir eða 'átti'."[254] Thus, a saga scribe was only responsible for the saga version he created, and thus his imprint on the saga on a more general level was comparatively little. Assuming a very neutral narrative tone and keeping himself completely in the background, the saga scribe does not reveal any personal opinions or evaluation of the events he is telling of. This factor makes it well-nigh impossible to get a sense of the storyteller and his point of view.[255]

The advent of Christianity and Iceland's official conversion (AD 999 or 1000) not only paved the way for the writing down of the sagas but additionally stimulated and facilitated literary and cultural exchange. Despite this crucial change, Icelandic traditions and mentalities changed only slowly, and ancient elements were still retained for quite some time.[256] In order to establish itself, the clerical sphere was forced to get in contact and mix with the agricultural sphere. This interconnection eventually proved very fruitful as the literary field was cultivated both by the Church and aristocratic families:[257] "It is quite likely that the milieu of clerical

[252] Clover 2005, 245. For quite some time scholars have been speculating about the authorship of *EgS*. Several scholars have repeatedly made strong arguments for Snorri Sturluson being the author of this famous saga, see Wanner (2008, 183 n66), Clover (2005, 245), and Torfi H. Tulinius (2002, 236; 2015, 211).

[253] Mundal 2004, 289.

[254] Vésteinn Ólason 1998b, 19. "The saga writer was not inventing a story, but composing (the Icelandic phrase was *setja saman*, 'to put together', a direct translation of the Latin *componere*) and telling a story over which he had no ultimate authority" (Vésteinn Ólason 1998a, 20, italics in the original). The phrase *setja saman* and its meaning with regard to authorship has stirred many vivid discussions. Most prominent is probably the case in *Snorra Edda*. The beginning of manuscript U (Codex Upsaliensis, DG 11) reads as follows: "Bók þessi heitir Edda. Hana hefir saman setta Snorri Sturluson eptir þeim hætti sem hér er skipat" (*Snorra Edda*, Faulkes 2005, xiii; "This book is called *Edda*. It was compiled by Snorri Sturluson in the manner in which it is arranged here" *Snorra Edda*, Faulkes 1987, vi). These first few sentences give no evidence whether Snorri 'merely' compiled the *Prose Edda* on the basis of extant material or whether he actually authored the literary work.

[255] Vésteinn Ólason 1998b, 178.

[256] Vésteinn Ólason 1998b, 33.

[257] Mundal 2004, 279. In various cases people from high society commissioned a codex of (secular) literature at a monastery. One famous example is *Flateyjarbók* (GKS 1005 fol., ca. AD 1387), a compilation of *konungasögur*. *Flateyjarbók* was commissioned by the wealthy farmer Jón Hákonarson of Víðidalstunga and the manuscript was written by Magnús Þórhallsson and Jón Þórðarson, a man called Magnús illuminated it (Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 2005, 253).

education, whereby religious mixed with secular, young with old, and people of high birth with those of more lowly origin, played a significant part in the direction subsequently taken by Icelandic letters."[258]

In fact, the sagas as well as other texts (partly) dealing with religious issues spring from a paradoxical situation: "Overleveringen af teksterne om de nordiske guder hviler på en måde på et paradoks: Kun fordi skriftvæsenet kom til Norden med kristendommen er de hedenske fortællinger bevaret."[259] Even though Annette Lassen refers to the transmission of mythology, her observation is equally valid for the sagas. The conversion not only marks – or rather, is – a cultural breach (cf. Glauser below), which needs to be dealt with; it also introduced writing and thus opened up unprecedented opportunities for working through the historical struggles with the help of narratives.

This new mixture of backgrounds, ideals, aims and interests, left in one way or another its imprint on the wide Old Norse literary landscape. In the context of Christianisation and the scribes' task of dealing with pagan as well as with Christian times and events

> er det også eit spørsmål i kva grad sogene – eller nokre av sogene – kan spegle ein kristen ideologi. Etter som forfattarane er medvitne om at dei skriv om den heidne tida, og stort sett passar seg for anakronismar, kan vi ikkje vente at ein slik ideologi ligg open i dagen.[260]

Both the cultural as well as the literary temporal axis are dominated by two main points of reference: firstly, the settlement (*landnám*) marks the beginning of Iceland, the beginning of a new era detached from Norway, the beginning of the Icelanders' own history; the Conversion offers the second major temporal reference point. The formal introduction of a new religion is not only the starting point of a different culture and mentality, but it also puts an end to the early heroic age. In this way, Iceland's (post-)settlement era becomes glorified as the great Golden Age, *gullöld*, and is assigned mythical significance.[261]

There is also a third watershed: the *Sturlungaöld* and the consequent loss of independence around the years 1262/1264. During this period of political decay and serious power struggles, Iceland paradoxically experienced an astounding and blooming literary production which included the writing down of orally circulating (versions of) saga narratives: "Det har alltid vore ei fascinerande gåte korleis ein skal forklare dette bløman de litterære livet på øya i Nord-Atlanterhavet i utkanten av Europa … som i den perioden det litterære livet blømde rikast, nærmast hadde ein borgarkrigsliknande tilstand."[262] It is most likely not in spite of but rather *because* of this tense political situation that the literary sphere became so flourishing and productive. Realising what was at stake and the profound on-going changes, the

[258] Vésteinn Ólason 1998a, 45.
[259] Lassen 2011, 19.
[260] Mundal 2004, 292.
[261] Vésteinn Ólason 1998b, 20.
[262] Mundal 2004, 278.

Icelanders became aware of the past – or their idea of the past – and its assertive and strengthening value in times of anxiety.

In the course of the settlement, the sagas and their characters are first and foremost interested in establishing their independence and defining an idiosyncratic, Icelandic identity. At the same time, the narratives are not only about prospects but also about retrospects, given that the majority of the sagas were only written down towards the end of the Icelandic *þjóðveldi* (the Free State) during and after the troubled *Sturlungaöld*. Facing the Norwegian (and later on Danish) rule, the Icelanders were melancholically looking back on their time of success. Glauser argues that it is only after the events of the *Sturlungaöld* that the *Íslendingasögur* could actually assume their function as cultural memory, which bridges the breach and thus re-establishes the connection to the glorious past: "Erst das Bewusstsein, dass ein Bruch erfolgt ist, führt zur Schaffung von Vergangenheit. … Für den vorliegenden Fall der Isländersagas bedeutet dies, dass sie erst nach dem Bruch von '1262/64' … zum Medium des kulturellen Gedächtnisses in Island werden."[263]

Also, Torfi H. Tulinius (2000) emphasises the importance of the *Íslendingasögur* with regard to Iceland's self-image during the *Sturlungaöld*. He sketches how the *Íslendingasögur* reflect the uncertain identities of mid-13th century Iceland. It is first and foremost the rise of fiction which offered a valve to deal (in disguise) with pressing issues such as the identity anxiety. This distress resulted in the development of the artistic *Íslendingasögur* which feature characters that move outside clear-cut roles and turn into figures that are ambiguous regarding their religious orientation, social status and morality.[264] Especially Iceland's social upper class struggled as they were simultaneously competing with the members of the Norwegian royal court for status as well as conducting "questioning of the ideological foundations of the social system."[265] But as the social and political upheaval came to a preliminary halt in the course of the 14th century, the genre of the *Íslendingasögur* disappeared.[266]

2.2.2 THE PRIMARY CORPUS: THE SELECTED *ÍSLENDINGASÖGUR*

With the exception of mythological sources (Schjødt 2008), no particular set of Old Norse texts has yet been analysed in detail with regard to liminality. The decision in favour of the *Íslendingasögur* as the primary corpus has in part been motivated by Victor Turner and his two articles on the sagas. In the first article entitled *Anthropological Approach to the Icelandic Saga* (1973), Turner presents an application of his theoretical work on *Njáls saga*

[263] Glauser 2016, 44.
[264] Torfi H. Tulinius 2000, 261.
[265] Torfi H. Tulinius 2000, 261.
[266] It was not until the periods of Romanticism and Iceland's struggle for independence that the *Íslendingasögur* experienced a revival in their national importance. Very similar to the *Sturlungaöld*, the sagas provided ideals and templates for the self-perception and self-image of Iceland as an autonomous nation (Vésteinn Ólason 1998a, 242).

and in *The Icelandic Family Saga as a Genre of Meaning-Assignment* (1985) he scrutinises *Eyrbyggja saga*; a discussion of the articles follows below in ch. 3.2. Although Turner's analyses of the sagas tend to be fairly superficial, the *Íslendingasögur* are still a valid choice for studying liminality.

As puzzling as it may sound, the second reason in favour of the *Íslendingasögur* is actually their (not unproblematic) sense of realism. Employing seemingly realistic *Íslendingasögur* neither means that the saga narratives are treated as ethnographic and reliable source texts nor that the literary and the historical level are freely intermixed; the present project remains a strictly literary one. Rather, I argue that despite the elements we deem supernatural, it is the realistic depiction which facilitates the present day's recipients to access the saga world. In contrast to genres set in entirely supernatural or fantasy worlds, we can relate to a great many aspects of life as depicted in the *Íslendingasögur*. Torfi H. Tulinius notes in this regard: "Saga society is much like ours: a stratified yet mobile society where identities are unstable and where there is an ongoing struggle between individuals climbing the social ladder."[267] Even though we will never be able either to completely reconstruct or understand those times long gone, the universe of the *Íslendingasögur* makes it somewhat easier to get a glimpse into the Old Norse (literary) mentality.

As the subgenre of the *Íslendingasögur* consists of 40 narratives, it is beyond the scope of this study to analyse all of them in detail. In order to keep the selection as diverse and representative as possible, two main criteria were taken into account: firstly, the dating of the selected sagas covers the whole period of saga writing, that is, sagas generally considered to be early, classical and post-classical. Secondly, while most of the popular, classical sagas are set in (south-)western Iceland, the thesis's corpus includes sagas that happen in different regions of Iceland. In addition, three sagas were included which are partly set in Greenland. As a result, the following 14 alphabetically listed *Íslendingasögur*[268] have been selected:

[267] Turner 2000, 261.

[268] This thesis does not provide summaries for any of these sagas unless when necessary for the discussion of individual scenes. Summaries for the sagas can for example be found in Pulsiano (1993, summaries in English), and Simek/Pálsson (2007, summaries in German).

Íslendingasaga	Dating			Geographical setting				
	early	**classical**	**post-class.**	**North Iceland**	**East Iceland**	**South Iceland**	**West Iceland**	**Green-land**
Bárðar saga Snæfellssáss			●				●	
Droplaugarsona saga	●				●			
Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar	●						●	
Eyrbyggja saga		●					●	
Fóstbræðra saga	●						●	●
Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar			●	●				
Gull-Þóris saga			●	●				
Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða		●			●			
Kjalnesinga saga			●			●		●
Króka-Refs saga			●				●	●
Laxdæla saga		●					●	
Ljósvetninga saga	●			●				
(Brennu-)Njáls saga		●				●		
Þórðar saga hreðu			●		●			

Figure 2.3 Overview of the 14 selected *Íslendingasögur*.

The sagas listed above display a wide diversity regarding the following criteria:

Dating

As mentioned above, the sagas stem from all three major periods of the time of writing. The selection here proposed is based on Vésteinn Ólason's overview (2005, 114-115). Vésteinn Ólason indicates not only the estimated date of the oldest preserved fragment but also *Íslenzk fornrit*'s (ÍF) dating of the saga's origin as well as diverging, influential datings by other scholars. For the present project, the following slightly overlapping dating periods are accepted: the early *Íslendingasögur* stem from ca. AD 1200-1280, the classical sagas from ca. AD 1240-1310, and the post-classical sagas from ca. AD 1300-1450.

Setting	The geographical distribution of the saga settings has already been mentioned above. Böldl approves of ordering or choosing the sagas according to their main setting in Iceland. *Landnámabók* also groups its information about the land and the settlers according to quarters (*fjórðungr*, sg.) and does not opt for a chronological order. Furthermore, Böldl points out that the single *fjórðungr*s reveal differences both in their narrative techniques and styles, as well as the number of sagas written and located in each of the quarters.[269] – The decisions regarding the geographical origin of the sagas were made with the help of Emily Lethbridge's *Saga Map*[270] and the map in Schutzbach,[271] which provides a nice overview of the core settings of the *Íslendingasögur*.
Length	Along with *(Brennu-)Njáls saga*, the most extensive *Íslendingasaga*, considerably shorter saga narratives such as *Þórðar saga hreðu*, *Króka-Refs saga* or *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* are also included in the primary corpus. Interestingly, shorter sagas tend to be counted among the younger sagas.
Figure constellations	The *Íslendingasögur* mostly feature three main types of figure constellations: the biography of a hero; the *ættarsaga* which portrays one or two families over several generations; and the chronicle of a specific region. At times, it is difficult to keep the three types distinctly apart. *Kjalnesinga saga* starts as a regional chronicle but soon revolves around Búi Andríðsson; and although Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir plays a central role in *Laxdœla saga*, the narrative follows the prominent families of Laxárdalr over a couple of generations. Among the selected sagas it is probably only *Grettis saga Ásmundarson*, *Gull-Þóris saga* and *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* which focus (almost) exclusively on one main character.

[269] "Den Bestand an Sagas nach Landschaften zu gliedern, scheint auch insofern berechtigt … dass viele Sagas auch in der Region verfasst wurden, in der sie spielen. Schon im 'Buch der Landnahme' wird das Wissen über die Landnehmer und ihre Nachkommen … nicht historisch-chronologisch, sondern topographisch nach den Landesvierteln präsentiert. Und schliesslich hat man auch gewisse regionale Eigenarten der Isländersagas festgestellt. … Ein Blick auf die Saga-Karte macht indessen deutlich, dass es beträchtliche Unterschiede in der Produktivität einzelner Regionen gibt" (Böldl 2001, 196).

[270] See Lethbridge [2016], *Icelandic Saga Map*.

[271] Schutzbach 1985, 21.

Manuscript situation and Old Norse editions	For the aim of this project, the manuscript situation of the individual sagas is not taken into account. The analyses are based on the Old Norse editions of the *Íslenzk fornrit* series. Accordingly, quoted passages and terms in Old Norse follow, whenever possible, the spelling in *Íslenzk fornrit* which occasionally differ somewhat, e.g. in spelling.

3 LIMINALITY AND THE SAGAS: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Having introduced the most important aspects of the theoretical background, the question arises as to how the newly gained insights can be applied to Old Norse literature. A direct and unmodified application of the theoretical work on the *Íslendingasögur* is neither advisable nor fruitful. Given liminality's evasiveness, however, a careful modification is an intricate task as the concept must neither be diluted nor alienated beyond its original meaning or even beyond recognition. On the basis of examples, the sections to follow discuss what the difficulties of an unmodified application are and what temporal and conceptual gaps require consideration when adapting the concept. Towards the end of this chapter it will be presented how the concept of liminality will be used in the close readings of the sagas in chapter 4.

3.1 A VAN GENNEPIAN APPROACH TO THE *ÍSLENDINGASÖGUR*

Arnold van Gennep foregrounds those rites of passage which cover the most basic and important phases in human life and thus are undoubtedly universal, irrespective of time and place. On this premise, it could be assumed that rites of passage can also be found in the *Íslendingasögur*. Being a lively chronicle of a region on Snæfellsnes peninsula, *Eyrbyggja saga* tells of all phases of and events in human life, and thus provides a well suited 'field of experiment'. Astonishingly though, when reading *Eyrbyggja saga* through Gennepian glasses it soon becomes evident that an unmediated approach does not yield any significant results (see fig. 3.1 below).

In the left-hand column of the table, the most important phases in human life are listed along with van Gennep's descriptions of possible rites designed for these periods. The right hand column features instances from *Eyrbyggja saga*, which relate to the events described by van Gennep. Note that the table is by no means exhaustive and includes, for illustrative purposes, only some incidents which concern the more central figures in the narrative. Excluded are countless mentions of travels to and from Iceland or elsewhere in Scandinavia. Although van Gennep defines rites of passage first and foremost as territorial passages, it is not reasonable to sweepingly argue for the innumerable trips made in the sagas as being rites of passage.

Arnold van Gennep's descriptions as presented in *Rites of Passage* (1909/1960)	**Corresponding examples from *Eyrbyggja saga*** (= ÍF 4 (1935), p.)
Pregnancy and Childbirth (focus on mother) - Separation of mother from community - Prohibitions: the mother is considered impure or dangerous because of being in an 'abnormal' state - Rites protect the mother from evil spirits and facilitate birth - Reintegration of the mother into community after birth giving	(no examples)
Birth and Childhood (focus on child) - Newly born under taboos: infant is as 'impure' as the mother - Baby sometimes separated from the mother - Rites of incorporation of the baby: cutting of umbilical cord, naming, first tooth, ritual nursing, etc. - Parallels to funeral rites possible	Þórólfr Mostrarskegg consecrates his son to Þórr: "Þau Þórólfr ok Unnr áttu son, er Steinn hét. Þenna svein gaf Þórólfr Þór, vin sínum, ok kallaði hann Þorstein …" (12).[1] Þorsteinn þorskabítr sprinkles his son Grímr with water and consecrates him to Þórr, too: "En sumar þat … fœddi Þóra sveinbarn, ok var Grímr nefndr, er vatni var ausinn; þann svein gaf Þorsteinn Þór ok kvað vera skyldu hofgoða ok kallar hann Þorgrím" (19).[2] Kjartan is born: "Þat sama sumar fœddi Þuríðr at Fróðá sveinbarn, ok var nefndr Kjartan …" (80).[3]
Initiation rites: - Puberty rites (social vs. physical puberty, clear breach from childhood, becoming an individual and belonging to a certain community, being instructed) - Initiation rites into certain groups (e.g. secret societies) - Initiation of magicians, kings, monks and nuns - Negative initiations (e.g. expulsion and banishment)	Snorri is in charge of the temple and thus becomes a *goði*: "Hann varðveitti þá hof; var hann þá kallaðr Snorri goði …" (27).[4] In chapters 2, 27, 29 and 38 men are sentenced to (lesser) outlawry and are expelled from Iceland or Norway respectively. In chapter 55 a *dyradómr* is held in order to banish the revenants from the farm Fróðá and the sphere of the living.

[1] "Thorolf and Unn had a son called Stein, whom Thorolf dedicated to his friend Thor, calling him Thorstein" (*EbS*, Quinn 1997, 135).

[2] "In the summer of Thorstein's twenty-fifth year his wife Thora gave birth to a boy who was named Grim and sprinkled with water. Thorstein dedicated this child to Thor and declared that he would be a temple godi and called him Thorgrim" (*EbS*, Quinn 1997, 138).

[3] "The same summer Thurid gave birth to a boy at Froda who was given the name Kjartan" (*EbS*, Quinn 1997, 167).

[4] "He maintained a temple and was therefore known as Snorri the Godi" (*EbS*, Quinn 1997, 141).

Betrothal and Marriage - Betrothal as a transitional or independent phase - Marriage primarily as a social institution not a sexual relationship; most important change in social life - Marriage rituals include protective and fertility rites. At times, they are very similar to adoption rites as a 'stranger' is incorporated into a family	Þórólfr Mostrarskegg marries Unnr: "Þórólfr Mostrarskegg kvángaðisk í elli sinni ok fekk þeirar konu er Unnr hét" (12).[5] The *berserkr* Halli wishes to marry Styrr's daughter Ásdís: "Nú vil ek … biðja, at þú giptir mér Ásdísi, dóttur þína" (70-71).[6]
- A divorce is not the negative correspondence or inversion of a marriage, because the pre-marital status can never be regained	Þórdís divorces herself from Bǫrkr: "En er Bǫrkr var í brott búinn frá Helgafelli, gekk Þórdís fram ok nefndi sér vátta at því, at hon sagði skilit við Bǫrk, bonda sinn" (26).[7]
Mourning and Funeral: - Mourning as a transitional phase which requires that the mourning people are eventually reintegrated into society - Funeral rites aim at preparing the deceased for the journey to the Otherworld. They are therefore mostly transition rites. - Many rites are aimed at protecting society prophylactically, most often against revenants.	In chapters 7, 18 and 28, for example, men die or are killed and get buried in a mound. In chapters 4 and 11, men (are believed to) enter Helgafell after death. It remains unclear though, whether Helgafell is considered a kind of Heaven or whether it is merely a transitional place. Arnkell grants Þórólfr bægifótr the last service (the *nábjargir*) and then removes the dead body from the house through an opening in the wall (92). Þóroddr skattkaupandi takes care of Þórgunna's body and has it brought to Skálholt for burial: "Líkit var fyrst borit í kirkju, ok lét Þóroddr gera kistu at líkinu. … Líkit var sveipat líndúkum, en saumat eigi um, ok síðan lagt í kistu … Var Þórgunna þar [í Skálholti] jǫrðuð" (142, 143, 145).[8]

Figure 3.1 Comparison of Arnold van Gennep's observations on and descriptions of rites of passage with corresponding events and activities in *Eyrbyggja saga*.

As with most *Íslendingasögur*, *Eyrbyggja saga* is also rather reticent in its mention of and elaborations on occasions such as births, marriages, funerals, etc. The narrative keeps such events on a very factual level, as if these things are not important. In most cases, the event is

[5] "In his old age, Thorolf Moster-beard married a woman called Unn" (*EbS*, Quinn 1997, 135).
[6] "I now wish to strengthen the friendship between us by asking you to allow me to marry your daughter, Asdis" (*EbS*, Quinn 1997, 162).
[7] "When Bork was ready to leave Helgafell, Thordis came up and named witnesses to her declaration of divorce from her husband Bork" (*EbS*, Quinn 1997, 141).
[8] "Her body was taken to the church and Thorodd had a coffin made for it. … The body was wrapped in a linen cloth without seams, and then it was laid in the coffin. … Thorgunna was then buried [in Skálholt]" (*EbS*, Quinn 1997, 198 and 199).

tersely expressed in a few or even just one single sentence but any details on (ritual) proceedings or emotions are omitted.

Irrespective of their unelaborated nature, all examples listed above share the lack of rites (of passage) and consequently of explicitly liminal phases. Though reporting changes that could possibly have been accompanied by rites of passage, *Eyrbyggja saga* narrates (ostensibly) impassively that Þorsteinn þorskabítr sprinkles his son Grímr with water and consecrates him to Þórr, that Snorri becomes a *goði* (ch. 15),[9] that the *berserkr* Halli wants to marry Styrr's daughter Ásdís (ch. 28),[10] or that several men are sentenced to lesser outlawry, etc. But the text neither conveys nor emphasises any in-between state.

It is only the category of mourning and funerals that provides slightly more information and allows a somewhat more nuanced insight. Nonetheless, except for the mention of the *nábjargir*, no funeral rite is portrayed. By and large, the saga thus remains silent regarding the funeral preparations for and burial of Þórólfr, Þórgunna and other deceased characters. Again, it shows that the sagas' striking sense of realism must not be mistaken for ethnographic reports which reflect every aspect of life in medieval Iceland.

It should also be kept in mind that the narratives represent a male dominated, aggressive world which is predominantly driven by the high significance of the easily violated notion of honour, which often leads to fights and consequently to death and funerals. This main concern does not leave space for events which are attached to the feminine sphere such as pregnancy, birth and childhood which are completely neglected by most sagas.

Eyrbyggja saga, and most likely the majority of the *Íslendingasögur*, is puzzling for the reader in view of the fact that the saga's realistic depictions of narrated events do not necessarily include all aspects of daily and social life. But in their 'non-conformity' with van Gennep, the sagas prove that their realistic narrative style must not be mistaken for (neutral) ethnographic writings. The meagre findings when applying van Gennep's approach to *Eyrbyggja saga* are rather sobering, even if it was not expected that an unmediated application was feasible. The table above corroborates the idea that the gap between the concept's ethnographic background and the fictional data requires some thought.

[9] While the saga mentions initiation rites, such as the naming of a child, a rite reminiscent of Christian baptism, no ritual initiations into a social position (e.g. a *goði*) are mentioned.

[10] The example of Halli's and Ásdís's marriage is not liminal to the extent that they never enter the intermediary state of the betrothal.

3.2 A TURNERIAN APPROACH TO THE *ÍSLENDINGASÖGUR*

When it comes to the immediate applicability of Victor Turner's ideas to the sagas, it is rather surprising that Turner himself wrote two articles on the *Íslendingasögur*.[11] In 1973 he published *An Anthropological Approach to the Icelandic Saga*, and in 1985 the second article on Old Norse issues was posthumously published: *The Icelandic Family Saga as a Genre of Meaning-Assignment*. In both articles, he attempts to apply his concept of the social drama to two selected *Íslendingasögur* and traces how the characters handle social crises.[12]

In *An Anthropological Approach to the Icelandic Saga* (1973), Turner first introduces structuralist-functionalist approaches which were for a long time prevalent, not least within the Manchester School of Anthropology which Turner (initially) was part of. But in the course of his work he increasingly advocates studies which are based just as much on historical approaches. Having pushed this door open, Turner is dazzled by the *Íslendingasögur* and sees in them an abundant source of anthropological material.[13]

When reading the *Íslendingasögur* and analysing the narratives, Turner, who sides with the supporters of bookprose,[14] is utterly convinced by the sagas' veracity and historicity and almost sees in the saga scribes anthropological soulmates:

> In many ways, too, early Icelanders are the best anthropologists of their own culture, they have the sober, objective clarity about men and events that seems to belong to the Age of Reason rather than the Ages of Faith. When they show, in saga form, how institutions came into being and disputes were settled, I am inclined to believe that they [the sagas] were reporting facts.[15]

At first, Victor Turner thus flirts with the idea of reconstructing the "very foundation of Icelandic society"[16] on the basis of the saga narratives; fortunately, however, he admits one sentence later how naïve this view of his is. He comes to question the historical reliability of the sagas once he notices the time gap between the narrated time and the time of writing. He

[11] Turner's interest in the medieval North was stirred early on by E. V. Gordon's *An Introduction to Old Norse* (1927), which he read during World War II "by torchlight under my blankets to evade the sergeant's baleful eye" (Turner 1973, 351). After the war, Turner decided to switch to anthropological studies in order to study societies similar to the Norse-Icelandic ones. Even though he ended up working on the African tribe of the Ndembu, his interest in the medieval North remained, and, though significantly later than most of his main works, he wrote those two articles on the topic.

[12] As both essays address a mainly anthropological audience, Turner explains, rather extensively, central aspects of Iceland's geography, Old Norse society and culture (e.g. the *landnám*, the social and political structure, historical developments) and saga scholarship, especially on the *Íslendingasögur*. Turner also makes a couple of rather broad statements on *NjS*, the Free State and the Icelandic legal system, but they are not reviewed here. At least to scholars of Old Norse, these excursions are highly repetitive and distract attention from the actual argument.

[13] Turner 1973, 351.

[14] Turner 1985, 96.

[15] Turner 1973, 358.

[16] Turner 1973, 353.

realises that the temporal discrepancy is artistic licence and consequently, that the scribe could rather easily depict the narrated events to his liking or imagination.[17]

Inspired by his work on the Ndembu and not least his concept of the social drama, Turner is eager to apply his knowledge and his methods to the Old Norse texts. He argues that "the sagas were nothing but connected sequences of social dramas."[18] Accordingly, saga society evolves as being "in constant change and development, though with certain repetitive and cyclical aspects."[19] In order to illustrate his observation, Turner applies the concept of the social drama to *Njáls saga*, which he considers not only the epitome of Old Norse saga literature but also as "an anthropological paradise."[20] Turner expresses his delight about *Njáls saga* as follows: "It may be said to be the *fine fleur* of the saga age and the culmination of Icelandic literature. It is also the paradigmatic social drama of the Icelandic Commonwealth, containing if not resolving all its contradictions."[21]

Turner then attempts to apply the four-fold structure of the social drama (i.e. breach, crisis, redressive means, new equilibrium or accepted breach) to *Njáls saga*. In his opinion, the breach is caused by the initially minor skirmishes between Hlíðarendi and Bergþórshváll. Slowly the breach between the families exacerbates and eventually leads to the splitting of the two camps when Hǫskuldr Þráinsson Hvítanessgoði is killed by the Njálssynir (*NjS*, ch. 111).[22] The evolving crisis is a cleavage between the major lineages in the southern quarter of Iceland. Turner stresses that *Njála* features not just one single severe crisis but rather a whole chain of crises. Unfortunately, he neither refers to further scenes of crisis nor does he explicitly point out episodes that belong to the third – liminal – and fourth phase of the social drama. It remains obscure what he considers redressive means or what factor eventually restores the equilibrium. Regarding the last phase, Turner claims that the crises in *Njála* can only be resolved "by the total defeat of one party,"[23] in this case the burning of Njáll and his family. By and large, Turner refrains from developing his views on the social drama in *Njála* and does not indicate the specific text passages he is thinking of.

In 1980, Victor Turner wrote *The Icelandic Family Saga as a Genre of Meaning-Assignment*, which was only published posthumously in 1985. By then he had developed a more nuanced and accurate understanding of Old Norse saga literature, especially when it comes to fictionality and historicity: "It must be understood, in the first place, that the

[17] Turner 1973, 357.
[18] Turner 1973, 353.
[19] Turner 1973, 353.
[20] Turner 1973, 361.
[21] Turner 1973, 361, italics in the original. While Turner conceives of *NjS* as providing resolutions to its inherent contradictions, Ármann Jakobsson (2004) argues that *NjS* repeatedly employs phrasings and descriptions which disrupt the apparent narrative harmony and thus force the audience to reflect on various central issues, as e.g. Skarphéðinn's social recognition and status, or Gunnarr's relationship with Hallgerðr.
[22] Unfortunately, Turner is not very specific in his rendering of the saga, and he only mentions that the final breach in *NjS*'s social drama is coterminous with "the killing of a *goði*" (1973, 369, italics in the original).
[23] Turner 1973, 370.

Icelandic family sagas are *not* historical chronicles but highly structured and elaborated literary pieces."[24] Turner calls *Eyrbyggja saga* and indeed the *Íslendingasögur* in general "prose epics"[25] and assigns them an "epic relation."[26] With this term he refers to the fact that the saga narratives are products of various interconnected (time) layers,[27] and do not reflect one time period only. He maintains that scholars must be aware of this epic relation and must take these various layers into account when dealing with and interpreting the sagas.

His support of the book-prose theory remains unchanged as well as his interest in social dramas in the sagas:

> What we are in effect dealing with is a type of social drama, characteristic of Icelandic culture, involving feuds between coalitions of households, examined within the frame of a set of rhetorical conventions that have developed within a literate tradition though borrowing certain stereotyped elements from a preexisting oral tradition.[28]

Turner sees parallels between his pattern of the social drama and the generic five-fold narrative structure of the *Íslendingasögur*, which Theodore Andersson suggested in *The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytical Reading* (1967):

Theodore Andersson's generic structure of the *Íslendingasögur* (1967)	**Victor Turner's social drama**
1. introduction	
2. conflict	1. breach 2. crisis
3. climax 4. revenge 5. reconciliation	3. redressive means
6. aftermath	4. new equilibrium or accepted breach

Figure 3.2 Comparison of Turner's social drama with Andersson's generic narrative structure of the *Íslendingasögur*.[29]

As the table illustrates, Turner's and Andersson's patterns are not entirely congruent, because Turner does not list an introductory phase but starts right away with the breach. While Andersson's second step of the conflict corresponds to Turner's breach and crisis (1 and 2), Turner's redressive means (3) comprises Anderson's steps 3-5 (i.e. climax, revenge, reconciliation). This correspondence is astonishing as one would expect Turner's redressive means (3) to correspond to Andersson's reconciliation (5) only. It is only the final phases

[24] Turner 1985, 96, my emphasis.
[25] Turner 1985, 96.
[26] Turner 1985, 98.
[27] Turner (1985, 98) mentions three periods: the heroic time (i.e. the narrated time), the time of writing (i.e. narrating time) and the documentary time (i.e. the period to which the oldest extant manuscripts are dated).
[28] Turner 1985, 97.
[29] The table is based on Turner 1985, 107-108.

from both schemes that correlate again. It is rather unfortunate that Turner neither elaborates on this comparison nor does he truly apply it to the saga later on.

With regard to *Eyrbyggja saga*, Turner spots "ten major dramas of conflict and resolution involving six groups of settlers."[30] Reminiscent of the previous article, Turner does not specify his observations and leaves the issues with the statement: "The *Eyrbyggya* [sic.] is, at least, one sagaman's attempt to portray and partially understand the human problem of living together in peace."[31] On a more general level, he goes on to comment on the position of Snorri goði in the saga and makes some puzzling statements such as "The plot of *Eyrbyggya* [sic.] is fairly simple."[32] It is rather unfortunate that Turner does not draw any overall conclusions on the applicability of the social drama or on *Eyrbyggja saga* in general and thus leaves the reader – or at least the Old Norse scholar – unsatisfied.

It is only towards the end of the second article that Turner briefly and rather unexpectedly takes up the topic of liminality independently of the discourse on the social drama. He quotes Guðbrandur Vigfússon, who considers the sea and *Alþingi* to be the "two great outlets"[33] of Old Norse structure, and adds Yule as one more of the "'liminoid' alternatives to life in the local community."[34] At this point, Turner provides merely a meagre explanation of the term *liminoid*.[35]

While liminality is predominant "in tribal and early agrarian societies," the liminoid only started to "develop in Western Europe in nascent capitalist societies."[36] Turner thus identifies the Industrial Revolution as the watershed between the use of *liminality* and the *liminoid* because it initiated the division between work, play and leisure.[37] It is leisure which is first and foremost associated with the liminoid and which figures as "an independent domain of creative activity."[38] The subject is therefore not restricted by social expectations but enjoys

[30] Turner 1985, 113.

[31] Turner 1985, 113.

[32] Turner 1985, 114. Other rather debatable statements by Turner concern the women in the saga(s): According to Turner, women enjoy a "high status" and are "extremely individualistic" (ibid., 116). Furthermore, Turner thinks it difficult to interpret the social dramas in the saga(s) without being in possession of an accurate and high-resolution map of Iceland that names most farmsteads (ibid.). Indeed Turner's statements on the sagas and Old Norse culture appear at times rather out-dated to modern scholars of Old Norse studies. Still, both his articles need to be seen in context of the time in which they were written as well as the fact that he writes on a subject outside of his actual field of study.

[33] Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1879, xxi.

[34] Turner 1985, 117. During the period of Yule, "the idea of communitas" (ibid., 118) prevails. It is a time of celebrating, enjoying (family) gatherings and of (possibly) less strictly maintained hierarchies. On rituals and (folkloristic) customs related to Yule, cf. Gunnell (1995, 2006).

[35] "Liminoid activities are marginal, fragmentary, outside the central economic and political processes" (Turner 1985, 117).

[36] Both quotes from Turner 1982, 53.

[37] Turner 1982, 30 and 35.

[38] Turner 1982, 33.

the freedom of choice.[39] The liminoid is therefore much closer fitted to the "personal-psychological"[40] level than liminality. Thus, the crucial difference between liminality and the liminoid lies in the aspects of individuality and voluntariness.[41]

This division between the liminoid and liminality is in most cases coterminous with the distinction between primitive versus complex societies. While the former is paired with liminality, Turner associates the latter rather with the liminoid. However, he neither specifies what premises must be fulfilled for calling something liminoid, nor does he broach the issue of primitive versus complex societies in the context of Old Norse culture. It must suffice for the reader to know that Turner considers saga society to be complex and that both liminal and liminoid features can be identified in the *Íslendingasgöur*.

Both Turner's articles on the sagas are somewhat unstructured and lack a clear focus in the argumentation. Again, it shows that Turner worked in a more creative and intuitive manner than systematic one, which makes it difficult at times to follow and grasp the meaning of his work. What is more, he often refrains from elaborating on his observations on the application of the social drama to the sagas. He never outlines in detail which episode or action pertains to which phase of the anthropological scheme. Consequently, the present main point of interest, namely how the sagas portray liminality, which occurs first and foremost during the redressive phase, is sadly left untouched. Turner's articles do not provide, therefore, immediate guidance for tracing liminality in the *Íslendingasögur*.

3.3 APPLYING LIMINALITY TO THE *ÍSLENDINGASÖGUR*

At first glance, liminality as a quality and description of non-structural states may appear fairly easily understandable. Upon closer inspection, however, the concept proves intricate and fleeting especially with respect to the development of a framework which can be transferred to data from fields other than anthropology. In the context of Old Norse literature in general and the *Íslendingasögur* in particular, scholars soon face basic difficulties, such as the generic differences between anthropological and saga texts, the absence of rituals in the sagas and anachronisms.

3.3.1 GAPS AND ANACHRONISMS

The gaps between liminality's original anthropological context and medieval (fictional) literature are manifold and considerable, not least with regard to temporal distances and contextual differences. While liminality is a scholarly term and concept which was defined and developed within 20th-century anthropology, and was first and foremost applied to real-

[39] Individuals feel much freer in the sphere of the liminoid, because neither expectations nor obligations are associated with it. In contrast, the few instances of liminality in modern societies, such as "the activities of churches, sects, and movements, in the initiation rites of clubs, fraternities, masonic orders, and other secret societies," are nonetheless bound up with some expectations (Turner 1982, 55).

[40] Turner 1982, 54.

[41] Bräunlein 2012, 87.

life data, the Old Norse target texts constitute a completely different corpus. Not only do they date back to the 12th-14th centuries but also present literary fiction. Indeed the contrast(s) between the concept and the target texts selected could not be bigger. Most of these contrasts are indeed anachronisms as they relate to the temporal axis: "Túlkandi þarf ekki aðeins að reyna að brúa bil margra alda, breyttra þjóðfélagshátta og breyttrar heimsmyndar, heldur verður að brúa bil frá bókmenntaskilningi nútímans til skilnings miðalda."[42] In the present case four major anachronisms can be identified.[43]

The first anachronism is immanent in the sagas themselves, namely the divergence between narrated and narrative time as well as the difficulty of dating the sagas. The saga world as depicted in the *Íslendingasögur* must not be taken at face value because it is an artificially constructed and distorted picture which is influenced by two time periods. This issue is further complicated by the fact that within the field of saga studies aspects such as the dating of the sagas and the extant manuscripts are in themselves complex issues and have (long) been the subject of intensive debates. These issues have already been examined in ch. 2.2.1 and will not be revisited at this point.

The second anachronism concerns the data used by van Gennep and Turner.[44] Both scholars rely and draw on data which stem not only from all over the world but also from various epochs. On the one hand, this wide range of data shows that the concept of liminality truly has universal validity and can be applied to the most diverse data. On the other hand, neither van Gennep nor Turner arrange and discuss their data systematically but tend to use it for illustration whenever applicable.

What is more, it is also debatable to what extent the data used in the ethnographic works in question form an adequate and undistorted basis for further comparison. Van Gennep seems to have relied to a large extent on reports by other scholars. Turner probably did more fieldwork himself but he also included historical material from existing records.

Conducting fieldwork inevitably raises the question of objectivity. It goes without saying that no scholar can ever assume a completely objective position and remain neutral towards his object of study. Everyone is influenced by his cultural and social background as well as education. Accordingly, everything perceived is interpreted and judged on the basis of a personal set of moral, ethic, political etc. values.[45]

[42] Vésteinn Ólason 1998b, 184. "The interpreter needs not only to make the imaginative leap across many centuries, social changes, and revised understandings of the world, but he must also negotiate the gap between today's literary understandings and those of the Middle Ages" (Vésteinn Ólason 1998a, 220).

[43] My thanks go to Kolfinna Jónatansdóttir who helped me delineate these four anachronisms.

[44] The following brief discussion of objectivity in anthropological studies is in no way meant to doubt, belittle or criticise van Gennep's and Turner's works in these regards. I accept and use their works the way they are and do not scrutinise their methods as I do not have a background in anthropology. My statements are merely intended as general remarks on issues that should be borne in mind.

[45] This subjectivity is further accentuated by the fact that the anthropological writings render Western European scholars' view on what is termed primitive societies in different parts of the world (mostly in Asia and Africa). Even if van Gennep and Turner attempted to be as neutral and objective as possible in their recordings and

The third anachronism centres on the temporal difference of about 700 years that separates the sagas from van Gennep and Turner. Consequently, the two sorts of texts involved in this study are rooted in and informed by strongly diverging mindsets when it comes to social norms, moral values, religious and political world views, economic situations, etc. Although this thesis is by no means the first study that applies a modern concept to medieval texts, it should still be pondered whether this large gap can be bridged sensibly without forcibly merging two elements. Theoretical and methodological tools need to be adapted to the characteristics of target texts or data.[46]

In the present study, the main difficulty is the fact that the *Íslendingasögur* are poor in the depiction of rituals. With regard to liminality, this 'lack' forces scholars to find different ways and approaches for the tracing of liminal instances. Studies such as the present one need not be abandoned or dropped. Indeed, the interlacing of modern and medieval aspects can yield highly interesting results as well as enrich our understanding of times past and thus broaden the horizons of scholarship. Why not employ a modern concept in the hope to perceive and crystallize overarching structures and organisations of human social life which might otherwise go unnoticed?

From these observations follows the fourth (potential) anachronism, namely the question as to whether it is justifiable to work with theories in the early 21st century that date from the early and mid-20th century and apply them to medieval fictional texts, which are ambiguous in themselves. While some old scholarship is still considered valid, other more recent scholarly trends and literature are soon considered dated and are thus avoided in modern scholarship. The intensive study of van Gennep and Turner has revealed that the work of both scholars and their concepts still merit our attention, as long as their shortcomings are kept in mind.

It is these major gaps that impede an easy and immediate application of the liminal concept; however, many scholars in the field face similar difficulties.[47] Such obstacles should not deter scholars from exploring new theoretical and methodological ground and connecting it with rather distant fields and subjects. Considering that no theory can make up for such temporal and cultural distances, it is also a question of how much importance should be attached to the individual gaps. In the present case, the *Íslendingasögur* are treated as literary

descriptions, they were all the same governed by the Western European view point, which was at that time still influenced by colonialism.

[46] Hans Robert Jauss conducted extensive research on how modern approaches can fruitfully be applied to medieval texts. Jauss (1977) identifies alterity and modernity as key factors for the modern interest in medieval literature. He emphasises that the alterity of old texts must first be reconstructed in order to truly uncover and fathom their meaning (ibid., 11). It should thus be refrained from judging and approaching medieval texts in an unmediated way and without exploring the historical-cultural context. Jauss distinguishes in this regard between modernity – the educated treatment of old literature – and modernism – the unreflected reception of medieval literature (ibid., 25). For further reading on modern approaches to medieval literature, cf. Kiening (2003).

[47] For a set of recent studies about the application of modern concepts and frameworks to medieval texts, see Ackermann and Egerding (2015).

pieces and as such they form a closed system which can be analysed as an entity irrespective of temporal, spatial and cultural differences.

3.3.2 THE ABSENCE OF RITUALS

Within Old Norse studies several scholars have pointed to the lack of (what a modern audience readily recognises as) explicit depictions of rituals in the extant narratives.[48] In her article, "Two Old Icelandic Theories of Ritual" (2003),[49] Margaret Clunies Ross looks into what Scandinavians might have defined as *ritual* and whether the literary corpus offers any hints for uncovering ritual elements. Clunies Ross is astonished by the unbalanced relationship between the

> relative richness of our medieval vernacular sources on Old Norse myth and the relative paucity of the information these sources provide about rituals that may have been associated with at least some myths and are likely to have been central to the practice of religion as well as other forms of human behaviour in medieval Scandinavia.[50]

Having said that, Clunies Ross also cautions her reader about assuming that the Norsemen shared our modern understanding of rituals: "We cannot assume that medieval people conceptualised ritual in the same way, enacted the same repertoire of rituals as modern societies do, nor even that they recognised ritual as a special kind of activity."[51]

Because of the temptation of unreflected application, the historian Philip Buc uses the term *ritual* as a "shorthand for 'a practice twentieth-century historians have identified as ritual'"[52] in his stimulating book, *The Dangers of Ritual* (2001). But first and foremost, he urges scholars to take seriously the textuality of the sources as a medium of narration and depiction, and hence a stance which always represents a specific mind set and world view. It should not only be refrained "from immediately applying anthropology to what is not raw data," Buc goes as far as arguing that "ultimately, there can be no anthropological readings of rituals depicted in medieval texts."[53] In light of the present study, which is well underway by now, this is a rather daunting statement.

Buc, who focuses in his book on medieval political rituals, argues that scholars should not expect detailed, almost ethnographic-like descriptions of rituals. Instead scholars should assess the vocabulary used in such instances: "Medieval writers, in order to indicate patterned behavior, might employ shorthand verbal markers such as *rite* or *secundum morem*, or, with

[48] It goes without saying that the *Íslendingasögur* feature many instances of ritualised acts in all kinds of social interactions.
[49] This article was previously published in Swedish, cf. Clunies Ross (2002).
[50] Clunies Ross 2003, 279.
[51] Clunies Ross 2003, 280.
[52] Buc 2001, 2. Buc adds that scholars need to be aware of what values, morals, world views etc. have influenced and shaped our modern notion of *ritual*. This background is as equally important as the understanding of the medieval mindset.
[53] Both quotes from Buc 2001, 4.

more descriptive valence, *solemniter, honorifice, humiliter*."[54] While the contemporaneous audience could decode these 'abbreviations' and could extract the ritual implications of these markers, because they knew what the corresponding norms and expectations were, this information is lost to a modern audience. In the case of the *Íslendingasögur*, however, such an approach is not likely to yield results because the narratives present only a few ritual(-like) events which are hardly commented upon.

Similar to Clunies Ross (2003, above), Jens Peter Schjødt (2008) bases his analyses on mythological material. With regard to initiation rites he confirms Clunies Ross's statements on the lack of ritual depictions in Old Norse narratives and states: "Transitional or initiation rituals, which we can find in all religions, are … not described in any early Scandinavian text in a way that gives us a detailed picture of the sequence of the ritual."[55] Schjødt rightly adds that this absence must not be equated with an inexistence of (transitional) rituals.

Concerning saga literature, Terry Gunnell notes in his comprehensive study of the representation of drama in Scandinavian texts that "there are no direct accounts of ritual-dramatic performances in the sagas."[56] He goes as far as to claim that "the sagas can hardly be regarded as presenting a comprehensive overview of social behaviour."[57] While religious and social life might have been closely interwoven in real life,[58] the spectrum of the depicted actions in the *Íslendingasögur* is rather limited and many aspects of communal and family life are left out, even though social interactions dominate and drive the saga narratives.

In addition, the few mentions of rituals must be treated with a pinch of salt. Even though they have survived the transition into the Christian era, we need to consider that all the extant

[54] Buc 2001, 6, italics in the original.

[55] Schjødt 2008, 328.

[56] Gunnell 1995, 86. One of the few and probably the best-known scenes depicting a ritual can be found in *GíS*, when Gísli Súrsson, Þorkell skerauki Súrsson, Vésteinn Vésteinsson and Þorgrímr Þorsteinsson prepare to enter sworn brotherhood (*fóstbræðralag*). For once, the saga describes in what kind of setting such a ritual might have taken place. The four men assemble under a strip of raised turf, mix soil and some of their blood, fall on their knees and swear that they will avenge each other: "En þeim sýnisk þetta ráðligt. Ganga nú út í Eyrarhválsodda ok rísta þar upp ór jǫrðu jarðarmen, svá at báðir endar váru fastir í jǫrðu, ok settu þar undir málaspjót, þat er maðr mátti taka hendi sinni til geirnagla. Þeir skyldu þar fjórir undir ganga, Þorgrímr, Gísli, Þorkell og Vésteinn. Ok nú vekja þeir sér blóð ok láta renna saman dreyra sinn í þeirri moldu, er upp var skorin undan jarðarmeninu, ok hrœra saman allt moldina ok blóðit; en síðan fellu þeir allir á kné ok sverja þann eið, at hver skal annars hefna sem bróður síns, ok nefna ǫll goðin í vitni" (*GíS*, ÍF 6: 22-23). "This seemed good counsel to them, so they walked out to Eyrarhvoldsoddi and scored out a long strip of turf, making sure that both ends were still attached to the ground. Then they propped up the arch of raised turf with a damascened spear so long-shafted that a man could stretch out his arm and touch the rivets. All four of them had to go under it, Thorgrim, Gisli, Thorkel and Vestein. They they drew blood and let it drip down onto the soil beneath the turf strip and stirred it together – the soil and the blood. Then they all fell to their knees and swore an oath that each would avenge the other as if they were brothers, and they called on all the gods as their witnesses" (*GíS*, Regal 1997, 7). Only when they call on the gods as witnesses and hold each other by the hand, the ritual is famously interrupted and broken up by Þorgrímr. This scene will not be discussed in the analysis below as I do not consider it a rite of passage.

[57] Gunnell 1995, 85.

[58] Hultgård 2008, 212.

sources "have passed through the intermediary of medieval Christian culture."[59] Terry Gunnell adds that "it might be argued that the Church would have endeavoured from the start to wipe out any examples of pagan ritual that were left over from earlier time."[60] From a folkloristic perspective he thinks it unlikely though that all pagan practices in daily life would have been abandoned due to the official acceptance of Christianity.

Margaret Clunies Ross delineates two possible purposes of the "*interpretatio Christiana*"[61] of Old Norse pagan material: on the one hand, the Christian rendering of the pagan lore illustrates the differences between the old and the new religion with a strong tendency to depict the pagan practices and beliefs as products of sinister and evil origin. On the other hand, the Christian sources could equally well present pagan religion as "inadequate precursors of Christian beliefs or rituals."[62] Along the same line, Catherine Raudvere argues that the Old Norse material was preserved by the early Scandinavian Christians in order to provide strongly contrasting deterrents. Raudvere adds: "The members of the *populus* were to be converted, corrected and generally disciplined; if their beliefs were ignorant and foolish, their rituals were – even worse – ingenuous and vulgar."[63]

It is also difficult to tell what the saga narrators think of the few rituals or ritual-like scenes they portray. Sometimes they add that something happens "sem siðvenja var til".[64] The texts do not reveal, however, what *siðvenja* actually includes and thus they leave the modern audience at a loss when it comes to comprehending the action, its meaning and scope. Nonetheless, aspects which are considered part of pre-Christian traditions are explicitly demarcated as belonging to a former time and not to the present (and increasingly Christian) world view.

In *Ljósvetninga saga* (ch. 16), Þórir Helgason challenges Guðmundr ríki to a duel and explicitly states that the *hólmganga* should take place, "svá sem forn lǫg liggja til."[65] *Fóstbræðra saga* (ch. 23) mentions that Gríma is "fornfróð"[66] (i.e. skilled in old lore), while *Grettis saga* (ch. 78) suggests that despite the official conversion some time ago, the ancient

[59] Hultgård 2008, 212.

[60] Gunnell 1995, 140.

[61] Clunies Ross 2003, 280, italics in the original.

[62] Clunies Ross 2003, 280. Clunies Ross further suggests that the framework of euhemerism was employed to negotiate between paganism and Christianity so that people were not forced to reject their forefathers' religious belief completely.

[63] Raudvere 2008, 235-236, italics in the original.

[64] A full-text search of the Modern Icelandic term *siðvenja* rendered a list of 21 instances in the *Íslendingasögur*. With seven instances, *Egils saga* emphasises the distinction between the two traditions the most. The full-text search was conducted on the webpage *Íslenskt textasafn*, provided by Stofnun Árna Magnússonar.

[65] *LvS*, ÍF 10: 40. "according to the ancient laws" (*LvS*, Andersson/Miller 1997, 222). – Prior to his *hólmganga* with Atli inn skammi, Egill Skalla-Grímsson also refers to the old tradition of duelling to which Atli readily consents: "Þat váru ok lǫg, er Egill mælti, ok forn siðvenja, at hverjum manni var rétt at skora á annan til hólmgǫngu, hvárt er hann skyldi verja sakar fyrir sik eða sœkja" (*EgS*, ÍF 2: 208). "What Egil said was law too, under the ancient custom that every man had the right to challenge another to a duel, whether to prosecute a case or defend it" (*EgS*, Scudder 1997, 132).

[66] *FbS*, ÍF 6: 242; "ancient arts" (*FbS*, Regal 1997, 383).

tradition and religion were still quite present: "En þó at kristni væri á landinu, þá váru þó margir gneistar heiðninnar eptir. Þat hafði verit lǫg hér á landi, at eigi var bannat at blóta á laun eða fremja aðra forneskju, en varðaði fjǫrbaugssǫk, ef opinbert yrði."[67] One character who is still well able to work magic is Þuríður, the foster mother of Þorbjǫrn ǫngull, who had not forgotten about her skills despite her age: "Hon var mjǫk gǫmul ok til lítils fær, at því er mǫnnum þótti. Hon hafði verit fjǫlkunnig mjǫk ok margkunnig mjǫk, þá er hon var ung ok menn váru heiðnir; nú þótti sem hon myndi ǫllu týnt hafa."[68] In *Grettis saga*, the old lore and the magic prove so strong that they eventually overcome the saga hero. It is only after this deed that the division between the new, Christian culture and the pre-Christian tradition is underlined by adopting a new law, which condemns all pagan sorcerers to full outlawry (ch. 84): "Var þá í lǫg tekit, at alla forneskjumenn gerðu þeir útlæga."[69]

These brief glimpses illustrate that the sagas are not 'merely' observations but that the narrator expresses his opinion on some rules and actions rather clearly and distances himself from elements which are connected to the pre-Christian lore. Thus, following Clunies Ross and Buc, the *interpretatio Christiana* as well as the reception of a text as a shaped cultural product of a specific time and place need to be taken into account when working with the sagas.

3.3.3 IN SEARCH OF LIMINAL PLACES

Since the search for liminality via ritual actions is barred, an attempt will be made to approach the topic by looking at *places* where rites of passage or at least liminal episodes could potentially take place. This, however, poses the difficulty of adapting a dynamic, social concept to the comparatively static parameter of space. Turning to van Gennep and Turner for help in this matter is in vain: neither scholar establishes or defines a specific kind of place which is liminal *per se*.

Van Gennep is an ardent advocate of the pivoting of the sacred,[70] that is, the sacred is neither temporally nor spatially a stable quality but evolves only in and depends entirely on its ritual and/or social context.[71] Victor Turner also clearly distances himself from the idea of fixed or prescribed liminal places: "I have tried to eschew the notion that communitas [i.e.

[67] *GS*, ÍF 7: 245. "Yet although Christianity had been adopted in Iceland, many vestiges of heathendom remained. It had been the law in Iceland that sacrifices and other black magic were not forbidden if they were practised in private, but were punishable by lesser outlawry if they were done publicly" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 168).

[68] *GS*, ÍF 7: 245. "Thorbjorn Hook had a foster mother called Thurid who was very old and not considered capable of doing much. She had been well versed in magic and knew many secret arts when she was young and people were heathen, but by this time it was thought she had lost all her powers" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 168).

[69] *GS*, ÍF 7: 268-269. "It was also made law that all practitioners of black magic should be outlawed" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 180).

[70] Gennep 1960, 12.

[71] "Sacredness as an attribute is not absolute; it is brought into play by the nature of particular situations" (Gennep 1960, 12).

liminal phase] has a specific territorial locus."[72] Thus, there is no place which is ideally used or required for liminality because its emergence depends entirely on social actions. Consequently, there is no pre-defined set of qualities which would mark a place as being liminal.

When turning to the sagas, the reader encounters various settings which – to phrase it rather cautiously – tend to be associated with the occurrence of special and extraordinary events. Such exceptional places may encompass sites which assume different roles or fluctuate in importance depending on their function in an episode. It is also conceivable that some settings only appear in specific contexts. The impression that there are specific locations which exercise some kind of a supernatural power over their visitors or which trigger unprecedented events is rooted deeply in many cultures, not least in (Western) Europe. Over time many settings have developed into what can be called literary motifs or *topoi*,[73] and thus they give rise to particular expectations about what can or should happen at such a setting. In the context of the *Íslendingasögur*, one might expect such unusual events to unfold, for example, on islands, on sea, close to glaciers, or in the remote highlands, even far away from Iceland.

The case studies to follow will thus focus on the following locations in the *Íslendingasögur*. Here only very brief descriptions are provided, but a more extensive general discussion of each setting will be given prior to the individual analyses.

Doors and thresholds	Doors and thresholds have been selected because they link directly to the origin of the concept of liminality and thus offer an ideal starting point for the endeavour. In the present selection of spaces, doors and thresholds represent the cultural and indoor space.

[72] Turner 1969, 126.

[73] The field of topoi is vast and I will not delve into it at this point. The concept of a topos developed from the Greek tradition of providing evidence. Initially fixed phrases, which were used in the line of argumentation, they developed into sets of figurative images or formulae which helped the audience to decipher and understand a talk quickly. Topoi are rooted in their culture of origin but they tend to be transferrable to other cultures and times: "Ein Topos ist etwas Anonymes … Er hat eine zeitliche und räumliche Allgegenwart wie ein bildnerisches Motiv" (Curtius 1973, 14). The topos is thus constantly fluctuating between adaptation and stability. For further reading, see Curtius (1993) or Baeumer (1973).

Islands and the sea	Being neither completely land nor completely water, islands are often thought to be genuinely liminal and/or the setting of paranormal events. Since the *Íslendingasögur* repeatedly make use of islands as settings, it could well be that some of the numerous island-episodes feature an instance of liminality. And because nobody can reach an island without crossing the sea, it is involved in the analysis as well. After all, as early as 1878, Guðbrandur Vigfússon pointed out that the sea is one of the big social outlets where people move in a different sphere.
Glaciers	Glaciers dominate vast parts of (today's) landscape of Iceland. Despite this prominence it has been noticed that few glaciers actually appear as settings in the sagas. It will therefore be explored how glaciers are portrayed in the sagas and whether or how they host outstanding or even liminal episodes.
Caves	Often closely connected to glaciers are caves which serve as (temporary) habitations for outlaws and supernatural characters. Like glaciers, they clearly assume a marginal position as they are in the wilderness and far away from settlements. So glaciers and caves mark the ultimate counterpart to doors and thresholds.

It goes without saying that the list of locations and settings that have been selected for this study is incomplete and could be extended with various other (physical) places and (figurative) spaces. Furthermore, there are several thematic overlaps and a couple of examples could be discussed under two headings. The selection of examples has been made based on how representative they are, and attention has been paid to the introduction of episodes from as many of the selected sagas as possible. Indeed, the following chapters will reveal that not all of the fourteen sagas provide suitable instances for the purpose and focus of this project. An overview of all the examples discussed and their liminal qualities can be found in figure 5.1 in chapter 5.

3.3.4 THE SEVEN LIMINAL QUALITIES

It has certainly been noticed that this study sticks rather closely to the definitions put forward by Turner and van Gennep. This proximity has deliberately been chosen and pursued. Considering the lack of a systematic study on liminality within Old Norse (literary) studies, this thesis regards itself as a baseline study which is first and foremost interested in what liminal elements and aspects can actually be found in the *Íslendingsögur*. I thus consider it essential to operate with a rather narrow definition of liminality that hardly diverges from the

original understanding. Only then is it possible to perceive to what extent the anthropological concept can be applied (directly) to the *Íslendingasögur* and in what regard modifications and adjustments are necessary so as to take the character and properties of the source texts better into account. The chapters to follow will reveal how sensible the above choice and definition of liminal criteria is and/or how adaptations need to be made for providing (medieval) literary study with a better tool of analysis.

Having defined the locations that will be of greatest interest, it needs to be specified on what basis their liminal quality will be assessed. Even though van Gennep and Turner have discussed at length what properties can be, or are, observed in rites of passage or liminal phases, no pre-defined set of essential liminal qualities has been put forward within scholarship. It has therefore been decided to select the most basic liminal qualities that have been described by van Gennep and Turner, and which make sense in view of the focus on places. Consequently, liminal properties which adhere exclusively to the liminal ritual subject are not of primary importance, e.g. the loss of status and rank. Nevertheless, some choices are certainly debatable, as for example the quality of invisibility or presumed death which has been included, since none of the settings becomes invisible, but rather a few characters become temporarily invisible.

All of the seven liminal qualities have already been discussed in the chapters on Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner. I thus refrain from repeating the discussion of the single elements and revisit them only briefly with regard to their relevance and application in the analyses to follow:

Spatial segregation from daily life	It has been pointed out by the theoretical works that liminal activities tend to take place at rather remote places or at locations which are clearly segregated from the daily environment. It is a criterion to locate an episode's setting with regard to its vicinity to settlements and social centres.
Momentary suspension of daily life	Liminal activities cause a temporary suspension of the daily routine because they unfold outside of the social-structural. It is thus of interest whether the selected episodes interrupt daily life or not. However, since the main focus lies on places, no particular attention will be devoted to periods of (pagan and/or Christian) festivities such as Yule, the *vetrnætr*, Easter or social gatherings such as the *leikar*.

Sense of otherness intruding	The category of otherness has deliberately been sketched in a blurry manner,[74] and mainly serves here the needs of a modern audience to divide between rational and paranormal elements, a distinction of modern origin that is not congruent with medieval perception. This quality thus encompasses elements belonging to the realm of the supernatural and of magic. As it has been argued at the beginning, liminality is neither coterminous with the supernatural nor with magic. Nonetheless liminal procedures (can) involve some connection to the beyond.
Invisibility or the individual is presumed dead	The criterion of invisibility or presumed death is naturally only applicable to characters and not to places themselves. In the present analysis, it is of interest whether individuals are temporarily invisible to others or even thought dead at particular places.
Changes or transformations are triggered	The criterion of changes and transformations proves rather complicated and in a way philosophical. It goes without saying that every narrative revolves around a profound change of some kind. However, throughout a story not every episode is equally important and crucial for all characters involved. Here the focus lies on change or transformation of a figure which is deliberately intended, either by himself or a third party.
Paradoxes and/or ambiguities	Being a phase of in-betweenness, liminality is essentially dominated by paradoxes and ambiguities which are created by the fact that the liminal (ritual) subject falls between categories or rather belongs simultaneously to more than one category. Similar to the criterion of invisibility, paradoxes and ambiguities apply first and foremost to characters and not to places. The analyses will show whether the *Íslendingasögur* feature places that appear paradoxical or ambiguous or put the character in a state of equivocality.

[74] I am aware that the keyword *otherness* opens up a whole new field of discussion, which, however, will not be explored here.

Irreversibility	The question of irreversibility is again a rather philosophical one since no action is truly reversible. Here the focus lies on the question whether a character experiences – be it self-inflicted or caused by a third party – a change of some sort that has lasting influence on his personal development and/or the course of his life.

The brief commentaries already reveal that in spite of the main focus on spatial liminality, it is hardly feasible to keep it clear from liminality connected to time or individuals. Any analysis thus inevitably ends up looking at liminal constellations where it is quite difficult to dissect single parameters such as space, time or characters. Nevertheless, the present approach does not lose its validity: the category of space provides the initial criterion for selecting episodes, which in turn are analysed from the point of view of liminality.

Having introduced liminality as an absolute quality which only allows for ‘presence’ or ‘non-presence’, the question of whether all (seven) criteria need to be met to qualify an element as liminal may strike as odd. Yet, when operating with a set of criteria, it is necessary to query whether all the criteria – and if yes which ones – have to be met for a place to be considered liminal. Indeed, none of the seven criteria are in themselves decisive for categorising a place or an event as liminal. Only a holistic discussion involving an episode’s context can eventually decide on the liminal status. The discussion of the *Íslendingasögur* will demonstrate that the decision on liminality is hardly ever a straightforward yes/no-issue but indeed suggests some degrees of liminality. In this case we will eventually face the challenging question of what criteria should be fulfilled for categorising an element as liminal. Some criteria might evolve as more influential and decisive than others, or some combinations of criteria are more often encountered than others. A discussion of these issues follows in chapter 5.

4 ON THE THRESHOLD: LIMINAL PLACES IN THE *ÍSLENDINGASÖGUR*

4.1 THRESHOLDS, DOORS AND DOORWAYS[1]

A discussion of (potentially) liminal instances is probably best begun by looking at the epitome of liminal places: the threshold, and connected to it, doors and doorways. It is by no means van Gennep who first described the importance of doors and thresholds. Many scholars have pointed out the importance of these architectural elements present in a plethora of cultures through time and space:

> Door and threshold are deep metaphors in almost all sedentary cultures and languages of the world – to paraphrase Lakoff and Johnson (1980), they constitute *metaphors we live by*. The near-universal metaphorical significance of the door, while impossible to date, probably developed early in human history, because of the door's vital role as a border between the inside and outside of inhabited space.[2]

In her highly interesting and comprehensive article on doors and doorways, Marianne Hem Eriksen points out that "The exceptional thing about a doorway is that it is simultaneously a place and a non-place."[3] This characterisation underlines the liminal potential of doorways and thresholds, which is further enhanced when considering the three main and partly paradoxical functions of doors as Eriksen presents them:[4] firstly, doors connect rooms because they create physically static axes and thus focus and guide both movement and gaze. Simultaneously, doors fulfil a separating function and hence set up spatial oppositions. The most basic and crucial juxtaposes *inside* versus *outside*, which eventually sets up identifying boundaries between insiders and outsiders,[5] *we* and *them*. Thirdly, the door – or rather the doorway – figures as a space on its own, namely an interstice belonging neither truly here nor there.

These three varied functions of doorways link back to Turner and his proposed states and phases of societies or social groups: the connecting aspect of doors can be seen as the communitas-function in bringing together people and allowing for open and permeable borders. Consequently, the door's second function of opposing spaces corresponds to structure which keeps different (social) spaces apart and brings about order. And finally, the door as an in-between-space figures as liminality, being neither here nor there but on the way from an outside to an inside or vice versa. Astonishingly similar to social processes, "the

[1] This subchapter does not attempt to present an overview of the general symbolism of thresholds and doors, rather it focuses on the handling and meaning of such places in the *Íslendingasögur*.
[2] Eriksen 2013, 188, italics in the original. Reference to Lakoff and Johnson (1980).
[3] Eriksen 2013, 189.
[4] Eriksen 2013, 189.
[5] Eriksen 2013, 189.

power of the doorway lies in its ability to effect and affect our embodied, sensory experience of space and relations."[6]

Despite its functional ambiguity and transformative power, the door should not prematurely be categorised as being genuinely liminal. By no means every crossing of a threshold in everday life is necessarily an act of liminality, rather "passing through a doorway is an embodied everyday experience prompting numerous social and metaphorical implications."[7] In order to distinguish between meaningful and ordinary uses of doors, Eriksen resorts to Catherine Bell's research on the theoretical exploration of ritualization. Bell and accordingly Eriksen consider only *ritualized doors* to be special: "The process [of ritualization] leads to a situation where some doors, or doors at specific times, are seen as qualitatively distinct from others, and are used as ritual instruments."[8] By emphasising the temporality of ritualization, Eriksen echoes van Gennep's pivoting of the sacred. The majority of the door-examples taken from the *Íslendingasögur* will confirm this view: only few instances of doors and thresholds are actually embedded in a ritual-like context.[9]

Ritualised or not, the door remains a vulnerable spot that separates and protects the home from the "fremde, feindliche Aussenwelt."[10] Both in religious as well as superstitional practice, particular attention is dedicated to thresholds – mostly in the form of protection rites – so as to strengthen their protective power to keep all kinds of unwanted intrusion, such as evil spirits, at bay.[11] While having enjoyed much reverence among the Romans, no particular

[6] Eriksen 2013, 189.

[7] Eriksen 2013, 189.

[8] Eriksen 2013, 190.

[9] In connection with the keywords *ritual* and *door*, many scholars immediately think of Ibn Fadlan's travel report, *Risalah* (ca. AD 921), where the burial ritual of the Rus on the shores of the Volga is described. In the course of the ritual, a girl is lifted over a door frame from where she can apparently see into the world of the dead beyond. The present study does not include a discussion of Ibn Fadlan's text, first and foremost because the source material is too different in nature and origin for it to be easily compared to the accounts in the *Íslendingasögur*. Even if the Rus (might) have some Scandinavian origin, the state of source material is fairly complicated and requests meticulous, individual analysis and contextualisation. Hence, Jens Peter Schjødt's (2007) reading of the funeral as an example of a genuine Scandinavian ritual appears out of place. For a comprehensive and careful analysis of Ibn Fadlan's account, see Þórir Jónsson Hraundal's doctoral thesis (2013); for an extensively annotated translation of the *Risalah*, see James E. Montgomery's article "Ibn Faḍlān and the Rūsiyyah" (2000).

[10] Weiser-Aall (1935/1936), 1510.

[11] For various and extensive lists and descriptions of cults and acts taking place at and/or involving thresholds and doors both in Europe as well as worldwide, e.g. Trumbull (1896), Weiser-Aall (1935/1936), Gennep (1960), Arrhenius (1970). Not a particular protection rite for the threshold but involving the door-frame is the traditional carolling (Sternsingen) in various countries in Western Europe. In Roman-Catholic regions, this tradition entails the inscription of the protective formula 'C+M+B' to the door-frame. As carolling is often done around and on January 6th, the three letters are often wrongly interpreted as the initials of the three magi, Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar. In fact, they are the initials of the Latin plea 'Christus mansionem benedicat' (*Christ, bless this house*). The blessing is renewed yearly and the formula C+M+B also includes the year dates; the formulations vary considerably. For the year 2016 the following notions would be possible: 20*C+M+B+16, 20*C+M+B*16, 20 C+M+B 16, 20+CMB+16, 20+C+M+B+16. Initially, the formula was regarded as a means of banishment,

threshold deity can be identified in Germanic areas and accordingly it is unlikely that a particular ritual was allotted to thresholds and hence cultivated.[12]

4.1.1 THE SEVEN INSTANCES OF *ÞRESKǪLDR*

In the corpus of the *Íslendingasögur*, a full-text search[13] for the word *þreskǫldr* 'threshold'[14] renders just seven entries: one in *Eyrbyggja saga*, two in *Grettis saga* and four in *Fóstbræðra saga*.[15] The seven episodes follow different narrative patterns, which can be grouped into three types, which are only linked by the omnipresent element of revenge. In all instances, the thresholds play a crucial role, both in a material and a figurative sense: while the physical threshold influences the plot considerably, it poses at the same time as the figurative border

nowadays it is considered a plea for God's blessing on the house and its inhabitants. Footnote based on Grensemann (2012).

[12] "Von der Heiligkeit der S. [Schwelle] im strengen Sinn oder von einer Verehrung, wie sie z. B. die alten Römer kannten, ist auf deutschem Gebiet kaum eine Spur zu finden" (Weiser-Aall 1935/1936, 1511). The Romans had three deities which pertain to the door: Cardea (in charge of the door hinges), Limentinus (in charge of the thresholds) and Forculus (in charge of the doorposts). All of them are genuinely Roman and seem to have already been part of the Etruscan religion according to Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* (early 5th c.). The Etruscan deities are distributed on 16 levels of celestial regions. In the first region dwells, among others, Janus, a genuinely Roman god who protects the *iani* (pl.; *ianus*, m.sg.), the archways, gateways, covered passages and most importantly: heaven's gate. Being a threshold figure Janus needs to see in both directions and is therefore mostly depicted with two faces. In the 16th celestial region, there are the earthly door-keepers (the *ianitores terrestres*) – Cardea, Limentinus and Forculus – who are considered assistants to Janus (Capdeville 1996, 294). The arrangement of the 16 regions forms a descent from heaven to earth, with Janus guarding the top gate, and the *ianitoris terrestres* the earthly ones (ibid., 293-294). Capedevill suggests that this Etruscan vision should rather be thought of as a huge portal itself: while the upper end points towards heaven, the lower end faces towards earth (ibid., 294). In this way, the celestial regions can be imagined as a liminal space which is situated between Heaven and Earth and the gates on both ends allow for transitional passages.

[13] A full-text search of the modern Icelandic term *þröskuldur* was conducted on the webpage of *Íslenskt textasafn*, provided by Stofnun Árna Magnússonar. Interestingly, for the category *Fornrit*, the search renders only 11 examples of *þröskuldur*: 7 examples in the *Íslendingasögur*, 3 in *Sturlunga saga* (*Þórðar saga kakala*) and 1 in the *Fornaldarsögur* (*Sturlaugs saga starfsama*).

[14] Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon explains the etymology of modern Icelandic *þröskuldur* (m.; Old Icelandic *þreskǫldr*) as a composition. While the first constituent is the verb *þreskja* ('to thresh'), he groups the second component with similar elements such as *(wa)-ðlu-*, *(u)-ðlu-* (1995, 1200). Furthermore, Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon remains cautious when it comes to defining a concrete meaning for *þröskuldur*. It is most likely that the original meaning was along the lines of *þreskitré*, *þreskifjöl* and so denotes the place where corn was threshed. Besides the architectural meaning, *þreskǫldr* also refers to "*an isthmus* or *ridge flooded at high water*" (Zoëga 2004, 516, italics in the original). While the *þreskǫldr*-examples in the *Íslendingasögur* refer exclusively to the first meaning, the three only instances of *þreskǫldr* in *Sturlunga saga* solely reference an isthmus. They appear only in one single episode of *Þórðar saga kakala*, namely, when Kolbeinn Arnórsson rides with his men during low tide on the isthmus from Arney (Breiðafjörður) to the adjacent island: "Var þar [í Arneyjarsundi] svá til farit, at þröskuldr lá í sundinu, en djúpt af út tvá vega. Var þar reitt at fjörum, en eigi flóðum. … En er fjara tók, herðu þeir Kolbeins menn á ok riðu utan á þröskuldinn" (*Þórðar saga kakala*, 1948, 47). "It was out in Arney Sound (Arneyjarsund), as it happened, an isthmus laid in the sound, but it was deep out either way. Low tide rather than high tide was coming. … And as low tide came, Kolbeinn's men took to riding further out on the isthmus" (trans. Ryan E. Johnson).

[15] There is no evident explanation for the distribution of seven *þreskǫldr*-instances and especially for the four examples in *FbS*. Three out of *FbS*'s four instances are actually a repetition of a very similar narrative pattern as the following discussion discloses.

between life and death. Despite featuring some liminal qualities, which differ, however, in nature and degree, none of the physical thresholds appear in a ritual or ritual-like context.

The following discussion must be put into perspective: the seven instances of the term *þreskǫldr* are by no means the only appearance of material thresholds in the *Íslendingasögur*. Numerous episodes feature actions taking place close to or at the threshold (e.g. *dyradómr*, ch. 4.1.3) or characters stand on the threshold without the word *þreskǫldr* being used (e.g. the slaying of Atli, or Svartr inn sterki's attack on Snorri goði at Helgafell, discussed below). Thus, the seeming absence of the specific term does not equate to a general absence of thresholds in the *Íslendingasögur*.

PERFORMING MAGIC AT THE THRESHOLD

Many sources discussing the threshold, and doorways in general, mention that being, or more precisely, sitting on a threshold, makes you enter or at least get a glimpse of the Otherworld, and aids in the experience of all kinds of apparitions. With regard to Iceland, James George Frazer maintained that "it is an Icelandic belief that he who sits on the threshold of a courtyard will be attacked by spectres."[16] Unfortunately, Frazer neither clarifies what he means by 'Icelandic belief' (i.e. whether this refers to folklore material only or whether he includes (Old) Icelandic literature), nor what the source of his statement is. Be it as it may, with regard to the *Íslendingasögur*, it can be said that Frazer's image of a person sitting on the threshold has not turned into a topos,[17] and only one out of the seven *þreskǫldr*-examples features a woman sitting on a threshold.

[16] Frazer 1918, 3:12.

[17] Frazer was possibly referring to the Old Norse literary topos of *útiseta* or *at sitja úti* 'sitting out'. Similar to *seiðr*, *útiseta* is counted among the various forms of divinatory magic. Dillmann (2006, 42) explains that the magician attempts to obtain hidden knowledge through necromancy, e.g. by getting in contact with spirits or by invoking other supernatural beings such as trolls. Gísli Sigurðsson (1999, 215) emphasises that the *útisetumaðr/-kona* does not act as a medium or clairvoyant by answering questions for others but is him-/herself seeking, and in most cases, receiving numinous knowledge. The implementation of *útiseta* and *seiðr* differ – superficially – to the extent that the former is a form of magic which is mostly pursued in seclusion, while *seiðr* is often performed in the presence of an audience (e.g. *Orkneyinga saga*; see also Tolley 2009, 151). By and large the examples of *útiseta* in the Old Norse literary corpus are not that numerous. From Gísli Sigurðsson's list of *útiseta*-instances (ibid., 212-214) it becomes evident that this form of magic is most often mentioned in mostly mainland Scandinavian lawbooks from the Christian era (e.g. *Gulaþingslǫg, Frostaþingslǫg, Járnsíða, Jónsbók*) as well as other Christian texts (*Skriptaboð Þorláks biskups*, *Vitæ Patrum*). In Christian sources *útiseta* is strongly condemned: the clerical texts consider *útiseta* a deadly sin and the lawbooks deem it a criminal act (ibid., 213). Probably the most impressive and prominent examples of *útiseta* are in *Vǫluspá*, *Orkneyinga saga* and in *Heimskringla*. In the former, the *vǫlva* 'sits out' in order to obtain knowledge. While it has long been argued that Óðinn asks the *vǫlva* to share her knowledge with him, Gísli Sigurðsson (ibid., 218) claims that Óðinn appears to her while sitting out and discloses to her the things mentioned in the poem. In *Orkneyinga saga* it is the figure of Sveinn brjóstreip who repeatedly 'sits out' and is said to converse with the devil, and in *Hákonar saga herðibreiðs* (in *Heimskringla*), Þórdís skeggja 'sits out' to secure king Hákon's victory in a battle. Even though *útiseta* is never mentioned in the *Íslendingasögur*, Dillmann (2006, 43) warns against hasty conclusions that *útiseta* and necromancy in general were not practised in ancient Iceland.

In chapter 23 of *Fóstbræðra saga*, the protagonist Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld Bersason fights with Falgeirr Þórdísarson. Having killed Falgeirr and being seriously injured himself, Þormóðr is brought to the old woman Gríma for a cure. The saga introduces her among others as a skilled healer and well-versed in sorcery: "Hon var svarkr mikill, gǫr at sér um mart, læknir góðr ok nǫkkut fornfróð."[18] One year after this incident, Falgeirr's mother, Þórdís Einarsdóttir á Lǫngunesi, sets out to avenge her son, after a dream[19] has revealed to her the whereabouts of Þormóðr. Fortunately, Gríma also has a dream that warns her of Þordís's plans.[20]

When Þórdís and her party arrive at Gríma's, the old woman wants Þormóðr to sit in the main room on her carved chair, which is adorned with a large image of Þórr. In addition she orders him: "Vil ek ekki, at þú rísir upp af stólnum, meðan Þórdís er á bœnum. Nú þó at þér þykki nǫkkurar nýlundur í gerask, eða þér sýnisk ófriðr at þér borinn, þá rís þú ekki upp af stólinum."[21] Gríma receives Þórdís sitting on the threshold to the main room, spinning yarn and chanting something the others do not understand: "Gríma sat á þreskeldi ok spann garn ok kvað nǫkkut fyrir sér, þat er aðrir skilðu ekki."[22] Þórdís searches the house in vain as the main room is filled with smoke, which has been made intentionally by Gríma's husband Gamli. Only after the house is aired by Þórdís's companions is it possible to have a better look at the rooms. Still, Þórdís does not spot Þormóðr but only the chair with the carving of Þórr.[23] She suspects though that the conspicuous chair has something to do with the situation: "Eptir er enn nǫkkut fyrnsku Grímu, er Þórs líkneski er skorit á stólsbrúðum hennar."[24]

The whole scene is reminiscent of a conjuration with a ritual-like touch to it. On top of this, Gríma puts both herself as well as Þormóðr in a liminal position. Þórmóðr's liminality is expressed by him sitting on this conspicuous, carved chair. The extraordinariness of this spot is underlined by Gríma's warning that Þormóðr must on no account get up from the chair, no matter what seems to attack him. Despite Gríma's insistent words, the saga – unfortunately –

[18] *FbS*, ÍF 6: 242. "[She was] an ill-tempered woman but one with many talents. She was a good healer and quite versed in the ancient arts" (*FbS*, Regal 1997, 382-383). The word *fornfróð* 'sorcery' has negative connotations.

[19] Although she was (seemingly) asleep while the information was disclosed to her, Þórdís does not talk of having been dreaming in this context, but says that "Víða hefi ek gǫndum rennt í nótt" (*FbS*, ÍF 6: 243). "I have ridden my staff far and wide this night" (*FbS*, Regal 1997, 383). This suggests that she is a witch with supernatural powers herself.

[20] In contrast to Þórdís, Gríma seems to get her information in a 'conventional' though fitful dream and not through any kind of witchcraft.

[21] *FbS*, ÍF 6: 245. "On no account must you stand up while Thordis is here. No matter what strange events you think you see, nor whether you think you are being attacked, you must not rise up from this chair" (*FbS*, Regal 1997, 384).

[22] *FbS*, ÍF 6: 246. "Grima sat on the threshold, span some yarn and hummed something that the others did not understand" (*FbS*, Regal 1997, 384).

[23] "Þau sáu Þór með hamri sínum skorinn á stólsbrúðunum, en þau sáu ekki Þormóð" (*FbS*, ÍF 6: 247). "They saw Grima's chair in the middle of the floor with the figure of Thor and his hammer carved into the arms, but they did not see Thormod" (*FbS*, Regal 1997, 385).

[24] *FbS*, ÍF 6: 247. "Grima still keeps to some of the old ways. She has a figure of Thor carved on the arms of her chair" (*FbS*, Regal 1997, 385).

does not tell us what Þórmóðr actually experiences while sitting on the chair. His visions remain hidden as much as he remains hidden to the eyes of Þórdís, thanks to the smoke and, above all, Gríma's enchantment. Þórmóðr's temporary physical invisibility is also a social invisibility, in the sense that he can (for this time) abdicate his responsibility for having killed Falgeirr. Temporary invisibility underlines a liminal subject's momentary non-category and non-status during a rite of passage. In the course of a rite of passage, the subject is at times treated as if being invisible and/or considered dead, because the person has died out of the former social position, is 'dead' during the liminal phase, and is bound to be reborn into the new position. Invisibility or apparent death thus contribute to liminality's ambiguity. However, Þormóðr's invisibility does not bring about serious changes, neither for him nor his social position; Gríma's procedure is merely a short respite from Þórdís's persecution without further implications. In this respect, the liminal quality of Þormóðr's invisibility and temporary, intermediate position are questionable.

As regards Gríma, she appears liminal in three ways: firstly, she is not only sitting on the material threshold between the antechamber and the main room, but also in the interstice between this world and the Otherworld. Similar to Þórmóðr sitting on the carved chair, the saga keeps silent about what Gríma possibly sees while sitting on the threshold. Neither does the saga hint at Gríma being attacked by any kind of spectres as Frazer attributes to "Icelandic belief". Secondly, Gríma is in an interstice since she is physically present but has spiritually established contact with the world beyond which is strongly suggested by her reciting of incomprehensible songs. They are most likely of an evocative nature and thus the reason for Þórmóðr's temporal invisibility rather than protective spells for Gríma herself. Thirdly, the act of spinning is liminal to the extent that it moves Gríma closer to a divine sphere because many cultures associate spinning and weaving with fate and the threads of destiny.[25] With her spinning and the statement "at hverjum bergr nǫkkut, er eigi er feigr,"[26] Gríma emphasises her capability of intervening in Þormóðr's fate, and indirectly also discredits Þórdís's skills as a

[25] In (Western European) mythology, the act of spinning and weaving is often associated with fate. It is especially the Greek *moirai* (Μοίραι; moira, sg.; Roman *Parcae*) who are associated with spinning. They are mostly pictured as a triad: Clotho, who spins the threads of destiny, Lachesis, who measures the thread of life, and Atropos who personifies the hour of death. In Old Norse mythology, the Norns are said to be spinning, too, however, it is only in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* that norns actually spin the hero's threads of destiny. In stanza 2 it says: "Nótt varð í bœ, / nornir kvómu, / þær er ǫðlingi / aldr um skópu," and stanza 3 continues: "Sneru þær af afli / ørlǫgþáttu" (*Eddukvæði* II, 2014, 247; "Night fell on the place, the norns came, / those who were to shape fate for the prince" and "They twisted very strongly the strand of fate" *The Poetic Edda*, Larrington 1996, 114-115). Reminiscent of the Norns, spinning can be found in ch. 49 of *LxdS*. Having killed Kjartan, Bolli arrives back home and Guðrún compares both of their morning's work: "Misjǫfn verða morginverkin; ek hefi spunnit tólf álna garn, en þú hefir vegit Kjartan" (*LxdS*, ÍF 5: 154. "A poor match they make, our morning work – I have spun twelve ells of yarn while you have slain Kjartan" *LxdS*, Kunz 1997, 79). In Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson's opinion Guðrún belongs to and and partakes in pagan tradition (1997, 130-161, esp. 156-161). He (ibid., 157) suggests that Guðrún's spinning is a purposeful behaviour to influence the outcome of the fight. Consequently Guðrún (temporarily) becomes a spinning goddess of fate. It remains obscure though how she actually wishes the fight to end.

[26] *FbS*, ÍF 6: 247. "If a man's time has not come, something will save him" (*FbS*, Regal 1997, 385).

witch. There appear to be different kinds of witchcraft. Not every woman endowed with magical powers disposes of the same skills or is equally powerful and deceiving in her actions and schemes. The sagas also differentiate between good and evil magic skills.[27] Although all four women in the mentioned episodes of *Fóstbræðra saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga* – Gríma, Þórdís, Katla, Geirríðr – are skilled in magic and have a talent for clairvoyance: Þórdís cannot overcome Gríma, nor can Katla outwit Geirríðr. This power imbalance correlates with the division between positively and negatively connoted skills; the sagas clearly emphasise and prefer 'white magic' which is used for the moral good of society.

The episode with Gríma, Þórmóðr and Þórdís is reminiscent of chapter 20 in *Eyrbyggja saga*: the sorceress Katla í Holti protects her son Oddr Kǫtluson from his persecutors, Þórarinn svarti Þórólfsson and Arnkell Þórólfsson, by making him invisible to them and by involving the act of spinning. The first time the pursuers search her house, Katla turns Oddr into a distaff while she keeps sitting on the dais and spins yarn from the disguised Oddr: "Þeir sá, at Katla spann garn af rokki [i.e. Oddr in disguise]."[28] The second time, Katla is in the fore-chamber and Oddr appears in the shape of a billy goat, and the third time, Katla is back on the dais and spinning again while Oddr in the shape of a boar is lying next to a heap of ash. In all three instances, Þórarinn svarti and Arnkell are not able to spot Oddr. It is only when Geirríðr Þórólfsdóttir, who is skilled in magic, accompanies them that Katla is overcome and Oddr is found.[29] Both in the case of Gríma as well as Katla, their spinning is associated with influencing people's perception of a situation.[30] Similar to Guðrún in *Laxdæla* (cf. footnote above), Jón Hnefill views Gríma and Katla as (the last) representatives of the old *siðr* (m., 'custom, habit, religion, faith') in a world which is dominated by Christian belief and culture:

[27] Interesting in this regard is how *Fóstbræðra saga* deals with and judges the two Gríma figures and their magic skills. While the saga rather frowns on the first Gríma (ch. 9) when she tries to punish Þormóðr with magic tricks for visiting her daughter Þórdís, the saga looks favourably on the second Gríma (ch. 23), who heals Þormóðr after his strenuous fight with Falgeirr: "Bei der ersten Erwähnung der zauberkundigen Gríma stellt er [der Erzähler] eine gewisse Distanz dazu her, wenn er kommentiert, dass viele Menschen es damals für eine besondere Gabe gehalten hätten, wenn jemand zauberkundig war, weil das Christentum im Land noch jung und unvollkommen gewesen sei. Das hindert ihn jedoch nicht daran, genüsslich das zauberische Täuschungsmanöver einer zweiten Gríma auf Grönland vorzuführen" (Butt 2011, 413).

[28] *EbS*, ÍF 4: 51. "They noticed that Katla was spinning yarn on her distaff" (*EbS*, Quinn 1997, 153).

[29] Yet another parallel episode can be found in *NjS* (ch. 88). It is Þráinn Sigfússon who helps Víga-Hrappr Ǫrgumleiðason to escape from his persecutors by hiding him in three different places on his (i.e. Þráinn's) ship. This instance, however, differs with regard to two aspects from the discussed examples: firstly, only men are involved, and secondly, Þráinn does not make use of magic (and/or (fateful) spinning) but rather hides Hrappr in very practical ways (i.e. in barrels, under a heap of bags and in the shortened sail). The only element that stays the same is the action of the persecutor, in this case jarl Hákon. Although the jarl proves early in chapter 88 to have some seer-skills when he covers his eyes and learns where Hrappr hid initially, Hrappr's hiding places on the ship are not disclosed to Jarl Hákon until he has withdrawn from the ship. The jarl's search is eventually in vain as Þráinn sails away with Hrappr safely aboard.

[30] Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1997, 152.

"Gríma og Katla voru arftakar nornanna, valkyrjanna og spunakvenna fornaldarinnar, fulltrúar eldri trúarbragða í nýjum sið."[31]

To return to Gríma and Þormóðr: Þormóðr's liminal status is debatable since he does not properly undergo a transition. Rather he is saved from Þórdís's revenge thanks to Gríma's working of magic. Gríma does not undergo a transition either. Strongly reminiscent of a medium, Gríma's position on the threshold allows her to get in contact with the world beyond which helps to cause Þormóðr's invisibility. This episode thus proves rather tricky with regard to employing the concept of liminality without falling into the trap of mixing liminality with the supernatural and magic.

WEAPONS GETTING STUCK IN THE THRESHOLD

Fóstbræðra saga features also three further *þreskǫldr*-examples, where the threshold appears in the context of taking revenge. In chapter 3, Þorgeirr Hávarsson kills Jǫðurr Klœngsson in revenge for his (i.e. Þorgeirr's) father; and in chapter 13, Þorgeirr stabs Þórir á Hrófá on behalf of Saint Óláfr of Norway. In both instances, Þorgeirr Hávarsson arrives at the farm of the wrongdoers late on a winter's night, knocks and requests to see the farmer. Upon stepping in the doorway, both farmers hold their spear and stick the points into the threshold. This dominant behaviour, however, does not hinder Þorgeirr in spearing the farmers.

- Jǫðurr [the farmer] tók spjót í hǫnd sér ok setti hjálm á hǫfuð sér ok gengr út í dyrr ok tveir húskarlar með honum, sér mann standa fyrir durum ok *snýr spjótinu ok setti spjótsoddinn í þreskjǫldinn*. Hann spurði, hverr inn komni maðr væri. … Nú er þá varir sízt, þá gengr Þorgeirr at durunum ok lagði spjóti á honum miðjum ok þegar í gegnum hann, svá at hann fell í dyrrnar inn í fang þeim fylgdarmǫnnum sínum.[32]

- Þórir [the farmer] reis upp ok tekr spjót sitt, gengr út í dyrr ok *setr spjótsoddinn í þreskjǫldinn*, heilsar þeim, er komnir váru. Þorgeirr tók eigi kveðju hans. … Ok er minnstar vánir váru, leggr Þorgeirr spjótinu til Þóris; þat lag kom framan í fang honum ok gekk þar á hol; fell Þórir inn í dyrrnar og dauðr.[33]

[31] Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1997, 153. "Gríma and Katla were the heirs to the Norns, the Valkyries and the spinning women of olden days, the representatives of the old religious faith in a new custom" (trans. Ryan E. Johnson).

[32] *FbS*, ÍF 6: 129 and 130, my emphasis. "Jod picked up a spear, put his helmet on his head and went to the door with two of his men, where he saw a man standing in the doorway. He turned his spear down and stuck the point into the threshold. Then he asked who the man was. … When they least expected it, Thorgeir moved forward and drove his spear straight through Jod's middle, so that he fell into the arms of his servants" (*FbS*, Regal 1997, 334).

[33] *FbS*, ÍF 6: 185, my emphasis. "Thorir stood up, picked up his spear and went to the door. He rested the point of his spear on the threshold and greeted the two men. Thorgeir ignored the greeting …. Then, without warning, Thorgeir thrust his spear at Thorir's chest and it pierced right through him. Thorir fell backwards into the house, dead" (*FbS*, Regal 1997, 359).

A variant of these scenes occurs towards the end of the saga (ch. 24). This time it is Þormóðr Bersason and his men who travel to the farm Langanes in order to kill Ljótr Þórunnarson.[34] As in the previous examples, Ljótr, the farmer of Langanes, takes his spear with him when answering the door but he attacks Þormóðr immediately.[35] Ljótr gets wounded by one of Þormóðr's companions and wants to withdraw into the house, but when he attempts to do so Þormóðr strikes with his axe with such a force down onto Ljótr's leg that the weapon gets stuck in the threshold: "Hann [Ljótr] hljóp inn í dyrrnar, Þormóðr hjó eptir honum, ok kom hǫggit á lærit ok reist ofan lærit ok kálfann; hljóp øxin niðr í þreskjǫldinn. Ljótr fell inn í dyrrin."[36]

In contrast to the previous two examples, on this occasion it is the farmer who launches the attack, not the person arriving, and secondly, the fight does not end fatally for any of the protagonists. Nevertheless, all three examples form a cluster on the basis of the role the threshold plays and the dichotomy of *innanhúss*/*útanhúss*, that is, within and outside the house respectively. On the one hand, *Fóstbræðra saga* initially enhances the importance or protective role of the threshold symbolically by having it protected by weapons. The weapon sticking in the threshold marks it as a barrier and prohibits a passage, or – in the case of the axe – makes it a threat to enter the house by force. In this way, the threshold keeps its separating function, because the arrivals do not step into the house and the farm residents do not step outside. Only the weapons as artificial body parts or extensions trespass the boundary.

On the other hand, unlike in the previous subchapter with Gríma and Þorgeirr, the thresholds do not fulfil their protective function because they cannot ward off the attacks. By killing and hurting the *bóndi*, the master of the interior space, the attackers violate the innerspace to its very core. Despite being (fatally) wounded, the farmers do not completely fall prey to the attacking exterior space since they tumble back into the house and so retreat to the safe area, which, however, does not safeguard Jǫðurr and Þórir since they both die after the attack.

[34] Ljótr Þórunnarson is the cousin of Falgeirr Þórdísarson, who got killed by Þormóðr Bersason in chapter 23 of *FbS* (cf. above). Both men are nephews of Þorgrímr trǫll Einarsson, who was one of the slayers of Þorgeirr Hávarsson, and thus they find themselves in the spotlight of Þormóðr's revenge for his sworn brother Þorgeirr.

[35] *FbS*, ÍF 6: 250. "Then he took his spear and went to the door. He recognised Thormod and struck at his chest with his spear" (*FbS*, Regal 1997, 387).

[36] *FbS*, ÍF 6: 250-251 fn 3. "He [Ljótr] ran into the doors, Þórmóðr struck at him and the blow hit his thigh and progressed from above the thigh and the calf, the axe tore down into the threshold. Ljótr died in the doorway" (trans. Ryan E. Johnson). Note that the version of Ljótr stumbling and Þormóðr attacking with an axe can only be found in *Flateyjarbók* (GKS 1005 fol.); in *Möðruvallabók* (AM 132 fol.) and *Hauksbók* (AM 544 4°) Þormóðr does not assault Ljótr with the axe and Ljótr just runs unhurt back into the house: "Hann [Ljótr] hljóp inn í dyrrnar, en konur hlaupa fram fyrir hann" (ibid., 250. "Ljot fell in the doorway and the women ran past him and closed the door" *FbS*, Regal 1997, 387).

- Nú er þá varir sízt, þá gengr Þorgeirr at durunum ok lagði spjóti á honum [á Jǫðri] miðjum ok þegar í gegnum hann, svá at *hann fell í dyrrnar inn í fang þeim fylgdarmǫnnum sínum*.[37]

- Ok er minnstar vánir váru, leggr Þorgeirr spjótinu til Þóris; þat lag kom framan í fang honum ok gekk þar á hol; *fell Þórir inn í dyrrnar og dauðr*.[38]

- Ljótr *fell inn í dyrrin*.[39]

These movements of attack and retreat on either side of the threshold make it ambiguous because on the one hand it is not a strict boundary but allows for trespassing movements and actions, which gives rise to deeds with dire outcomes. At the same time, however, the threshold keeps the interior and exterior sphere separated to the extent that the figures themselves do not cross it but stay on either side, which, however, does not impede the attacks. The threshold is simultaneously protective and non-protective and thus leaves opportunities for unexpected attacks with severe consequences. To what extent this ambiguity makes the threshold liminal is debatable and the issue will be taken up again in a more general discussion on the liminal qualities of the seven *þreskǫldr*-episodes at the end of the following subchapter.

STUMBLING OVER THE THRESHOLD

Grettis saga and *Eyrbyggja saga* feature a third narrative pattern related to the threshold. Both sagas portray a figure that stumbles over a threshold which leads to his doom. In *Eyrbyggja saga* (ch. 43), the farmhand Egill sterki is incited by the infamous Þorbrandssynir to go to the winter ballgames at Leikskálavellir, to sneak to the booths of the Breiðavík-people and to kill one of their leaders. Egill, promised his freedom if he carries out this feat, sets off, arrives at the place and enters the booth. Spotting his potential victims and thinking only of his freedom, which is almost within his reach,[40] he does not notice that his shoelaces are undone. And when he wants to cross the threshold of the booth, he steps on his shoelace and falls with a loud noise into the main room: "Ok er hann vildi stíga yfir þreskǫldinn, þá sté hann á þvengjarskúfinn, þann er dragnaði; ok er hann vildi hinum fœtinum fram stíga, þá var skúfrinn fastr, ok af því reiddi hann til falls, ok fell hann innar á gólfit; varð þat svá mikill dynkr."[41] It goes without saying that Egill is caught, forced to reveal everything about the intended scheme, and gets killed the next morning.

[37] *FbS*, ÍF 6: 130, my emphasis, for a translation, see fn above.
[38] *FbS*, ÍF 6: 185, my emphasis, for a translation, see fn above.
[39] *FbS*, ÍF 6: 250, fn 3, my emphasis, for a translation, see fn above.
[40] "Ok ætlaði Egill nú á lítilli stundu at vinna sér til ævinligs frelsis" (*EbS*, ÍF 4: 117). "And Egill felt it would only be a little while before he earned for himself everlasting freedom" (*EbS*, Quinn 1997, 186).
[41] *EbS*, ÍF 4: 117; "But when he went to step across the threshold, he trod on the loose tassel. When he tried to step forward with his other foot, the tassel held fast causing him to trip, and he fell forward onto the floor of the hall. There was a huge thud" (*EbS*, Quinn 1997, 186).

Although this episode does not constitute a rite of passage in the narrow sense due to lacking formality in its sequences,[42] the scene is nevertheless part of a transitional rite since the assassination would socially transform Egill from being a farmhand to being a free and independent man. However, Egill trips over the threshold, both literally as well as figuratively, and thus fails on the verge of gaining his freedom.

The episode's liminality is enhanced by the fact that Egill is supposed to execute the task during the ballgames (the *leikar*), a short period of time during which everyday life was suspended and people gathered together and took part in festive activities. Terry Gunnell notes that the time of *leikar* was often also a time of religious activity:

> As Elias Wessén has emphasised, in primitive societies it is extremely difficult to draw a clear line between 'games' and ritual. This would seem to be supported by the literary evidence concerning play activities in Scandinavia during the pagan and early medieval period which suggests that the various *leikar* in Scandinavia were often closely connected to religious festivals and ritual activities.[43]

So Egill's personal liminality unfolds during a generally liminal time which is often used in saga narratives as settings for crucial changes in plots. While some fateful incidents truly happen during a game,[44] others like Egill's ambush take place in the contex of the *leikar* but at no specific point in time. In the case of Egill sterki, the Þorbrandssynir perhaps assumed that in the hustle and bustle of the *leikar* Egill's deed would go unnoticed for a while.

With regard to the seven liminal criteria the case of Egill sterki appears fairly liminal as it fulfils five out of the seven qualities: Egill's liminal passage takes place during the *leikar*, when everyday life is spatially segregated and momentarily suspended. Moreover, Egill is about to undergo a transformation which should eventually make him a free man; during the liminal period, Egill is in an ambiguous state and his experiences are irreversible, not least because he is killed after having been caught in the act.

There is a very similar scene in chapter 26 of *Eyrbyggja saga*: Vigfúss Bjarnarson promises his slave Svartr inn sterki his freedom if he goes to Helgafell and kills Snorri goði. Svartr goes to Helgafell and waits patiently in the chamber above the corridor to the exit. When the men leave the house and walk through the hallway beneath him, Svartr misses Snorri and spears Már Hallvardsson instead. Jumping off the roof, Svartr wants to escape but slips on the pavement in front of the door: "Honum [Svarti] varð hált á brústeinunum ok fell

[42] I follow here Clunies Ross (2003), who makes use of Roy A. Rappaport's broad definition of ritual: "I take the term 'ritual' to denote *the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers*" (Rappaport 1999, 24 in Clunies Ross 2003, 279, italics in the original). Rappaport's definition is not only restricted to religious rituals but applies to a wide variety of human behaviour.

[43] Gunnell 1995, 32, italics in the original.

[44] Recall for example the ball games in *EgS* (ch. 40) when Skalla-Grímr kills Egill's friend Þórðr Granason and Egill commits his first killing. It can well be argued that these incidents eventually triggered the tensions or animosities between Egill and Skalla-Grímr. In *GíS* (ch. 15) Gísli and Þorgrímr wage their conflict about Vésteinn's death during a ball game. Also, Grettir (*GS*, ch. 15) gets enraged about and feels pushed back by another player and enters a serious fight with him.

hann fall mikit."[45] Svartr is also caught, but he is not killed; rather his wounds are taken care of. In contrast to Egill's case, Svartr inn sterki does not launch his attack on Snorri goði during any kind of festivities but rather in broad daylight on a regular day at Helgafell.

Turning to chapter 24 in *Grettis saga*: the saga hero is in a tavern in Tunsberg, and soon a man called Gunnarr enters the room together with three companions. He wants to avenge his brothers Bjǫrn and Hjarrandi who have been slain by Grettir (ch. 22 and 23). Gunnarr and his men attack Grettir immediately but he slays two of them, so Gunnarr and his only remaining companion wish to make off as soon as Grettir lunges out at them. On their retreat, the companion strikes his foot against the threshold and tumbles: "Þá vildi Gunnarr undan leita ok hans fǫrunautr. Komsk sá til duranna og drap fótunum í þreskǫldinn ok lá fallinn ok komsk seint upp."[46] Gunnar, who cannot flee because of his companion lying in the doorway, keeps defending himself but as soon as he reaches the doorway, Grettir first hacks of Gunnarr's hands and when Gunnarr has fallen back out of the door, Grettir slays him: "Fell hann [Gunnarr] á bak aptr út ór durunum. Grettir hjó hann banahǫgg."[47]

Similar to the case of Egill sterki in *Eyrbyggja saga*, the threshold firstly prevents a saga character executing his plan, and secondly he meets his end there: instead of avenging his brothers, Gunnarr meets the same fate and is put to death by Grettir after having stumbled over his companion and fallen "út ór durunum." Thus, it is the companion lying on the floor who becomes Gunnarr's threshold because he poses an obstacle to Gunnarr's path of escape and so decides – indirectly – over life and death, which is in line with the role of the threshold discussed so far for the *Íslendingasögur*.

Somewhat later in *Grettis saga* (ch. 45) Þorbjǫrn øxnamegin rides to Bjarg in order to kill Grettir's brother Atli because Þorbjǫrn does not agree with an earlier arbitration between the two of them. Upon arriving at Bjarg, Þorbjǫrn tries to lure Atli out of the house. Atli, however, does not step outside right away but keeps standing in the doorway and looking around: "Gekk hann eigi út ok helt sinni hendi í hváran dyrustafinn ok litask svá um."[48] All of a sudden Þorbjǫrn jumps up and runs his spear through Atli, who then dies and falls forward onto the threshold: "Í því bili snaraði Þorbjǫrn fram fyrir dyrrnar ok lagði tveim hǫndum til Atla með spjótinu á honum miðjum, svá at stóð í gegnum hann. … Síðan fell hann [Atli] fram á þreskǫldinn."[49]

[45] *EbS*, ÍF 4: 66. "He slipped on the paving stones and had quite a bad fall" (*EbS*, Quinn 1997, 160).
[46] *GS*, ÍF 7: 83. "Gunnar tried to escape with his remaining companion, who reached the door but tripped on the threshold, fell to the ground and was slow to get back to his feet" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 88).
[47] *GS*, ÍF 7: 83. "Gunnar tumbled over backwards through the door. Grettir dealt him a death blow" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 88).
[48] *GS*, ÍF 7: 145. "He did not go outside, but held onto a doorpost with each hand and looked around" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 119).
[49] *GS*, ÍF 7: 145-146. "All of a sudden Thorbjorn rushed up to the door holding his spear in both hands, and lunged at Atli's stomach, piercing him right through. … Then he fell forward onto the threshold" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 119).

The difference to the previous two episodes lies in the fact that the threshold does not play a decisive role because it neither figures as a literal stumbling block, nor would either character attain a new social status when crossing the threshold. Even though the word *þreskǫldr* is not used when Atli is standing in the doorway, he is all the same in a liminal space being neither in the safe space of the house, nor outside in the courtyard where he would have had more possibilities for fighting or escaping. This spatial in-betweenness makes him utterly vulnerable and allows for Þorbjǫrn to stab him. Hence, standing on the threshold is no better than stumbling over it. On a more general level, Lily Weiser-Aall points out that many cultures consider stumbling over the threshold a sign of bad luck: "Schon im alten Rom galt das Anstossen an oder gar Stolpern über die S. [Schwelle] als böses Vorzeichen. Mit dem Fuss an die S. stossen bedeutet Unglück." And highly reminiscent of Atli standing in the doorway, she comments: "Es ist nicht gut, wenn man mit ausgestreckten Armen in der Türs. [Türschwelle] steht."[50] Unfortunately, she does not elaborate on this any further but as the saga demonstrates: standing somewhat indecisively in the doorway can have fatal consequences.

Having discussed the seven *þreskǫldr*-examples, it remains to be assessed what liminal characteristics can actually be spotted in these episodes. The table below summarises and compares the discussion of the seven *þreskǫldr*-examples with regard to the seven most important characteristics of liminality.

[50] Weiser-Aall (1935/1936), 1540 and 1541.

		spatial segregation from daily life	momentary suspension of daily life	sense of otherness	invisibility or death	changes/ transform. taking place	paradoxes, ambiguities	irreversibility
1	**Gríma and Þormóðr** (*FbS*, ch. 23)			●	●		●	
2	**Þorgeirr and Jǫðurr** (*FbS*, ch. 3)					●		●
3	**Þorgeirr and Þórir** (*FbS*, ch. 13)					●		●
4	**Þormóðr and Ljótr** (*FbS*, ch 24)							
5	**Egill sterki** (*EbS*, ch. 43)	●	●			●	●	●
6	**Grettir in the tavern** (*GS*, ch. 24)					●		●
7	**Atli's death** (*GS*, ch. 45)					●	●	●

Figure 4.1 Summary and comparison of the seven *þreskǫldr*-episodes and their congruence with the seven main characteristics of liminality.

The table corroborates two major and eye-catching issues: firstly, it illustrates that the seven episodes do not follow one single narrative pattern. It is actually only the element of the threshold which the episodes share, and which (indirectly) assumes a decisive and often fatal role for the characters involved. Secondly, despite being attributed to outstanding and manifold characteristics, powers and functions, the seven thresholds neither represent nor suggest that the thresholds in the *Íslendingasögur* are necessarily or genuinely liminal places. This observation is congruent with Eriksen's, Bell's and of course also van Gennep's and Turner's opinion that places are not genuinely sacred or liminal but only acquire this quality for specific occasions.

The table further reveals that the manifestation or the distribution of liminal qualities is rather restricted.[51] Only the example of Egill sterki features five out of the seven characteristics; the remaining examples are liminal in merely two to three aspects. The temporal and spatial aspects of liminality are qualities which are not met in the examples. The seven thresholds appear neither in special places nor at special times; indeed, all of them take place in a clearly domestic or public sphere and are in no way pushed to the periphery. The same applies to the temporal aspects: probably due to lacking a formal frame in the episodes,

[51] Note that the features that are not marked off in the table indicate either that the feature does not apply or that it is difficult to tell in the given context of an episode.

it cannot be maintained that the incidents interfere with or suspend normal daily life. Fights take place whenever and wherever the antagonists meet. As a matter of fact, most attackers (esp. in examples (2) – (7)) make use of the element of surprise and therefore neither space nor time are left to set up a ritual(-like) structure, that could frame and channel the actions to follow. Again, it is only episode (1) that poses an exception to the extent that Gríma anticipates Þórdís's arrival and thus has time to make arrangements accordingly. In addition, it might come as a surprise that only example (1) features a sense of otherness when Gríma works her magic in order to protect Þormóðr. This hints again towards the idea that magic must neither be mistaken for liminality nor that magic is essential for a liminal situation.

The category of changes and transformations is strongly represented. It not only includes social or personal transformation in character or abilities but also sudden and violent deaths. This category is therefore closely bound up with the quality of irreversibility.[52] As can be seen in the table, the threshold either triggers or 'encourages' manslaughter in five out of seven incidents. Only examples (1) and (4) do not feature a killing, albeit revenge and killing are on the character's mind. Noteworthy again is episode (5) with Egill sterki: This is the only example which actually entails what van Gennep initially termed liminal, namely a social transformation. In fact, Egill sterki is about to undergo some kind of a rite of passage even though no immediate ritual structure in the strict sense crystallizes.

It is true to say then that the threshold figures as a place of destiny and exerts crucial influence on the characters. The main protagonists of the seven episodes find themselves – expressed in German – 'an der Schwelle des Todes' or correspondingly and equally fitting 'at death's door'. Even though the physical threshold or door is not involved in any kind of ritual practice, it assumes a figurative liminal meaning to the extent that it is involved in a person's passing from life to death.

Paradoxes, and even more so, ambiguities are fairly often encountered: in example (1), Þormóðr's invisibility as well as Gríma's connection to the Otherworld through her chanting constitute the scene's ambiguity. Examples (2)-(4) do not really feature ambiguity or paradoxes. It can be argued that the threshold is ambiguous because it both connects and separates the indoor space and outdoor space, and thus does not truly belong to either space. As already mentioned above, Egill sterki (5) finds himself in a phase of ambiguity because of his unclear social status. Atli (7) on the other hand positions himself in a spatially ambiguous position by standing in the doorframe and thus belonging neither in- nor outside.

More important as well as trickier is the definition of what constellations count as liminal, that is, how many and what criteria it takes to establish something as being liminal. Fulfilling five out of seven criteria, the episode with Egill sterki (5) is the most liminal one, followed by

[52] On the one hand it can be argued that killing changes the state, though not the social status, of a figure and death or killings should thus be considered liminal. On the other hand, life and death are part of every (structural) existence. Again it is the question of where structure ends and liminality starts, or whether it is not possible to keep these two spheres apart, not least if there is no ritual providing a clear-cut frame as is the case with the *Íslendingasögur*.

the episode with Gríma and Þormóðr (1), and Atli's death (7). While the episode of Egill is fairly liminal, it is up for discussion whether examples (1) and (7) qualify as liminal by meeting 'merely' three of the qualities. Irrespective of the sources' silence regarding rituals, I argue that the *þreskǫldr*-episodes can be called liminal because in addition, all seven material thresholds function at the same time as figurative thresholds between life and death.

Summing up the discussion of the seven *þreskǫldr*-examples reveals three major issues that need to be kept in mind and will be revisited during the discussions in the (sub-)chapters to follow: firstly, it is possible to trace liminality irrespective of the source's silence on rituals. However, liminality does not appear in a strictly Gennepian and/or Turnerian sense. Secondly, there is no single key to unlock liminality in the *Íslendingasögur*. Irrespective of occasional interlinkage and similarities in the narrative structures, each saga – or even, each episode – requires individual analysis. This results in a plethora of differing representations of liminality.

4.1.2 FATEFUL DOORS AND WALLS

LOCKED AND BURIED IN THRESHOLDS AND WALLS

The episodes which make explicit use of the word *þreskǫldr* are, however, not the only ones in the *Íslendingasögur* which feature an important action in the doorway and/or right at the threshold. In *Laxdœla saga* (ch. 17) the rowdy bully Víga-Hrappr Sumarliðason dies of old age, but before he passes away, he decrees that "vil ek mér láta grǫf grafa í eldhúsdurum, ok skal mik niðr setja standanda þar í durunum; má ek þá enn vendiligar sjá yfir hýbýli mín."[53] Accordingly Víga-Hrappr is buried under the central threshold of the house. Soon though, he becomes a revenant and starts terrorising the inhabitants of the farm behaving even more violently than in life, so that the people are eventually forced to abandon Hrappsstaðir. Hǫskuldr Dala-Kollsson has the body unearthed and reburied at a more remote place, and after that Víga-Hrappr's activities decrease. Nevertheless, Hrappsstaðir cannot be resettled for quite some time: After having moved to the deserted farm, Sumarliði Hrappsson goes mad and dies. Later on, Þorsteinn Surtr hinn spaki Hallsteinsson wants to settle at Hrappsstaðir. On his sailing trip to the farm his party is followed by a seal with human-like eyes.[54] As the men

[53] *LxdS*, ÍF 5: 39. "I want to be buried in the kitchen doorway. Have me placed in the ground upright, so I'll be able to keep a watchful eye over my home" (*LxdS*, Kunz 1997, 19).

[54] *LxdS* emphasises the human-like eyes of the seal which portend the eerie or supernatural nature of the seal: "svá sýndisk þeim ǫllum, sem mannsaugu væri í honum" (*LxdS*, ÍF 5: 41. "and everyone aboard was struck by its eyes, which were like those of a human" *LxdS*, Kunz 1997, 20). Einar Ól. Sveinsson points out that if people were thought to shapeshift or re-appear in a different shape, the eyes were believed to remain unchanged and hence recognisable (*LxdS*, ÍF 5: 41, fn6). Even though the saga does not explicitly say so, the seal can be interpreted as Víga-Hrappr who might attempt to keep Þorsteinn from settling at Hrappsstaðir. It is also possible to think of the animal as being Hrappr's *fylgja*, not least because the *fylgja* "als literarisches Motiv meist auf negative Ereignisse vorausweist" (Böldl 1999, 176), in this case the shipwreck. However, scholars' opinions on whether dead people can have *fylgjur* diverge. In her article *The Role of the Dead in Medieval Iceland*, Kirsi Kanerva mentions Else Mundal who argues that *fylgjur* are mostly immaterial and thus dead people cannot have

consider the seal a bad omen, they try to kill the animal, but in vain: soon after they are shipwrecked and Þorsteinn and his men drown.

Then Óláfr pái Hǫskuldsson purchases the estate of Hrappsstaðir and builds a new splendid farm which is re-named Hjardarholt (ch. 24). During the first winter, one of the farmhands demands to be given a task other than that of taking care of the cows. The reason for this request is not clear at first, and it is only when Óláfr accompanies the man to the stable that he witnesses Víga-Hrappr standing in the stable door,[55] attacking the farmhand whenever he wants to pass. Óláfr lays into Hrappr with the golden spear he received from the Irish king Mýrkjartan but Hrappr disappears into the ground.[56] The fight between Víga-Hrappr and Óláfr is reminiscent of the *þreskǫldr*-examples discussed above: the men clash at the threshold and Óláfr, who is the attacker from the outside, charges at Hrappr with a spear. Neither man crosses the threshold, and Hrappr stays indoors and also vanishes into the indoor-space or the ground respectively.

Regarding the burial under the threshold, Weiser-Aall points out that this motif goes back to the legend of the Langobardian king Alboin.[57] In astonishing resemblance to *Vǫlsungasaga* Alboin gets murdered by his wife after having invited her to drink from a drinking cup made of her father's skull. According to Paul the Deacon Alboin's body is buried "sub cuiusdam scalae ascensu, quae palatio erat contigua."[58] In contrast to Víga-Hrappr, King Alboin does not return from the dead. In saga literature, it is only Víga-Hrappr who wants and gets to be buried under the threshold; there are, however, archaeological findings of burials in walls, and Icelandic folktales offer the motif of the dead female in the wall. In her article on the re-use of

a *fylgja* (Kanerva 2011, 31). Dag Strömback on the other hand gives consideration to material *fylgjur*, especially in connection with people with magic skills (ibid.). In *EbS* a seal's head appears in the fireplace in the course of the *Fróðárundr* (ch. 52-55). It has repeatedly been suggested that this seal is either the late Þórgunna, her *fylgja* or her will because the seal explicitly looks in the direction of Þórgunna's bed canopy (Kanerva 2013, 31). While Böldl (2005, 129) is sceptical of associating all appearances of seals as *fylgjur*, Odner (1992, 138) thinks it evident that the seal is Þórgunna's *fylgja*. Odner (ibid.) argues that seals are liminal beings which unite the elements of sea and land and "mediates between the wild and the human world." On Odner's use of the term liminal, see ch. 2.1.3. Torfi H. Tulinius, however, does not support the generally held views. He maintains that the seal is not Þórgunna's *fylgja* because Þórgunna was granted Christian burial according to her wishes and therefore she had no reason to return from the dead in the shape of a seal. By referring to Hebridean folklore material, Torfi H. Tulinius (2007, 52) suggests that Þórgunna is a woman from the Hebrides fleeing from an underwater divinity. She seeks spiritual refuge in Christianity and thus attends mass every day and explicitly wishes for a strictly Christian burial at Skálhólt. The possible link to the Hebridean material is not overly convincing as *Eyrbyggja saga* does not point in any way to a deity endangering Þórgunna's spiritual (after-)life. However, Torfi H. Tulinius does not propose how he interprets the seal if the animal should not be considered to be connected to Þórgunna.

[55] "Hrappr stendr í fjósdurunum" (*LxdS*, ÍF 5: 69). "Hrapp is standing there in the doorway" (*LxdS*, Kunz 1997, 35).

[56] "en Hrappr fór þar niðr, sem hann var kominn" (*LxdS*, ÍF 5: 69). "Hrapp let himself sink back down to where he had come from" (*LxdS*, Kunz 1997, 35).

[57] Weiser-Aall (1935/1936), 1512.

[58] Paulus Diaconus 2005, 106. "under the steps of a certain flight of stairs which was next to the palace" (Paul the Deacon 1907, 83). The Latin text does not explicitly use the word 'threshold' (*limen*, liminis; nt.) still the description of the burial place implies a threshold.

houses and barrows, the archaeologist Eva S. Thäte (2007) mentions a couple of (Norwegian) examples of burials in walls. Abandoned or partially destroyed prehistoric monuments, mostly farmhouses, were at times re-used as early medieval burial sites. Interestingly the dead bodies (or cremation graves) are predominantly located in the walls or close to walls of the former building. The archaeological sites do not reveal though why places within or close to walls were chosen for burial sites.[59]

While the archaeological findings discussed by Thäte include both male and female bodies, Icelandic folklore contains the motif of the dead (young) woman in the wall, as e.g. in *Galdra-Loftur*[60] and *Stúlkan í veggnum*.[61] In both stories, the (dead) person in the wall has fallen prey to magic. In *Galdra-Loftur*, a young girl who is supposed to carry ashes out of the kitchen gets trapped in a wall. While the maid was busy going to and from the kitchen, the vicious and magically skilled Loftur manipulated the walls and suddenly "opnast göng fyrir henni [stelpu] í miðjum vegg svo hún gekk inn í þau."[62] Because the girl is so afraid of what is going on, she does not step out of the wall quickly enough and the magic spell takes, or rather loses, its effect: the wall closes and traps the girl for good. Only when the wall is torn down much later, an upright standing skeleton and bones of a foetus are found. Similarly in *Stúlkan í veggnum*: a young maid is supposed to help the farmer's wife in the kitchen. When the girl carries ashes out of the kitchen she does not come back. Decades later a skeleton is found when one of the front walls, which included a door, is torn down. Interestingly, the skeleton seems to look back over its shoulder. Only then the people remember that the girl's lover drowned at sea the very same day the girl disappeared. It is therefore concluded that the *draugur* of the lover appeared to the girl to take her with him to the realm of the dead. Since *draugar* were known for "sýna þar dyr á sem engar voru áður,"[63] it is assumed that the *draugur* had lured the girl through the putative door into the wall, and when the wall closed the girl looked back over her shoulders searching for her lover.

THE CORPSE-DOOR

The connection of thresholds, doors and walls with the dead is also expressed in the concept of the corpse-door. In his article from 1907, Feilberg describes this architectural feature in an old Danish house as a "bricked-up oven-door"[64] and explains its existence not very

[59] It is unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis to delve further into the archaeological aspect regarding doors, thresholds and walls.

[60] *Galdra-Loftur* in *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri* 1 (1954).

[61] *Stúlkan í veggnum* in *Íslenskar þjóðsögur og sagnir* 2 (1982).

[62] *Galdra-Loftur* 1954, 572. "A passageway opened up before her [the girl] in the middle of the wall, then she walked into it" (trans. Ryan E. Johnson).

[63] *Stúlkan í veggnum* 1982, 91. "showing doors there where none had been before" (trans. Ryan E. Johnson).

[64] Feilberg 1907, 363. Eriksen (2013, 194) renders the picture of a wooden corpse-door in Norway. According to both Feilberg and Eriksen, the most preserved corpse-doors are to be found in Denmark and Norway. Eriksen comments on the apparent long-standing tradition of the corpse-door as follows: "Transporting the dead out through the wall instead of the door seems to be a particularly resistant door practice, which may well have had its roots in a prehistoric world view, as the sagas claim" (ibid.).

convincingly with practicalities and human laziness: "It [the corpse-door] is a simple, easy, and inexpensive means of getting the dead out of the house."[65] However, there is a deeper meaning to the corpse-door. Arnold van Gennep considers rites such as "the opening in the wall of the house, the coffin, the vault" as prophylactic and animistic actions, which are known and practiced by many peoples all over the world in the context of mourning and funerals.[66] Indeed, the corpse-door or reclosable opening in the wall is intended to prevent the spirit of the deceased from becoming a revenant and finding its way back (in)to the house. The idea of the corpse-door is thus "an attempt to control the threshold to the domestic space,"[67] and hinges on the belief that the ghost of the deceased can only enter and exit enclosed spaces through the passage which they have initially taken.[68] If the dead body is taken out of the house through a hole in the wall which is closed up immediately afterwards, the ghost is (thought) unable to find its way into the house irrespective of doors and windows.

Although not in the form of an actual door but rather an opening of the wall, which is only used for the specific purpose of getting the dead body of a potential revenant out of the house, the corpse-door appears twice in the corpus of the *Íslendingasögur*. In chapter 33 of *Eyrbyggja saga*, the vicious Þórólfr bægifótr passes away, which is on the one hand a relief for the community, but on the other hand, "ǫllum þótti óþokki á andláti hans."[69] Whether out of tradition or out of hope of preventing something worse, Arnkell takes care of his father's dead body and administers him the last rites (*veita e-m nábjargir*), which includes closing the dead person's eyes, nose and mouth.[70] Eriksen calls this fittingly "a practice of closing … the

[65] Feilberg 1907, 374. Before Feilberg states this simplistic conclusion about the corpse-door, he rightly mentions that some funeral practices, which seemingly belong to or are counted among a Christian "superficial stratum" (ibid., 365), actually stem from "an antique layer of practices" (ibid.). In this split origin Feilberg sees the reason why some (funeral) rituals are no longer properly understood but repeated for the sake of tradition.

[66] Gennep 1960, 157. On the one hand, mourning and funeral rites make sure that the deceased easily reaches the realm of the dead, on the other hand they are meant to protect the bereaved from possible haunting and other attacks by the dead.

[67] Eriksen 2013, 194. Feilberg (1907, 368) mentions two precautions that are taken if the coffin is led out of the house through the door: firstly, the dead is carried feet-foremost, in order to prevent him from looking back at his home and memorising the way to the house. Secondly, upon leaving the house, the house is often sealed off against revenants by forming a cross with the coffin over the threshold.

[68] Davidson 1968, 60-61. Feilberg (1907, 369) quotes in this context Goethe's Mephisto, who explains to Faust that ghosts and alike are not always free in their choices of entries and exits: "'s ist ein Gesetz der Teufel und Gespenster: / Wo sie hereingeschlüpft, da müssen sie hinaus. / Das Erste steht uns frei, beim Zweiten sind wir Knechte" (Goethe 2000, 41, lines 1410-1412).

[69] *EbS*, ÍF 4: 92. "His death seemed to them so unpleasant" (*EbS*, Quinn 1997, 173).

[70] The *nábjargir* appear to be part of a very basic procedure when dealing with the deceased. All the same, the *Íslendingasögur* use the word *nábjargir* in only four scenes: In *EgS* (ch. 58) Egill attends to Skalla-Grímr after his death; in *EbS* (ch. 33) Arnkell takes care of his deceased father Þórólfr bægifótr; in *NjS* (ch. 98) Skarphéðinn provides the *nábjargir* to his half-brother Hǫskuldr Njálsson; and in *LvS* (ch. 21) Einar at Þverá takes care of the dead body of his brother Guðmundr ríki. In all four instances, the *nábjargir* are only granted to men who distinguish themselves through an ambivalent character and prove readily disputatious. The *nábjargir* are thus certainly also a means to prevent these dead from turning into revenants, which, however, is not successful in the case of Þórólfr bægifótr. All four sagas in question reach, however, a climax or turning point with the death of these dominant and contentious men.

'doorways' of the cadaver".[71] This is all done from behind the dead person, so that the dead person's evil eye cannot do any harm to the person offering the *náb jargir*.[72] After having completed the *náb jargir*, "sveipaði hann [Arnkell] klæðum at hǫfði Þórólfi ok bjó um hann eptir siðvenju. Eptir þat lét hann brjóta vegginn á bak honum ok draga hann þar út."[73] In case of Þórólfr all these traditional precautions cannot prevent him from becoming one of the most famous *aptrganga* (revenants) of the sagas. Whether the fact that Þórólfr does not enter farmsteads during his hauntings can be explained by the use of a corpse-door is debatable and does not make his actions any less menacing.

The second mention of the corpse-door can be found in chapter 58 of *Egils saga Skalla-Grímsson*: Egill's father Skalla-Grímr dies at Borg after having disposed of most of his money in a swamp. Egill is notified and when he arrives at Borg, "gekk Egill fram í setit ok tók í herðar Skalla-Grími ok kneikði hann aptr á bak, lagði hann niðr í setit ok veitti honum þá náb jargir; þá bað Egill taka graftól ok brjóta vegginn fyrir sunnan."[74] While Skalla-Grímr was certainly not always a pleasant man and thus would have the potential for becoming a revenant, his death does not scare people as much as Þórólfr's, and Skalla-Grímr does not become an *aptrganga*.[75]

Both in *Egils saga* as well as in *Eyrbyggja saga*, the character in question dies overnight and is found sitting upright the next day. Both of the deceased receive the last rites – the *náb jargir* – from their son, and then the bodies are taken out of the house through an opening in the wall and are prepared for the funeral. Even though both Skalla-Grímr and Þórólfr bægifótr have the potential to become revenants, due to their difficult personalities and their tendency to be quarrelsome, it is only Þórólfr who turns into a fairly violent revenant. As both men's dead bodies formally receive the same treatment, the trigger for becoming an *aptrganga* must lie in an aspect other than the funeral preparation. While Egill's preparation

[71] Eriksen 2013, 193.

[72] Böldl 1999, 168, and Schier 1996, 282.

[73] *EbS*, ÍF 4: 92. "He wrapped some clothes around Thorolf's head and prepared his body according to the customs of the time. After that he had the wall behind him broken down to drag the body outside" (*EbS*, Quinn 1997, 173).

[74] *EgS*, ÍF 2: 174. "Egill went through to the bench, took Skallagrim by the shoulders and tugged him backwards. He laid him down on the bench and closed his nostrils, eyes and mouth. Then he ordered the men to take spades and break down the south wall" (*EgS*, Scudder 1997, 115).

[75] In his latest book *The Enigma of Egill* (2014), Torfi H. Tulinius discusses the possibility of Skalla-Grímr returning from the dead although his return is not as obvious as Þórólfr's. In this context, Torfi H. Tulinius refers to Claude Lecouteux who has called attention to "examples in Germanic folklore that seem to point to a belief that people could return to life after death if they had taken the precaution of burying a hoard in the ground beforehand" (ibid., 113). Torfi H. Tulinius argues that by having buried a brazen kettle (*eirketill*) in Krumskelda marsh (ch. 59), Skalla-Grímr creates himself a loophole for becoming a revenant, hence all precautions taken by Egill after Skalla-Gímr's death are ultimately done in vain. It is not only the general animosities with his son that might motivate Skalla-Grímr to return but his conviction that Egill partly caused his brother's death in England. Skalla-Grímr might want to avenge this loss and thus causes the storm in which Egill's beloved son Bǫðvarr drowns (ch. 78): "The saga can be read as signifying that Skallagrímr's ghost caused the wreck in order to avenge the death of his son Þórólfr, Egill's brother" (ibid., 117).

of Skalla-Grímr seems to proceed effortlessly, *Eyrbyggja saga* states explicitly that Arnkell had "at kenna aflsmunar"[76] when taking care of his father's corpse. The strenuousness continues and applies to every action involving the corpse of Þórólfr bægifótr: getting the body out of the house through the wall is strenuous, getting him on the sledge is a big effort as well as moving the sledge to the (first and later on the second) place of burial. The dead body's resistance to being buried indicates that irrespective of his apparent death, Þórólfr is still full of energy, which he will make use of in his dreadful hauntings and eventual re-appearance as the bull Glæsir. In the case of Þórólfr, the precautions taken with the opening in the house wall can neither prevent the haunting nor improve the situation in any way.

FIGHTS IN THE DOORWAY AND SHATTERED DOORFRAMES

In *Grettis saga* there are two scenes which emphasise the door, though not explicitly the threshold, as an important barrier, which separates the familiar and protected indoor space from the dangerous and unpredictable outdoor space. Both in the description of Grettir's fight against Glámr (ch. 35) and later on against the trollwoman (*trollkona*) in Sandhaugar (ch. 64-65), the door is emphasised as a parting element, the crossing of which seriously influences the power balance to the detriment of Grettir. In both cases, the saga hero fights a supernatural invader who is obviously stronger than him, and both times Grettir realises that he has to do everything in his power to keep fighting indoors, as it is not likely that he stands a chance fighting outdoors.

In the case of Glámr (ch. 35), he has not only been riding the houses (*at ríða húsum*) but also breaking down doors before Grettir's arrival. After the second night Grettir spends at Þórhallsstaðir, the stable doors are broken down and Grettir's horse was dragged outside and killed. When describing the interior of Þórhallsstaðir, the narrator says about the door: "Duraumbúningrinn allr var frá brotinn útidurunum, en nú var þar fyrir bundinn hurðarflaki ok óvendiliga um búit."[77] The following night, Glámr launches another attack on the farmhouse. When the fight begins, Glámr tries to pull Grettir out of the house, but Grettir does his utmost to resist: "En svá illt, sem at eiga var við Glám inni, þá sá Grettir, at þó var verra at fásk við hann úti."[78] But soon Glámr manages to drag Grettir to the entrance hall, a

[76] *EbS*, ÍF 4: 92. "more force than he expected" (*EbS*, Quinn 1997, 173).
[77] *GS*, ÍF 7: 119. "The frame had been smashed right away from the door to the house and makeshift boards had been put in its place" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 106).
[78] *GS*, ÍF 7: 120. "But difficult as Glam was to deal with indoors, Grettir saw he would be even harder to handle outdoors" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 106).

liminal space which is neither completely inside nor outside and essentially a space of transition.[79]

With all his power, Grettir struggles against Glámr and tries to overcome him: "Hann [Grettir] hleypr sem harðast í fang þrælnum [Glámi] ok spyrnir báðum fótum í jarðfastan stein, er stóð í durunum."[80] Even though Grettir pushes against this stone with all his might, he cannot keep himself indoors. He falls out of the house and lands on Glámr who has fallen backwards and thereby smashed the doorframe: "Fell hann [Glámr] svá opinn ok ǫfugr út ór húsunum, en Grettir á hann ofan."[81]

Much later in the saga (ch. 65), Grettir enters a similar fight of which he thinks – again – that he has never "fengizk við þvílíkan ófagnað fyrir afls sakar."[82] This time his opponent is a highly aggressive and dangerous *trollkona* at the farm of Sandhaugar. As did Glámr, the *trollkona* hauls Grettir out of the house: "Hon dró hann fram yfir dyrrnar ok svá í anddyrit; þar tók hann fast í móti. Hon vildi draga hann út ór bœnum, en þat varð eigi, fyrr en þau leystu frá allan útiduraumbúninginn."[83] Not until the *trollkona* has dragged him to the edge of nearby cliffs can Grettir launch a counterattack and so manages to toss her down the gorge.

The similarities between the two fighting scenes are striking and call for further consideration. Featuring three (otherness, change, irreversibility) and four (otherness, change, irreversibility, paradoxes/ambiguities) out of the seven liminal qualities respectively neither fighting scene proves highly liminal. Grettir's fight with Glámr features also the quality of ambiguity because of the famous statement that Grettir "lá náliga í milli heims ok heljar."[84]

[79] On the architectural forms of entrances, see Beck 2014, 132. In his book *Witchcraft and Magic in the Nordic Middle Ages* (2011) Stephen Mitchell points to the liminal character of the entrance hall with a special focus on the *vapenhus*. The *vapenhus* is an element of Nordic church architecture, "a vestibule that functioned as a cold-trapping antechamber and a place where weapons were to be left. But it also represents the transitional or liminal space between the outside secular world and the marked holy area of worship" (ibid., 185). Entrance halls and the *vapenhus* of churches are often richly decorated with paintings in which "a pedagogical and didactic intentionality" (ibid.) can be detected. In this context Mitchell describes Danish *vapenhus* which feature – by means of lively illustrations – "a didactic message to the female congregants about how they should behave or, more accurately, how they should not behave" (ibid., 187) if they want to avoid a bad reputation as an evil woman skilled in witchcraft.

[80] *GS*, ÍF 7: 120. "He suddenly thrust himself as hard as he could into the wretch's arms and pressed both feet against a rock that was buried in the ground of the doorway" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 106).

[81] *GS*, ÍF 7: 121. "Glam fell out of the house onto his back, face upwards, with Grettir on top of him" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 106). Interestingly, when Grettir fights with the bear in chapter 21, the plot develops rather similarly to the fight with Glámr. The main part of the fight takes place on or around a threshold of some kind (in the case of the bear, it is the limited space between the cave and the abyss) and eventually Grettir's opponent falls backwards into wilderness proper. Both times Grettir lands on top of the antagonist. While the bear is dead after the fall onto the rocks, Glámr is still alive and curses Grettir before the latter kills him.

[82] *GS*, ÍF 7: 212. "And he felt he had never fought such a powerful beast before" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 152). Grettir makes similar statements after having fought the bear (ch. 21) and of course Glámr (ch. 35).

[83] *GS*, ÍF 7: 212. "She dragged him out through the door and towards the front door, where he made a firm stand against her. She wanted to drag him outside the farmhouse, but could not manage it until they had broken down the entire door-frame" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 152).

[84] *GS*, ÍF 7: 121. "He lay there on the brink of death" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 107). Literally the phrase translates as "He lay between the world and hell."

The fight with the *trollkona*, on the other hand, is rather straightforward and hardly leaves space for ambiguities. Nevertheless, the two scenes are closely interlinked and are centre poles in the narrative.

Not only that, but both the revenant and the *trollkona* attack people in their most vulnerable spot, namely at home in the hall;[85] they are also very determined to get Grettir out of the house and thus out of the comfort zone which would still partly allow him to escape the intruder's clutches and hide as well as attack from behind broken furniture. Both times, Grettir finds himself first dragged into the transitional antechamber,[86] before the fight eventually continues outside the house. While Grettir fights Glámr in the farmyard, which still counts as *innangarðs*,[87] it is not stated in the second instance whether the trollwoman passes the fence, and so forces Grettir *útangarðs* when dragging him to the chasm.

It can be assumed in either case that the door, or rather, passing through the door severely affects the action and the power balance between the two fighters. Both times it is stated clearly that Grettir would rather choose to fight the intruders indoors, in the protected area of home, civilisation and human dominion. But as much as he keeps defending himself, he is pulled outside into *útangarðs*, the chaotic part of the world where the adversaries have their origin. Despite being in a more advantageous position outdoors, neither Glámr nor the trollwoman can (physically) overcome Grettir. Grettir triumphs therefore, although he nearly dies on both occasions.

Considering both scenes embedded in the whole saga, it is striking that the outstanding events which deeply influence Grettir and which in turn characterise the saga actually happen between these two *þreskǫldr*-incidents. Before the fight with Glámr, Grettir pursues the life of a typical saga hero: getting involved in skirmishes, travelling abroad, and fighting beasts of all sorts. It is the fight with Glámr that is decisive and changes Grettir's fate for good: Grettir is accused of having killed the sons of Þórir í Garði (ch. 38); the ordeal in front of king Óláfr fails (ch. 39); Grettir's father dies (ch. 42); Grettir's brother Atli gets killed and Grettir avenges him (ch. 45 and 48); Grettir is outlawed at the *Alþingi* although he is not present (ch. 46); Þorbjǫrg in digra saves Grettir from being hanged (ch. 52); Grettir meets Hallmundr (ch.

[85] According to Anna S. Beck "every room in the longhouse can be assigned a depth value according to the minimum number of steps that must be taken to access that particular room. … The room placed deepest in the structure is often the hall, and there is never direct access from the outside into the hall" (2014, 134 and 135). Thus, monsters or revenants that intrude into the hall are the most dangerous and hideous ones, as they intrude into the heart of home and protectiveness and are thus highly disturbing, not least psychologically.

[86] Anna S. Beck also explores the position of doors within Viking Age longhouses. She distinguishes between two types of entrances: "Either the doorway was an integrated part of the wall and was described as 'not enhanced', or the doorway stood out from the wall and was described as 'enhanced'. … The enhancement of the doorway meant that it was separated from the rest of the house, and in this way defined as its own space – an entrance" (2014, 132). Judging by Beck's corpus of examples, it seems that the enhanced doorways forming their own space, as described in *Grettis saga*, became increasingly popular during the Viking Age.

[87] On the division line between *innangarðs/útangarðs* Kirsten Hastrup comments: "The borderline between the farmstead as centre [i.e. *innangarðs*] and the world outside as periphery [i.e. *útangarðs*] was drawn along the fence that surrounded the farm" (1985, 60).

54 and 57); Grettir spends some time on Arnarvatnsheiði (ch. 55), and later on moves to Þórisdalr for a while (ch. 61). After having fought the two ogres at Sandhaugar (ch. 65-67) *Grettis saga* ends rather abruptly and in a manner not nearly as spectacular and fast-paced as the previous narrative strands: Grettir retreats to Drangey, makes his appearance at the Hegranessþing and is killed soon after.

Interestingly, both big fights happen in the context of Christian Yule festivities. This is no mere coincidence but rather an expression of the struggles involving conversion which manifest themselves in Grettir's biography: While the Glámr-episode (ch. 32) is dominated by (sinister) pagan forces, Christian values prevail in the Sandhaugar-episode (ch. 64-65). It all starts with Glámr, the new and somewhat alien shepherd of Þórhallsstaðir,[88] who refuses to enter the farm's church as well as to fast on the day before Yule. Glámr does not survive the day; he is found dead and ugly-looking in the evening. Indeed, the whole site appears rather eerie and people cannot explain what exactly has happened. It is not much of a surprise that Glámr returns as a vicious revenant.

As he features so prominently in the saga, it is often forgotten that he had initially been hired for freeing Þórhallsstaðir from an unspecified *meinvættr* (f., 'evil spirit').[89] Ármann Jakobsson thus observes that Glámr inevitably takes over the *meinvættr*'s role, and later on it is Grettir who is actually designated to assume this role. Hence Glámr and Grettir are very similar figures or even doubles:[90] "They are both monster fighters and, as such, two outsiders fighting each other with the wellbeing of society at large at stake."[91] Yet, society does not immediately share this impression: Grettir remains an outsider and he never gains recognition, not to mention gratitude, for the great deeds he carries out.

Only when Grettir stays at Sandhaugar do things begin to change. Not only does he free the neighbourhood from two ogres, he also carries the landlady of Sandhaugar and her child safely through an icy cold river so that they can attend Yule mass. The comparison of Grettir to Saint Christopher cannot be denied. Allegedly, Saint Christopher was "von furchtbarem Antlitz und 12 Ellen hoch,"[92] a description that also fits Grettir who is often described as a troll. The landlady of Sandhaugar also expresses her doubts about "hvárt hana hefði yfir flutt maðr eða troll." Given the hostility Grettir often encounters, the priest's reply proves surprisingly tolerant: "Prestr kvað mann víst vera mundu."[93] Even if Grettir does not convert

[88] Ármann Jakobsson 2009, 311-312.

[89] Ármann Jakobsson 2009, 311. The *meinvættr*'s appearance just before Yule is not astonishing. In pre-Christian tradition, it was said that evil spirits roam the places during the time of Yule. In Norway people were therefore forbidden to leave the house so as not to run into any danger (Gunnell 2006, 290). In mainland Scandinavia, it is the tradition of the *julebukk* (Yule Goat) which is associated with a nature spirit that was offered food in order to pacify it and kept it passive during this time of year (Gunnell, 1995, 126).

[90] Ármann Jakobsson 2009, 311.

[91] Ármann Jakobsson 2009, 312.

[92] Keller 1970, 88.

[93] Both quotes from *GS*, ÍF 7: 211. "whether it was a man or a troll who had carried her across" and "The priest said it was definitely a man" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 152).

to Christianity,[94] as Saint Christopher did after having carried Jesus, the event is no less significant to Grettir's life. With his statement, the priest rehabilitates Grettir – similar to the outlaw sentence – *in absentia*. The priest acknowledges Grettir's human and ultimately Christian qualities as a saviour of some sort. Even though these two episodes clearly stand out from the narrative and immediately catch the audience's attention, the struggle of the religious traditions does not end at Sandhaugar. It continues but the balance increasingly shifts in favour of Christianity.[95]

The core of *Grettis saga* is thus framed by two parallel fighting scenes which both take place in the setting of Christian (Yule) festivities. In-between, Grettir is a restless figure truly hovering 'milli heims ok heljar'. He is driven by two disparate forces, namely his (legal) adversaries as well as Glámr's curse. Grettir's restlessness eventually results in spacelessness since he is not given the privilege to stay at any one place for any longer. Glámr's curse alone would still have allowed Grettir to live in society and not be exposed to his fear of darkness and loneliness. But as soon as Grettir is pronounced an outlaw, the curse and the verdict alternately force Grettir to be on the run; either he has to escape his fears or his foes:[96]

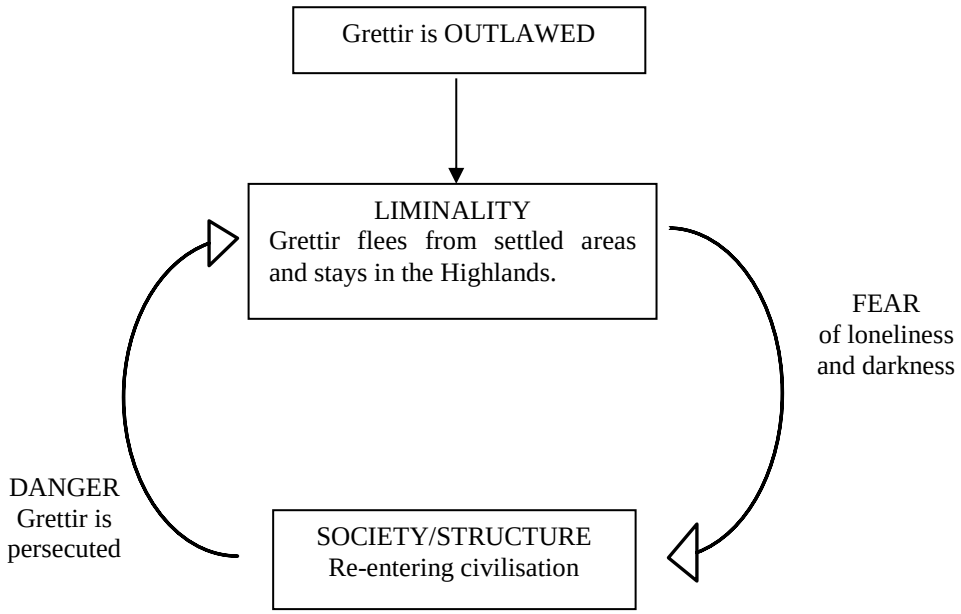

Figure 4.2 Grettir's perpetual movement between liminal and socio-structural spheres.

[94] In contrast to Glámr, Grettir does not openly despise Christian traditions.

[95] The last huge clash of religious traditions revolves around Grettir's death. Pagan actions (i.e. the piece of wood with the engraved curse) pave the way for Þorbjǫrn ǫngull Þórðarson and his men, and also his explanation that Christ has shown him the way to the island ("Kristr vísaði oss leið" *GS*, ÍF 7: 260) is fairly heretical. As so often in history, justice comes too late for the hero: in this case only at the *Alþingi* that sentences Þorbjǫrn ǫngull to outlawry, because of his proceedings against Grettir, the Christian (!) law is passed that persons who work magic are henceforth fully outlawed (Guðni Jónsson in *GS*, ÍF 7: 269, fn1). This aspect of belated justice certainly adds to the tragedy of Grettir's life and death.

[96] I first drew this diagram for my Master thesis (Heiniger 2010, 59), and later on I used it in a paper presentation at the International Medieval Congress in Leeds/UK in 2013.

The vicious circle is initiated by Grettir's outlawry and expulsion from social and legal structure and protection. He is forced to enter the liminal space of outsiderhood and withdraws to the highlands.[97] The notion of an outlaw's ostensible freedom quickly proves highly elusive.[98] Grettir's choice of his whereabouts is a dangerous issue and does not allow for long-term solutions which eventually results in a 'de-socialisation': "Der Weg wird zum Weg eines Einsamen und Vereinzelten, der seine Identität dadurch gewinnt, dass er sich in keine Kollektive integriert und seine Verlorenheit innerhalb der Gemeinschaft behält."[99] In this quote, Christian Kiening refers to a Christian figure in a German, medieval text,[100] yet the description adequately sums up Grettir's complicated and bleak situation.

Having defeated Glámr, he is additionally assailed by his fears of loneliness and darkness, which obviously haunt him relentlessly when staying on the margins of society. It makes him leave the periphery and re-enter structure (i.e. settled areas). Despite being relieved from his mental anxieties, Grettir is now chased by the constantly looming persecutors. Inevitably, Grettir has to flee and is again driven to lonely and dark places.

Grettir's unresolvable dilemma is his position between the human and the supernatural sphere. He can move and temporarily integrate in either world but he cannot settle down. He is not welcome in the human world, but neither does he choose to stay with supernatural beings. He is doomed to remain constantly crossing the borders of various spheres:

> Die Episoden, in denen Grettir mit übernatürlichen Wesen zusammentrifft, machen ganz besonders deutlich, dass er selbst ein Grenzgänger zwischen den Welten ist: ein Mensch, der am Rande und ausserhalb der menschlichen Gesellschaft steht, an der Grenze zwischen Ordnung und Chaos.[101]

[97] While those sentenced to lesser outlawry were requested to leave the country for three years and so were given the opportunity to enter another social structure (e.g. Norway), fully outlawed persons became *óferjandi* (i.e. it was forbidden to transport them by boat, G. Turville-Petre 1977, 770) and had to stay in Iceland, an environment that had become hostile and ill-disposed towards them. Outlaws were not legally confined to remote and far-off locations but any return to places of structure and society was risky.

[98] "The outlaw is condemned to a kind of complete freedom by being denied the freedom of making any bonds at all" (Miller 2004, 135).

[99] Kiening 2003, 89.

[100] Kiening discusses Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Willehalm* (ca. AD 1217) that tells the story of the Christian military leader Guillaume d'Orange.

[101] Seelow 1998, 247.

Instead of viewing Grettir caught in a simple binary opposition we can also picture him in the centre of a more complex area of conflict:[102]

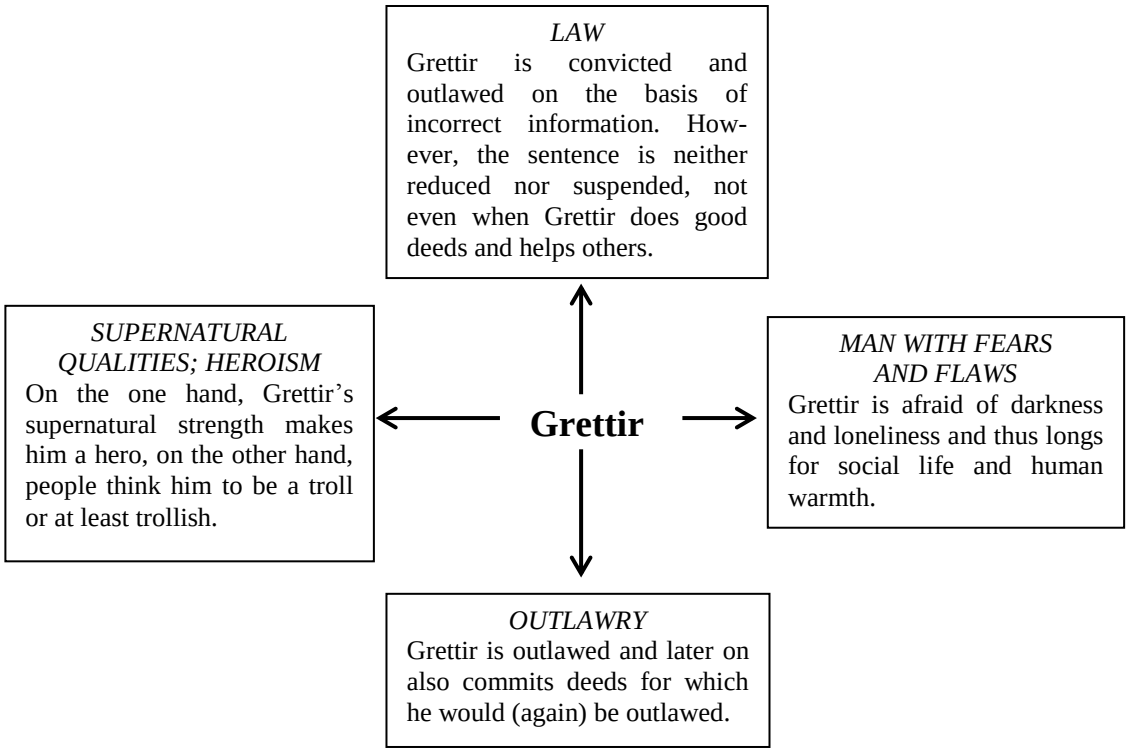

Figure 4.3 Grettir's position in the interstices of legal forces as well as the human and supernatural sphere.

Figure 4.3 illustrates how Grettir is caught between the extremes of two large continuums. In the vertical space of law, the 'upper pole' shows the legal shortcomings in Grettir's case. Even though he is outlawed on the basis of incorrect information, the sentence is neither suspended nor reduced as recompense for Grettir's good deeds and for tending a helping hand towards people in distress. The 'lower pole' stands for Grettir's bad deeds and wrong-doings for some of which he would again be outlawed.

Grettir's physical and psychological situation is represented by the horizontal axis encompassing the human as well as the paranormal or heroic aspect. While his bodily strength characterises and enables him to perform heroic deeds, Grettir's psyche is fragile and comparatively easily hurt. His flaws and especially his anxieties regarding darkness and loneliness repeatedly add a very human or even childlike touch to his personality.

Being positioned in the interstice, Grettir's personality and actions are immediately and strongly shaped by four crucial and powerful forces. Needless to say, these interconnections eventually doom the saga hero. Influenced or rather torn apart by the four forces, Grettir moves in a vacuum, a sphere emptied of status,[103] possession and shelter, or, in Turner's

[102] I first drew this diagram for my Master thesis (Heiniger 2010, 60), and used it later on in a paper presentation at the International Medieval Congress in Leeds/UK in 2013.

[103] The fact that Grettir stems from a prominent family does not secure him any privileges, neither regarding the sentence itself nor the duration of his outlawry.

words, Grettir is stripped of his socio-structural qualities and becomes a liminal subject. It is not until the *Alþingi*-verdict that Grettir is forced into liminal space. Not being temporally demarcated, full outlawry is a penalty for life and does not provide for the culprit's re-integration into society. The suitability and applicability of the concept of liminality is thus slightly restricted. Rather than being a case of liminality proper, Old Norse outlawry represents a case of Turner's outsiderhood.[104] Outsiderhood denotes a state of "being either permanently and by ascription set outside the structural arrangements of a given social system, or being situationally or temporarily set apart, or voluntarily setting oneself apart from the behaviour of status-occupying, role-playing members of that system."[105]

In *Grettis saga* the period of Grettir's outlawry is not equally important or equally characteristic for the saga narrative. Encompassing the all-decisive and most characteristic events, the actual kernel of the saga lies between the two prominent fighting scenes which have been discussed above. For this highly intensive period it is rather tricky if not well-nigh impossible to dissect whether it is Glámr's curse, the outlawry or his *ógæfa*,[106] or a mixture of these factors that eventually trigger Grettir's tragic downfall. Certainly, the question as to what extent Grettir is a liminal character is an interesting one and worth pursuing. As the focus of this study is centred on spatial issues, I would like to come back to the (demolished) doors at Þórhallsstaðir and Sandhaugar.

When panning out to the level of the saga's structure and considering the phases of liminality and the effect of the curse as a whole, the noted two doors seem to disappear and lose their importance. Yet, the fighting scenes in the doorway remain significant to the plot. Even though neither door proves highly liminal, they still mark the beginning and the end of Grettir's most troublesome and liminal time period, a period packed with exciting episodes which *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* is known for in the first place.

4.1.3 *DYRADÓMR*: TWO INSTANCES OF A DOOR-COURT

Two further instances of prominently featuring doors are the examples of the *dyradómr* ('door-court') found in *Eyrbyggja saga*. The *dyradómr* is a unique juridical institution found in Old Norse culture. Unfortunately, neither literary nor legal sources reveal much about its nature and structure. It can be gathered though that the *dyradómr* is a mostly spontaneously summoned private court, which has full legal efficaciousness despite the exclusion of public authority.[107] The plaintiff has to present the accusation at the door of the defendant, and an

[104] Victor Turner (1974, 231-233) introduced three types of anti-structure: liminality proper as experienced in ritualistic contexts, outsiderdhood as introduced above, and the state of marginality which refers to people who simultaneously belong to two contrasting social (and cultural) groups. Having roots in two places and still not belonging completely to either group is a situation that migrants often find themselves caught up in.
[105] Turner 1974, 233.
[106] For further reading on the notion of *ógæfa*, see Kanerva (2012), Brynhildsvoll (1993), McCreesh (1981), Hermann Pálsson (1975).
[107] Maurer 1910, 327.

assembly of men deliver the judgement on the spot, or more precisely on the threshold, on the limen.[108] Scholars agree that the *dyradómr* as it is presented in the sagas was a relic of the past and most likely no longer in practice at the time the sagas were written down: "Möglicherweise bewahrt die Saga hier die Erinnerung an eine Einrichtung, die im Rechtsleben der späteren Freistaatzeit, vor allem im 13. Jahrhundert, nur noch geringe Bedeutung hatte."[109]

The Christian law codex *Grágás* (AD 1117/1118) mentions various possibilities for an *einkadómr*,[110] as a special juridical form outside the context of the regular *þingi*. Briem comments that such *einkadómar* were set up whenever it was necessary to deliver a judgement quickly.[111] The *Gulaþingslǫg*, whose first edition dates to the first half of the 11th century, mentions juridical actions taking place at the door of a farm, especially in the context of debt collection (§37) and the redemption of *óðal*-property (§265-269). In either case, the plaintiff has to go to the defendant's house – or more precisely: the door – and summon a court according to the rules and in the presence of witnesses. However, neither codex explicitly refers to such a court as a *dyradómr*.

To add to the *dyradómr*'s secretive nature, the saga corpus features only two examples[112] which are to be found in *Eyrbyggja saga* (ch. 18 and 55). In chapter 18, Þorbjǫrn digri of Fróðá suspects Þórarinn svarti of Mávahlíð of having stolen his horses. With a couple of men Þorbjǫrn rides to Mávahlíð and wants to do a house search, which he is not granted. The accuser then convokes a door-court and publicly charges Þórarinn with the horse theft.

[108] In my unpublished Master's thesis, I argued that the door-court can be considered spaceless because it is not bound to a specific location like the *Alþingi*: "Das Türgericht ist in gewisser Weise raumlos, da es, wenn nötig, überall stattfinden kann. Die ephemere Eigenschaft wird daher doppelt unterstrichen, einerseits, weil solche Gerichte nur wenn erforderlich stattfinden, andererseits, weil sie jeweils nur von kurzer Dauer sind" (Heiniger 2010, 78).

[109] Böldl 1999, 162. For further reading, see also Maurer (1896).

[110] In his essay "Nokkur orð um stjórnarskipun Íslands í fornöld" Páll Briem mentions the following eight possible situations calling for an *einkadómr*: "Í Grágás eru ákvæði um nokkra einkadóma og eru þeir: 1. skuldadómur um skuldir andaðs manns, gjaldþrota, 2. hreppadómur um ýms hreppamál, 3. afréttardómur um afrétti, 4. engidómur um engi, 5. dómur um brigði á landi manns, er selt hefur verið meðan hann var ófullveðja, 6. dómur um brot útlendinga og um verslun. Ennfremur er í Eyrbyggju og Landnámu talað um 7. dóminn, dyradóm" (2015, 91). "In Grágás there are provisions for some private courts, they are: 1) liability court about the debt of a deceased man, bankruptcy, 2) regional court regarding various regional cases, 3) pasture-court regarding shared pasture land, 4) meadow-court regarding meadow land, 5) court regarding destruction of someone's real property, as had been sold while he was a minor, 6) court regarding violations of foreigners and regarding commerce. Additionally, in Eyrbyggja and Landnámabók there is mention of a 7th court, the door-court" (trans. Ryan E. Johnson).

[111] Briem 2015, 92.

[112] Strictly speaking, the full text search for (modern Icelandic) *dyradómur* also gives a hit for *Lnb* (in ch. 79 of the *Sturlubók*-version) and *Heiðarvíga saga* (ch. 12). However, both cases refer to the instances in *EbS*: *Lnb* points to the case of the horse theft (ch. 18), and *Heiðarvíga saga* alludes to the revenant scene (ch. 55). The full text search was conducted on the webpage *Íslenskt textasafn*, provided by Stofnun Árna Magnússonar.

> Eptir þetta reið Þorbjǫrn heiman við tólfta mann. … Síðan fóru þeir í Mávahlíð, ok var Þórarinn ok heimamenn í durum úti, er þeir sá mannferðina; þeir kvǫddu Þorbjǫrn ok spurðu tíðenda. Síðan mælti Þorbjǫrn: "Þat er várt ørendi hingat, Þórarinn," segir hann, "at vér leitum eptir hrossum þeim, er stolin váru frá mér í haust; vilju vér hér beiða rannsóknar hjá yðr." … Eptir þat setti Þorbjǫrn duradóm og nefndi sex menn í dóm; síðan sagði Þorbjǫrn fram sǫkina á hendr Þórarni um hrossatǫkuna.[113]

It is rather unfortunate for us that Geirriðr Þórólfsdóttir bægifóts interferes at that point and accuses her son Þorarinn svarti of being effeminate and putting up with everything Þorbjǫrn digri wants. Þorarinn svarti is forced to protect his reputation and together with his men he attacks Þorbjǫrn digri on the spot. The episode only confirms that the *dyradómr* lives up to its name as it is held at the door, but apart from that it leaves the (modern) reader in the dark about the further proceedings of a *dyradómr*.

Of much more interest, therefore, is the *dyradómr* in chapter 55. Throughout one winter, the farm at Fróðá is haunted by two groups of revenants. The first group assembles people who all died rather mysteriously from an illness, turned into revenants and headed by Þórir viðleggr; the other group, which is led by Þóroddr skattkaupandi, consists of men who drowned on a fishing trip and whose bodies have never been washed ashore. Both groups start making their appearance in the evening and intrude into the home space (mostly the *eldhús*) of Fróðá. They behave like living beings: upon entering the house, they wring out their wet clothes or brush the soil off their clothes, depending on what group of revenants they belong to. Then they make themselves comfortable at the fireplace and so force the people to retreat to another room. Neither group of revenants is violent as such but their persistent appearance scares the inhabitants nonetheless.

When the Fróðá people are at their wits' end about what to do against these gatecrashers, Snorri goði suggests a *dyradómr*. Kjartan, Snorri's nephew, and Þórðr kausi, Snorri's son, then accuse the revenants of haunting the farm without permission and thus jeopardising people's lives and health. Without much ado, every revenant is individually sentenced and legally forced to leave the house for good. The revenants comment on the sentences but make their exit one by one through the door where the *dyradómr* is not held.

[113] *EbS*, ÍF 4: 34-36. "After that, Thorbjorn rode from home with eleven men. … Then they rode to Mavahlid where Thorarin and his men were outside, and they watched the party approaching. They greeted Thorbjorn and asked his news. 'Our purpose in coming here, Thorarin,' said Thorbjorn, 'is to look for the horses that were stolen from me last autumn. We would like to make a search of your property.' … After that Thorbjorn established a door-court and named six men to judge the case. Thorbjorn brought a charge of horse-theft against Thorarin" (*EbS*, Quinn 1997, 145).

> Eptir þat [the burning of Þórgunna's bed-hangings] stefndi Kjartan Þóri viðlegg, en Þórðr kausi Þóroddi bónda, um þat at þeir gengi þar um hýbýli ólofat ok firrði menn bæði lífi og heilsu; ǫllum var þeim stefnt er við eldinn sátu. Síðan var nefndr duradómr ok sagðar fram sakar ok farit at ǫllum málum sem á þingadómum; váru þar kviðir bornir, reifð mál og dœmd; en síðan er dómsorði var á lokit um Þóri viðlegg, stóð hann upp ok mælti: "Setit er nú, meðan sætt er." Eptir þat gekk hann út þær dyrr, sem dómrinn var eigi fyrir settr. … Síðan gengu þeir Kjartan inn; bar prestr þá vígt vatn ok helga dóma um ǫll hús. Eptir um daginn syngr prestr tíðir allar ok messu hátíðliga, ok eptir þat tókusk af allar afturgǫngur at Fróðá ok reimleikar.[114]

This scene is remarkable for various reasons. Firstly, the episode reveals a bit more of what is required for a *dyradómr* than the previous example: the complaint is put forward, witnesses make statements, the proceedings are summed up and a sentence is pronounced. In order to underline the legal validity, the saga adds that everything happens "sem á þingadómum".

Above all, however, it is astounding – at least to a modern audience – that a legal institution is employed successfully to take action against revenants. One reason for this procedure lies in the concepts of the *living corpse* (*lebender Leichnam*) and the *living dead* (*lebender Toter*) respectively.[115] According to Germanic traditions, the returning dead were granted ordinary juridical rights and treatments because the *living dead* are neither considered identical with the corpse, nor are they linked to any kind of concept of soul,[116] rather they were considered real and very similar to their living 'predecessor'.[117] This point of view led to "die Lehre vom rechtlichen Fortleben des Toten"[118] that centres on the idea that the dead remains "ein belebter Körper mit ähnlichen Bedürfnissen, Trieben und Fähigkeiten wie vor

[114] *EbS*, ÍF 4: 151-152, my emphasis. "After that Kjartan summonsed Thorir Wood-leg, and Thord Cat summonsed the farmer Thorodd for walking around the homestead without permission, and depriving people of both their life and health. Everyone sitting by the fire was summonsed. A door-court was held and charges were pronounced, with the whole procedure following that of a court at an assembly. Decisions were made, and cases summed up and judged. When the sentence was being passed on Thorir Wood-leg, he stood up and said, 'I sat here as long as I could.' After that, he went out through the door at which the court was not being held. … Then Kjartan and his companions went inside. The priest carried consecrated water and sacred relics around the whole house. The next day the priest sang all the prayers and celebrated mass solemnly, and after that all the revenants and ghosts left Froda" (*EbS*, Quinn 1997, 202-203).

[115] It was Hans Schreuer who coined the term *lebender Leichnam* in 1916. During the following decades, the definition and scope of the *lebende Leichnam* were often debated. It was only Kurt Ranke (1951), who eventually renamed the concept *lebender Toter* (Petzoldt/Haid 2001, 166). Ranke's redefinition or renaming of the *lebender Leichnam* occurred only after World War II in the wake of a changed perception of dead people and corpses. Arguing along the lines of the walking dead being reborn, dead people rather than walking corpses, Ranke renamed the concept of the *lebender Leichnam lebender Toter*. For further reading, see Bodner (2006), Petzoldt (2002), Petzoldt/Haid (2001).

[116] By and large, the North Germanic people were not very familiar with the concept of the soul living on after death. Bodner states: "Als 'Ich-' bzw. 'Freiseele' (external soul) zieht sich der *hugr* nach dem biologischen Tod aus dem Körper zurück und nimmt die Form des *hamr* an. Derselbe gilt als 'innere Gestalt' des Menschen, die sein Wesen und Aussehen bestimmt. Nun tritt er als eine Art Körperersatz in Erscheinung" (Bodner 2006, 601, italics in the original).

[117] Petzoldt/Hain 2001, 166.

[118] Wallén 1958, 300.

dem Tode."[119] The dead can thus claim to be treated as fully-fledged members of society, which is also expressed in the legal sphere.[120] Consequently, a revenant can both file a lawsuit as well as be accused of an offence.[121] The case against the revenants in *Eyrbyggja saga* is embedded in a culture in which the dead are as much subject to jurisdiction as the living, not least when moving about in the world of the living: "Wiedergänger, die sich im Diesseits ergehen, müssen sich den Gesetzen der Lebenden unterwerfen."[122] Consequently, the two revenant groups can be sentenced for going about the farm without permission and hence endangering people's life and health. At the same time, however, the *dyradómr*'s smooth and efficient proceedings strongly contrast with the people's powerlessness regarding Þórólfr bægifótr's overly violent and incessant hauntings.

Despite the effectiveness of the pagan, legal proceedings[123] – all sentenced revenants leave the farm – Kjartan and Þórðr kausi make use of Christian means to ensure that the farmhouse is both legally as well as spiritually a safe place again and that the revenants do not come back. For that purpose a priest sprinkles the farm with holy water, relics are carried around the farm and the day after masses are sung. Only after the priest has fulfilled his duties does the saga explicitly state that the appearance of revenants ceased for good.[124]

While the saga elaborates on how the *Fróðárundr* are dealt with, no light is shed on what actually triggered them: "The audience of *Eyrbyggja saga* may learn what brought an end to the wonders of Fróðá but from the saga they never learn their exact cause or their certain nature."[125] Equally obscure is the reasoning why Snorri goði ordered the Christian acts in the first place. It is debatable whether Snorri goði is no longer convinced of the effectiveness of the pagan measures or whether he might want to be on the safe side, as by the time of the *dyradómr*, Christianity had found its way to Iceland and had been proclaimed Iceland's official religion a couple of chapters earlier. As so often, however, Snorri's motif is not lucid, an aspect that will be taken up again below.

[119] Neckel in Wallén 1958, 301. Bodner is fairly detailed in his description of revenants' needs and abilities: "Dabei behalten sie [die Wiedergänger] nicht nur menschliche Gefühle und Bedürfnisse (z.B. Hunger oder Sexualität), sondern oft auch ihre Wahrnehmungs-, Sprach- und Handlungs-, ja sogar Geschäfts- und Erwerbsfähigkeit, ihren sozialen Status, familiären Bezug, individuellen Charakter und persönlichen Namen" (2006, 599).

[120] Wallén 1958, 302.

[121] Wallén 1958, 302 and 303. Maurer comments on the fact that it is possible to bring an action against revenants as follows: "Im übrigen wissen wir ja, dass man im Mittelalter anderwärts gegen schädliche Tiere wie mit kirchlichen Beschwörungen, so auch mit Gerichtsverhandlungen zu Feld zog, und kann somit die Anwendung derselben Mittel gegen Gespenster nicht auffallen; dabei ist aber klar, dass das Verfahren gegen Gespenster dem gegen lebende Menschen üblichen nachgebildet sein musste" (1910, 376).

[122] Böldl 2005, 132.

[123] To what extent the *dyradómr* is a truly pre-Christian institution is well-nigh impossible to ascertain reconstruct. *EbS* does not mention any religious elements in the context of the *dyradómr*; rather the saga emphasises its juridical aspects, which, however, apply to supernatural beings as well.

[124] "Ok eftir þat tókusk af allar aptrgǫngur at Fróðá ok reimleikar" (*EbS*, ÍF 4: 152). "And after that all the revenants and ghosts left Froda" (*EbS*, Quinn 1997, 203).

[125] Ármann Jakobsson 2017, 83.

From a narratological perspective, another reason for the extra Christian layer might be the aforementioned fact that the door-court was (most probably) no longer put into effect at the time of writing down the saga (from ca. AD 1250 onwards) and hence, the scribe(s) might have doubted the efficaciousness of this heathen proceeding and decided instead to add a security layer in the form of a Christian (re-)consecration of Fróðá. Kjartan Ottósson is convinced that the Christian stance which is apparent throughout the *Fróðárundr* has most likely been supplemented by the scribe.[126] Accordingly the Christian elements embedded in the door-court scene have also been added, while the *dyradómr* itself is an original component of the saga.[127]

The threshold of the *dyradómr* or rather the door which the revenants use when they leave evokes some links to Old Norse mythology. Echoing the borderline between *innangarðs* and *útangarðs* as discussed above in the context of Grettir's fights, Odner states the importance of the door in a *dyradómr*: "The door establishes the border (*garðr*) between Miðgarðr and Útgarðr."[128] Hence, Fróðá's physical threshold is simultaneously the symbolic threshold which the revenants have to pass through in order to get from the sphere of the living to the realm of the dead. Interestingly, the revenants do not leave through the door at which the *dyradómr* is held but rather through another door. Maurer argues that the *dyradómr* was most likely held at the so-called *karldyrr* ('men's door'),[129] which could serve as a setting for legal procedures.[130] It is down to speculation though, whether the revenants actually leave through the women's door.

In contrast to Kjartan Ottósson and Odner, Klaus Böldl does not agree with the consideration that the door is a Christian element and a "Übergangszone zwischen dieser und nächster Welt."[131] For him the *dyradómr* confirms, above all, the legal order and system. Arguing against the transition of the revenants as the core of the scene, Böldl insists on a more rational and down-to-earth perspective and interpretation: "Wie die anderen Isländersagas erzählt auch die Eyrb. von der Entstehung und Bewältigung von Krisen."[132]

[126] Kjartan Ottósson 1983, 115. Kjartan Ottósson (ibid., 113) speculates that all the people of the farm Fróðá might have been held guilty from a Christian perspective, because they did not make sure that Þórgunna's will, especially with regard to the precious bed hangings, was respected. Although the guilt rests mainly on Þuríðr's shoulders because of her greediness, all the inhabitants of Fróðá are punished.

[127] Kjartan Ottósson 1983, 113.

[128] Odner 1992, 141. Odner agrees with Clunies Ross (1991, 43), that *Útgarðr* stands for the feminine sphere, death and giants, and *Miðgarðr* for men, life and gods. Clunies Ross on her part emphasises though that the world beyond "is also the locus of the creative force and inchoate power" (ibid.). So, the Otherworld is by no means exclusively associated with destructive or evil forces.

[129] Cleasby/Vigfússon's (1874) entry on *karldyrr* reads as follows: "karl-dyrr, n. pl. *the men's door*; in ancient dwellings the wings (skot, set) were occupied, the one side by the men, the other by the women; hence the door leading to the men's side was termed karldyrr, as opp. to the entry leading to the females' side."

[130] Maurer 1910, 376. While Weiser-Aall (1935/1936) lists the more traditional, folkloristic use of thresholds and doors; and Jacob Grimm (1922, 242-243) briefly summarises juridical procedures which had to take place at the door to be legally fully valid, e.g. swearing an oath while touching the door.

[131] Böldl 2005, 131.

[132] Böldl 2005, 132.

This statement nicely echoes Turner's social drama, a device that is designed to restore the social equilibrium. Indeed, both elements – the transition of the revenants and the re-establishment of the social and consequently legal order – are part of *Eyrbyggja saga*'s social drama which culminates in this door-court scene. Accordingly it is not God's assistance but rather social factors that eventually terminate the *Fróðárundr*: "Nicht durch himmlischen Beistand, sondern durch den Einsatz sozialer, also intramundialer Kräfte wird auf dem Hof Fróðá der destruktive Eingriff der Jenseitskräfte abgewendet und die menschliche Lebenswelt verteidigt."[133]

However, Böldl's rather rational view on the second *dyradómr* is not fully conclusive. The new social equilibrium at Fróðá can only be established once the revenants have been dealt with, that is, when they have been banned from the world of the living and forced to pass into the Otherworld. Indeed, Böldl himself has pointed to "die Homologie von sozialer und kosmischer Raumsemantik,"[134] which implies that a social stability can only be achieved if cosmic order is well-balanced and vice versa.[135]

A comparison of the two *dyradómr*-episodes reveals that they diverge rather considerably in their respective distribution of liminal qualities. In fact the only shared and potentially liminal feature is the temporary suspension of daily life. Apart from that, the situation hardly allows for generalising remarks or new insights about the door-court. The scenes neither deal with similar cases (horse theft versus sentencing revenants) nor does the saga provide detailed information about the proceedings of a *dyradómr* (six men are nominated as judges versus everything is done "sem á þingadómum"). The only (non-liminal) aspect in common is that in both cases the issues at stake need to be dealt with immediately and cannot be postponed.

[133] Böldl 2005, 133.

[134] Böldl 2005, 132.

[135] The close link between social and cosmic order adds considerably to the powerful status of Snorri goði. It is he who suggests the door-court in order to get rid of the revenants. His advice initiates the new equilibrium both for the human society as well as the cosmic sphere.

	spatial segre-gation from daily life	**momentary suspension of daily life**	**sense of otherness intruding**	**invisibility or Individual presumed dead**	**changes/ transform.**	**paradoxes, ambiguities**	**irreversi-bility**
***dyradómr* bec. of the horse-theft** (*EbS*, ch. 18)		•					
***dyradómr* bec. of the revenants** (*EbS*, ch. 55)		•	•		•	•	•

Figure 4.4 Comparison of the two *dyradómr*-episodes in *Eyrbyggja saga* with regard to their liminal aspects.

The uneven distribution of dots in the table illustrates that the door as such is not a genuinely liminal place, which corroborates van Gennep's notion of the pivoting of the sacred. As no result is achieved in the horse theft case, the threshold only obtains liminal qualities and fulfils its Gennepian purpose in the revenant-case: the *dyradómr* (in ch. 55) which takes place at the farm itself and hence is not spatially segregated; the transformation happens firstly with the revenants which are expelled from the sphere of the living and (most likely) enter the world of the dead for good; during the *dyradómr*, the daily life of Fróðá is momentarily suspended, both because of the revenants' presence as well as the court taking place; the sense of otherness has been intruding and is still present in the form of the revenants; the paradoxical and ambiguous qualities of the situation hinge first and foremost on the state of the revenants, who are neither dead nor truly alive, but they are temporarily caught in an intermediary state which will be resolved once they enter the realm of the dead and until then they are liminal; and last but not least the proceedings and the result of the *dyradómr* are irreversible, and thus normal and undisturbed daily and social life at Fróðá can be re-established in the best Gennepian and Turnerian manner. By and large, the *dyradómr* in the revenant-case constitutes the redressive phase of the social drama and is therefore an expression of liminality.

As satisfying and evident these insights are, they nevertheless give rise to questions regarding the actual source of liminality: How or why does the threshold or the door become liminal? Is it because revenants, who are liminal beings themselves, are involved? Is it because a court is summoned at a farmstead instead of at a *þing*? Is the threshold after all a genuinely liminal place and the reader just does not get to see it in the horse-theft case? Or are we back to square one with van Gennep and Turner: does liminality first and foremost hinge on the performed action and only then do material objects and people involved become temporarily liminal?

Though the two *dyradómr*-scenes do not mirror each other as closely as the fighting scenes in *Grettis saga*, it is nonetheless worthwhile to scrutinise the two scenes in combination as two narrative cornerstones of *Eyrbyggja saga*.[136] They too, fulfil a framing function: what happens between chapters 18 and 55 constitutes the core of *Eyrbyggja saga*, the very actions the saga is best known for.[137] They bear witness to a fairly turbulent social life on Snæfellsnes-peninsula involving various parties striving for control and power. There are Þórólfr bægifótr's dealings, his death and his reappearance as a revenant; Arnkell Þórólfsson's rise to the position of a *goði* and his death; Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi's frowned-upon relationship with Þorbjǫrn digri's wife Þuríðr and their illegitimate son Kjartan; the episodes revolving around the two *berserkir* which Vermundr inn mjóvi brought from Norway; the official conversion to Christianity and, last but not least, the *Fróðárundr*.

It has often been noted that it is a complicated task to trace and crystallize *Eyrbyggja*'s overall narrative structure.[138] While some episodes and scenes clearly form a unit or at least demonstrate some connections between them, others appear rather detached and isolated. Yet it is repeatedly the figure of Snorri goði who is involved or at least appears in the majority of episodes, be it as the main or a marginal character. Vésteinn Ólason comments that even though Snorri can hardly be called a saga hero, at least not in the conventional sense, he plays a role directly or indirectly in all conflicts.[139] In his highly interesting article, "Nokkrar athugasemdir um Eyrbyggja sögu" (1971), Vésteinn Ólason reckons Snorri goði to be the organizing principle of the saga.[140] What is more, Snorri goði is not merely present in the course of the central chapters (18-55);[141] rather his power and his influence on Snæfellsnes

[136] Note that *EgS* features a very similar internal structre, which, however, is not tied to a specific place but to the introduction of two figures with the same name. Torfi H. Tulinius (2014, 25-37) demonstrates that the appearance of the figures named Ketill structure the whole saga narratives. While four men called Ketill, all of them rather minor figures, make their appearance in *EgS*, only two of them form the structural parallel to *EbS* and *GS*, namely Ketill blundr (ch. 39) and Ketill gufa (ch. 77). More importantly, however, is their function as staging posts that demarcate the core parts of Egill's life (i.e. his travels abroad) and hence of the saga. In terms of liminality, Egill's childhood and his old age appear as fixed socio-structural roles, while Egill's life as a seafarer and warrior proves most versatile. So far this basic structure of mirroring scenes or figures has only been detected for *EbS*, *GS* and *EgS*, it is thus of great interest, whether other *Íslendingasögur* feature the same structural peculiarity. In any case, these observations strongly suggest that these arrangements are the result of authorial intention, whether they were made consciously or not (ibid., 29).

[137] Chapters 1-17 set the stage for the events to come: the main families are introduced, animosities are indicated or even lead to initial skirmishes, and of course Snorri goði is born (ch. 12) and he soon claims and settles at Helgafell (ch. 14), the new centre of power and order on Snæfellsnes. After the *Fróðárundr* Snorri goði moves to Tunga in Sælingsdalr. The saga tells of a series of incidents with Óspakr Kjallaksson and then draws to a close by focusing again on Snorri. Vésteinn Ólason (1971, 10-11) points out that in the course of the last three chapters *EbS* revisits the major three strands again and thus the narrator skilfully manages to unify the seemingly detached parts of the narrative.

[138] Right at the beginning of his 2011 article, Torfi H. Tulinius presents and briefly summarises some scholars' statements on the structure of *EbS*.

[139] Vésteinn Ólasson 1971, 6.

[140] Vésteinn Ólasson 1971, 6.

[141] Snorri makes his appearance in chapter 12 of the saga; back then he is still called Þórgrímr Þórgrímsson and is the son of a *goði* and great-grandson of the settler Þórólfr Mostrarskegg. Though descending from a line of

grow increasingly and culminate in his firmly established status of a highly respected *hofgoði*.[142]

Vésteinn Ólason spots in the crucial middle part of the saga the juxtaposition of various types of leaders, such as Snorri goði, Arnkell goði or Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi. While Bjǫrn stands for a rather emotionally driven, knightly hero, Arnkell is a man representing the ancient values.[143] With his traditional world view and set of morals he is the diametrical opposite to Snorri goði, who is not only the representative of the attitudes held by 13th-century Icelandic chieftains,[144] but his wit and determination make him both reach all his goals as well as surpass and overcome his antagonists.[145] Einar Ól. Sveinsson therefore views *Eyrbyggja saga* as a "saga um vaxandi 'skipulag', vaxandi reglu, um leið og hún er saga um vaxandi veldi Snorra."[146]

In his latest book, Ármann Jakobsson (2017) discusses the ambiguity of Snorri goði on the basis of three scenes (taken from *Kristni saga, LxdS, EbS*).[147] Ármann Jakobsson's analysis shows that Snorri employs a wide spectrum of tactics to achieve his goals and to manipulate other people. Especially his relation to the paranormal is worth considering: sometimes Snorri ridicules superstition and the existence of supernatural beings, while in other instances such as the door-court scene, Snorri takes them seriously and seems to believe in them himself. Each of the three saga episodes foregrounds a different aspect and behaviour pattern for him, which makes it difficult to grasp Snorri's contradictory character and to predict his moves. Snorri is "a Christian rationalist, a believer in demonic phenomena or even a ruthless pragmatist that makes use of the paranormal as it suits his grander purposes."[148]

Þórr worshippers, Snorri goði (formerly Þórgrímr) is the first in the family who loses the *Þór*-prefix of his name and who is given a new name – Snorri – because of his temper: the name Snorri derives from *snerrir* which means 'belligerent'. In Böldl's opinion, the loss of the Þórr-related name reflects Snorri's orientation towards worldly and especially legal means of power. All the same Snorri is still able to deal with cosmic interferences: "Das 'Türgericht' zeigt, dass die von Snorris Vorfahren wesentlich mitbegründete und von diesem selbst repräsentierte Rechtsordnung stark genug ist, um selbst Verstösse von kosmischer Dimension zu ahnden" (Böldl 2005, 132). Snorri goði's antagonist is Þórólfr bægifótr. As the latter still has the *Þór*-name, Böldl associates Þórólfr with *útgarðr* (ibid., 119), the chaotic sphere dominated by giants and opposing the cosmic order which is represented by Snorri goði. Kanerva, on the other hand, maintains a different view on the *Þór*-prefixes in names. In line with her claim that the revenants remind the people of Fróðá of the previous social wrongdoings, she sees in the *Þór*-names of the revenants a reminder of *Þórr* "who is the instrument of order in the world of the gods, the shield against the chaos of giants" (Kanerva 2011, 43).

[142] Ármann Jakobsson (2017, 202-203, n159) describes the office of a *(hof-)goði* as a priest-chieftain. Interestingly, the sagas foreground the secular aspects and neglect the religious functions.

[143] Vésteinn Ólasson 1971, 18.

[144] "Fulltrúi þeirra viðhorfa sem móta íslenzka höfðingjastétt á þrettándu öld" (Vésteinn Ólason 1971, 19-20).

[145] Vésteinn Ólason 1971, 21. Vésteinn Ólason (ibid., 20-21) points out that Snorri goði is not a fighter in the sense that he does not rush into skirmishes but rather has other men do the physical work for him. All the same, if necessary for reaching his goals, Snorri goði does not refrain from wielding the sword himself.

[146] *EbS*, ÍF 4: lvi. In spite of the saga's emphasis on Snorri goði, Vésteinn Ólason (1971, 6) emphasises that *EbS* is nonetheless preoccupied with the plot and individual events, rather than Snorri goði as a main protagonist.

[147] Ármann Jakobsson 2017, 71-84.

[148] Ármann Jakobsson 2017, 71.

There is only one aspect that remains the same: Snorri refrains from clarifying his often rather obscure and ambiguous statements and he leaves questions posed unanswered and hence a modern audience puzzled about how to interpret his comments.[149]

Apart from Snorri goði, there is also another less prominent protagonist that merits our attention: Kjartan at Fróðá. In her article "The Role of the Dead in Medieval Iceland" (2011) Kirsi Kanerva draws attention to Kjartan's role, particularly in the context of the *Fróðárundr*. Kanerva sees parallels in Kjartan's origin and the origin of Þórgunna's son:[150] both children are born out of wedlock and thus they are officially fatherless.[151] Kanerva argues that Þórgunna recognises these parallels and thus takes a liking to the boy.[152] The *Fróðárundr* with the revenants as shadows of the past[153] give Kjartan the opportunity to prove himself by tackling these difficulties and re-establishing the social equilibrium. Hence, the *dyradómr* is not only an efficient means to get rid of the revenants, but for Kjartan himself it also acts as "a rite of passage, a journey of a boy into manhood."[154]

Advised by his uncle Snorri goði, Kjartan sets up the *dyradómr* at Fróðá and sentences the revenants as described in the saga quote above. By exercising this power, Kjartan succeeds in appeasing the social turbulence, and regarding his origin and identity, he earns Snorri goði's approval as a first step to his social acceptance. While the father issue is not resolved until towards the end of the saga when Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi has Kjartan sent a sword as a symbol of the acknowledged paternity (cf. *EbS* ch. 64), Kjartan's role in the course of the second *dyradómr* can nonetheless be regarded as his rite of passage. After the revenants' disappearance, the saga states quite explicitly that he has become the new respected master of Fróðá and keeps the farm prosperous.[155] It is also conjecturable that Kjartan follows in Snorri goði's footsteps as a valued member of the region, since Snorri moves away from the peninsula and chooses to settle in the Dalir region after the second *dyradómr*. Seen from this perspective, the *dyradómr* represents the meeting point of former and new law enforcement: Snorri goði makes one of his last appearances, while Kjartan re-

[149] Ármann Jakobsson 2017, 80.

[150] The story of Þórgunna's son Þorgils is told in *Eiríks saga rauða.*

[151] Although the saga does not state it directly, Kjartan is the offspring of Þuríðr's extramarital relationship with Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi. On the problem of fatherlessness in *EbS*, see Kanerva (2011) and Torfi H. Tulinius (2009).

[152] "the fatherhood that has not been acknowledged, his status as the fruit of forbidden sexuality, and the lack of support from the most important male figure in a man's life, the father" (Kanerva 2011, 37-38).

[153] Kanerva 2011, 38. Kanerva adds: "Kjartan is bound to the restless dead by bonds of blood, by the actions performed by his real father in a culture of honour and blood feud. His real father has offended the honour of the man who has brought up Kjartan and whose property he inherits, and killed the sons of Þorgríma galdrakinn and Þórir viðleggr. This may even explain Kjartan's need to use legal measures, the door-court, to banish the restless dead. Kjartan needs the law to solve the conflict with them because in real life such disagreements could also create the need to use legal procedures and negotiations" (ibid., 42).

[154] Kanerva 2011, 44.

[155] "Um várit eptir undr þessi tók Kjartan sér hjón ok bjó at Fróðá lengi síðan ok varð inn mesti garpr" (*EbS*, ÍF 4: 152). "In the spring after these marvels, Kjartan took on new servants and lived at Froda for a long time after that, and he turned into the greatest of champions" (*EbS*, Quinn 1997, 203).

establishes social order and thus makes his entry onto the (political) stage of (northern) Snæfellsnes.

Let us return to the initial point of the discussion, the consideration of the two *dyradómr*-examples and their role and position in the saga narrative. It has been argued that the *dyradómr*-episodes – regardless of how differently they are elaborated – function as a frame for the major scenes, for which the saga is famous. In both cases it is the people from Fróðá who are involved in the scene. While the first *dyradómr* revolves around an instance of animosity between Fróðá and Mávahlíð, Mávahlíð soon moves out of the saga picture after Katla and Odd are killed and thus leaves the focus on Fróðá. In the view that *Eyrbyggja*'s plot only properly gets going after the first *dyradómr* and draws to a close relatively soon after the second *dyradómr*, it can be claimed that *Eyrbyggja saga* portrays first and foremost social life at Fróðá, both with regard to internal tensions as well as conflicts with other parties.

Thus, although the door in the first *dyradómr* case was not initially considered liminal, it nevertheless is an important point in the saga narrative and marks the beginning of a set of crucial actions and changes. The doors involved thus lead into and out of the liminal, troublesome period (ch. 18-55) during which many crucial things happen and the social order is negotiated and reorganised.

4.2 ISLANDS IN THE *ÍSLENDINGASÖGUR*[156]

4.2.1 THE PERCEPTION OF ISLANDS WITHIN (MEDIEVAL) WESTERN EUROPEAN CULTURES

Ever since the *Odyssey*, literary islands have served diverse (literary) purposes:[157] at times they appear as arcane or mystic places, or quite the opposite as prisons or other remote places of entrapment. Equally often, they figure as ideal caches of immense treasure or are used as fields for (thought) experiments.[158] It comes as no surprise then that the apparent isolation and difficult accessibility of islands has fired people's imagination: "Still today islands provide more scope to the Western imagination than any other land form."[159]

At first it should be considered what an island actually is in more general terms, not least with regard to the medieval Western European perception. Although this question appears rather superfluous and rhetorical at first sight, various definitions of what constitutes an island have been put forward over time. As divergent as the definitions are, they all share an emphasis on spatial aspects at the expense of the temporal axis, which in consequence is mostly minimised or even neglected. The *English Oxford Living Dictionary*, for example,

[156] An earlier version of this chapter was published in Heiniger (2017).
[157] Roger Moss in Moser 2005, 413.
[158] Moser 2005, 410.
[159] Gillis 2004, 5.

defines an island as "a piece of land surrounded by water,"[160] whereas Edmond and Smith consider islands to be first and foremost, "places out of time,"[161] and D. H. Lawrence says in *The Man Who Loved Islands* (1928): "But once isolate yourself on a little island in the sea of space, and the moment begins to heave and expand in great circles, the solid earth is gone, and your slippery, naked dark soul finds herself out in the timeless world … You are out in the other infinity."[162]

This split notion of how to describe an island is also mirrored in the often binary definitions that have become prominent over time and are still strongly influential within Western European cultures. In his article, *Archipele der Erinnerung: die Insel als Topos der Kulturisation* (2005), Christian Moser traces the diachronic development of the island as a cultural and literary topos and illustrates two opposite ideas of islands.[163] These two equally prominent aspects of the island topos illustrate that the character of islands – at least in literature – is not as easy to grasp as it might seem.

On the one hand there is the positive, well-defined, unambiguous island that is easily located and described:

> [Die Insel verheisst] Orientierung, Sicherheit und Stabilitiät. Sie erscheint somit als der Inbegriff eines deutlich markierten Ortes. Das Meer fungiert einerseits als Hindernis, als Schutzwall, der die Insel vor Übergriffen bewahrt. Es verleiht ihr andererseits eine scharfe Kontur, die sie greifbar und beherrschbar erscheinen lässt.[164]

On the other hand, islands appear equally often as floating and rather fuzzy entities which have neither a stable form nor a fixed location.[165] Being out of time and palpable space, somewhere between land and water, this kind of island is often associated with metamorphosis and enchantment: "[Inseln] haben etwas von dem Element, in dem sie sich befinden: Sie sind flüchtig, flüssig und unstet wie das Meer selbst, grenzen sich diesem gegenüber also nicht ab, sondern öffnen sich ihm."[166]

In line with Moser's observations on the two different natures of islands, John Gillis has compiled a list of opposites which show at a glance what contradictory characteristics we generally associate with islands:

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[160] *English Oxford Living Dictionaries*. Provided by the Oxford University Press. Available at <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/island>, last accessed April 6, 2018.

[161] R. Edmond and V. Smith in Moser 2005, 409.

[162] D. H. Lawrence. *The Man Who Loved Islands*. 1928.

[163] In a different way to Moser, Eldar Heide differentiates between the vertical and the horizontal definition of islands in the Middle Ages (2011, 58). While the conventional vertical definition, as rendered by the *English Oxford Living Dictionary*, is heavily influenced by a bird's eye view and cartographic depictions, the horizontal definition terms any land visible across or reached after having crossed the water (e.g. a lake) an island (ibid., 58 and 59). Nevertheless, Heide states: "I am trying to show that the question is not island or mainland. The question is: On the other side of the water or not" (ibid., 64).

[164] Moser 2005, 409.

[165] Moser (2005, 412) comments on this notion of the island as being prevalent from Antiquity up to the early modern period: "Von der Antike bis in die Frühe Neuzeit ist etwa die Vorstellung verbreitet, dass die Insel ein schwankendes Gebilde markiert, ohne stabile Form und ohne festen Ort."

[166] Moser 2005, 412-413.

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
wholeness and safety	fragmentation and vulnerability
recovery	loss
Paradise	Hell
point of welcome	quarantine/exile
continuity	separation
connection	isolation
origin	extinction
place of desire	place of fear
feeling free	feeling trapped
connectedness to world	solitude
mastery	powerlessness

Figure 4.5 A selection of positive and negative connotations of islands as prevalent in Western European cultures.[167]

Since they can assume a wide range of very positive to very negative connotations, the overall notion of *the island* easily enters the realm of paradoxes and ambiguities. This aspect is enhanced by the complex interplay of land and water. Islands are neither vast landmasses nor part of the sea and yet closely linked to both: "In Western cosmogony water stands for chaos, land for order. Islands are a third kind of place … something betwixt and between. As liminal places … we use them as thresholds to other worlds and new lives."[168] These features make *the island* an entity which is hard to grasp as it is never quite clear what to anticipate when approaching it. In this regard, the island certainly is a special place with many faces. It should be kept in mind though that specific islands in literature or film mostly belong to one category only and have either positive or negative connotations. However, there are also various examples of islands which switch from one category to the other, mostly by starting off as a paradisiac island which then turns into a place of Hell.

What is more, the characterisation of an island depends on the beholder's point of view, as the medieval discourse on Thule and Iceland respectively illustrates.[169] Despite lying at a great distance from the Mediterranean and Greece, Thule first appears in documents of this region. In Antiquity's (geographical) worldview, Thule marks the northernmost point of the known inhabited world.[170] Among others, Pytheas of Massalia (380-310 BC; *On the Ocean*), and a few centuries later Ptolemy (AD 100-160; *Geographia*) had tried to locate Thule. It is hardly possible to reconstruct which island they might have thought was Thule, and to evaluate whether their Thule refers to a real island at all. Indications of Thule being Iceland are often found in two shared features of these two islands: firstly, the fact that the island lies

[167] The list here represents a selection of the attributes of islands as presented in Gillis 2004, 3.

[168] Gillis 2004, 4.

[169] Thule repeatedly appears on many *mappae mundi*, either on its own or in addition to Iceland. This double depiction derives from a crossover of Antiquity's and Nordic cultural and geographic knowledge: while Thule thrives in the ancient tradition, which tends to depict Thule negatively, the Scandinavian world view is familiar with and thus depicts the 'real' island of Iceland (Brincken 1992, 61).

[170] Kleineberg et al. 2011, 104.

a six day sail off the Scandinavian mainland; and secondly, the fact that darkness rules during the winter, while the sun never disappears during the summer.

Almost a millennium after Pytheas, the German Adam of Bremen writes his substantial work, *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum* (AD 1075-76). Adam is relatively familiar with Scandinavia and Iceland because the Icelandic church was part of and reported to the diocese in Hamburg. In the fourth volume *Descriptio insularum Aquilonis*,[171] Adam of Bremen unambiguously identifies Thule with Iceland.[172] In strong contrast to other sources, he does not describe its inhabitants as barbarous or evil. Despite their poverty and rather primitive living conditions, he depicts them as *beata gens* ('blessed folk') who live *simplicitate sancta vitam* ('holy simplicity')[173] and hold dear the Biblical principle of altruism. So, *Gesta Hammaburgensis*, whose place of origin is more closely connected to Scandinavia than the Greek scholars, quite unexpectedly presents Thule-Iceland as a blessed place of Paradise because of the prevalent (social) conditions.[174]

In contrast to Adam of Bremen, the anonymous Norwegian author of *Konungs skuggsjá* (ca. AD 1260-70) and the Dane, Saxo Grammaticus (*Gesta Danorum*, ca. AD 1200), do not speak favourably of Iceland in their respective works, apart from the fact that neither work explicitly approaches the issue of Thule-Iceland. *Konungs skuggsjá* speaks of *Ísland* (Iceland) throughout and does not mention Thule at all.

Without discussing or exploring the (geographical) identification of Thule with Iceland, Saxo refers to Iceland with the terms *Glacialis* ('icy') and *Tyle* ('Thule').[175] Saxo mentions Iceland only briefly in two instances in the preface to his *Gesta Danorum*. He addresses the issue that Icelanders make up for the barrenness and the poor living conditions of their land with their knowledge: they are "compensating for poverty by their intelligence."[176] Both *Gesta Danorum* as well as *Konungs skuggsjá* report of the marvellous Icelandic nature which features peculiarities like splashing geysers, waterfalls whose water petrify everything it wets, and ice floes that make noises reminiscent of tortured souls. While Saxo adopts a rather neutral and observant tone, *Konungs skuggsjá* sketches Iceland as a place of torment and doom where God demonstrates his power: "Nú ætla ég það vist, að hvervetna þar sem mikil ákefð verður í slíkum ógnar hlutum, að þar eru víst píslarstaðir."[177]

[171] Adam of Bremen follows in the greater part of his work the traditional view of Scandinavia as an island, but at the same time he also hints at the possibility of mainland Scandinavia being a peninsula. It is only Saxo Grammaticus (ca. AD 1150-1220) who first clearly states that Norway and Sweden are connected to the continent via a narrow neck (Chekin 1993, 493).

[172] "This Thule is now called Iceland" (Adam of Bremen 1959, 217). "Haec itaque Thyle nunc Island appellatur" (Adam of Bremen, 1978, 59, §36).

[173] Latin quotes from Adam of Bremen 1978, 59 (§36), English translation from Adam of Bremen 1959, 217.

[174] Jørgensen 2009, 54.

[175] Saxo Grammaticus 2015, Preface 2.7 and Book viii, 3.10 (i.e. pages 1:13 and 1:541).

[176] Saxo Grammaticus 2015, Preface 1.4 (i.e. page 1:7).

[177] *Konungs skuggsjá* 1955, 38; "Now it seems evident to me that wherever such a great violence appears and in such terrible forms, there surely must be places of torment" (*The King's Mirror* 1917, 131). In addition to the vision of Iceland as a place of torment, the continental Middle Ages also associated the entrance to Hell with the

Except for Adam's positive, though theologically and ideologically motivated, depiction of Thule(-Iceland) and partly Saxo's rather fairly neutral account, the portrayal of Iceland is by and large not very favourable, not even in works that are of mainland Scandinavian origin. Regarding Iceland, the stigmatisation can be considered doubled when combined with the predominant, bleak picture of the North with the (negative) image of islands. Even if none of the old sources referred to in this thesis explicitly makes this connection, such a subconscious association could perhaps have influenced ancient and medieval scholars' perception of Iceland.[178]

Turning to medieval Icelandic texts, however, including for example the (partly) historical *Landnámabók* (early 12th c.), they do not share the medieval continental point(s) of view. On the contrary, *Landnámabók* identifies Thule right at the beginning with Iceland on the basis of the criteria already put forward by the learned from Antiquity:

> Í aldarfarsbók þeiri, er Beda prestr heilagr gerði, er getit eylands þess er Thile heitir ok á bókum er sagt, at liggi sex dœgra sigling í norðr frá Bretlandi; þar sagði hann eigi koma dag á vetr ok eigi nótt á sumar, þá er dagr er sem lengstr. Til þess ætla vitrir menn þat haft, at Ísland sé Thile kallat.[179]

Landnámabók maintains an objective tone throughout, and does not conjure up any kind of associations and stigmatisations of the island, neither as a sinister nor an Edenic place. Instead it provides a rather impressive itinerary providing information about the (temporal) distances between various destinations in the northern hemisphere, mostly seen in relation to Iceland:

Icelandic volcano Hekla. This connection is most probably based on fact that Hekla was very active and erupted several times during the 12th and 13th c. (Maurer 1894, 259). The idea of Hell being situated in Hekla is first and foremost the idea of foreigners who projected such notions onto faraway lands like Iceland (Maurer 1898, 45).

[178] The medieval world view on Northern Europe and the North in general was rather unfavourable, which has left clear traces on the *mappae mundi*. The Christian world assigns Northern Europe a literally marginal position and stigmatizes it. Medieval (continental) cosmography, which was heavily informed by theology, regarded Scandinavia as uninhabitable because it was considered too cold and dark to allow for human life. Moreover, the Middle Ages' reluctance towards discovering *terra incognita* ('unknown land') left the North more or less unexplored for a long time (Brincken 1992, 171). The makers of *mappae mundi* thus decided not to waste valuable parchment on an unknown and irrelevant part of the world (ibid., 168). But as Scandinavia could not simply be erased from the maps, it got squeezed into or even pushed over the very fringe of the inhabited world and was thought to be the home of wicked peoples (ibid., 168) and monsters that had no hope for redemption. Not being in close contact with the North was therefore advisable. For further reading on the *mappae mundi* and their depiction of Scandinavia, see e.g. Kugler (2007), Chekin (1993), and Brincken (1992).

[179] *Lnb*, ÍF 1: 31. "In his book, *On Times*, the Venerable Priest Bede mentions an island called *Thule*, said in other books to lie six days' sailing to the north of Britain. He says there's neither daylight there in winter, nor darkness when the day is at its longest in summer. This is why the learned reckon that Thule must really be Iceland" (*Lnb* 1972, 15).

> Svá segja vitrir menn, at ór Nóregi frá Staði sé sjau dœgra sigling til Horns á austanverðu Íslandi, en frá Snjófallsnesi fjǫgurra dœgra sigling til Hvarfs á Grœnalandi. Af Hernum af Nóregi skal sigla jafnan í vestr til Hvarfs á Grœnlandi … Frá Reykjanesi á sunnanverðu Íslandi er þriggja dœgra haf til Jǫlduhlaups á Írlandi í suðr; en frá Langanesi á nordanverðu Íslandi er fjǫgurra dœgra haf til Svalbarða norðr í hafsbotn, en dœgrsigling er til óbyggða á Grœnalandi ór Kolbeinsey norðr.[180]

As this passage from *Landnámabók* vividly illustrates, the new Icelandic settlers did not seem to think of themselves as living in a remote place but rather considered Iceland a hub from which almost every place in the North Atlantic is within reach.[181] Thanks to this advantageous position (as perceived by the Icelanders), the island forms a vital part in the Scandinavian or even European network of communication, travelling and trading. This self-portrayal further indicates that the ocean is in no way deemed an impediment, and consequently that islands are neither considered places of isolation nor of marginality.

Indeed, it is unclear whether the first to arrive in Iceland knew beforehand that Iceland is an island. It is only when one of the first men to arrive sails around the Icelandic coast and that the insular nature of Iceland is revealed: "Maðr hét Garðarr Svavarsson … hann fór at leita Snælands … Garðarr sigldi umhverfis landit og vissi, at þat var eyland."[182] Interestingly, this insight is of no further importance or consequence, neither for Garðarr himself, nor for the later settlers. It seems like it does not matter what form the land has as long as it provides the required basis for starting a new life. That Iceland fulfils the expectations in this regard is stated by the first explorers of Iceland, who are full of praise for the newly found land and express their approval with the almost formulaic sentence "Þeir lofuðu mjǫk landit."[183] Notable also is, the settler called Þórólfr who does not refrain from considerable exaggeration about Iceland's qualities: "Þórólfr kvað drjúpa smjǫr af hverju strái á landinu, því er þeir

[180] *Lnb*, ÍF 1: 33 and 35. The quoted passage is from *Hauksbók* (AM 371 4to and AM 105 fol.). "According to learned men it takes seven days to sail from Stad in Norway westwards to Horn on the east coast of Iceland, and from Snæfellsness four days west across the ocean to Greenland by the shortest route. … From Reykjaness in South Iceland it takes five days to Slyne Head in Ireland, four days from Langaness in North Iceland northwards to Spitzbergen in the Arctic Sea, and a day north from Kolbein's Isle to the wild regions of Greenland" (*Lnb* 1972, 16).

[181] In his article "Íslendingabók and Myth" (1997), John Lindow demonstrates how *Íslendingabók* ties in with myth and features various parallels to the Old Norse creation myth. Lindow emphasises how *Íslendingabók* makes an effort to tie Iceland to the centre of the world. Firstly, the migration from Norway to Iceland can be seen as a parallel or rather continuation of the exodus from Troy as depicted in the Prologus to *Snorra Edda*. Like this, Iceland remains attached to the centre of the world and (indirectly to) the European foundation myth. The series of migration is further continued by Ari inn fróði's mention of Greenland, "thus placing Iceland not on the western periphery but somewhere on a line leading to that periphery" (ibid., 459). While Iceland was inhabited by Christian hermits (the *papar*), Greenland's native people are called *skrælingar* who are associated with paganism and the margin of the (known) world. So *Íslendingabók* draws a positive picture of Iceland: a fertile island, which is connected to the centre and which is firmly embedded in Christianity.

[182] *Lnb*, ÍF 1: 34 and 36. "A man called Gardar … went out in search of Snowland [i.e. Iceland] … Gardar sailed right round the country and found out that it is an island" (*Lnb* 1972, 17, English translation modified by AKH).

[183] *Lnb*, ÍF 1: 34. "They praised the land a lot." This sentence is variously repeated in *Sturlubók* and *Hauksbók* as rendered in ÍF 1: 34-38.

hǫfðu fundit; því var hann kallaðr Þórólfr smjǫr."[184] Such a statement is startling given the fact that Iceland was called 'Snowland' and later on 'Iceland' because of its barren, icy and snowy landscape,[185] a setting that is not overly promising for settlers in search of a new home. The image Þórólfr draws of an utterly lavish, fertile land is strongly reminiscent both of the land of plenty, which is often associated with an insular setting,[186] as well as of the Biblical visions of Paradise and the land flowing with milk and honey.[187]

The allegedly lush meadows stand in stark contrast to the first impression that the Norsemen themselves got of Iceland, as well as the contemporary scholarly and clerical convictions held about the inhabitability of the North. Although it is probable that learned Icelanders were familiar with the continental European heterostereotypes of islands, the tradition of Thule and the reputation of the North, they self-confidently and in search of a new identity put forward – at least in the *Íslendingasögur* – particular autostereotypes of their home and its geographical position.[188] In Icelandic sources the emphasis is placed on whether the island provides a solid livelihood for the (Norwegian) migrants and hence for the start of a new society. While *Landnámabók* still maintains a neutral tone and style in its presentation of Iceland, the *Íslendingasögur* provide a positive depiction of the island and its living conditions.

This insight, that islands are subjected to contrasting perceptions within one single period of time, strongly suggests "that the idea of the island is also a construction, variable by time as well as by culture."[189] Moreover, this flexibility of the concept means that the island's attributes of marginality, interior homogeneity and the fact that they are well described are not naturally given to the island but are attributed to it in the course of a symbolic act.[190] Along

[184] *Lnb*, ÍF 1: 38. "Thorolf said that in the land they'd found, butter was dripping from every blade of grass. That's why he was called Thorolf Butter" (*Lnb* 1972, 18, English translation modified by AKH).

[185] *Snæland* ('Snowland') is the name Ǫlvir barnakarl Einarsson gave Iceland because of heavy snowfall. It was only Flóki Vilgerðarson who eventually named Iceland *Ísland* because of enormous drift ice in a fjord.

[186] Glauser und Kiening 2007, 12.

[187] See e.g. the *Old Testament*, Num 13,27.

[188] On the two world views coexisting in medieval (scholarly) Scandinavia, Sverrir Jakobsson states: "As a result of this learned consensus, the dominant world-view among the Icelandic literary elite was *allocentric*. The people who had a stake in Icelandic textual culture had a deep sense of belonging to a bigger unity, but at the same time, they were aware of their marginal situation within this unity" (2009, 919). This allocentrism consists on the one hand of the medieval Christian or Catholic view and the Nordic world view on the other hand: while the former had its sacred and secular centres in Jerusalem, Rome and Constantinople and pushed Scandinavia to the edges of the world; the latter world view depicts Scandinavia as a well-connected region which is anything but the home of monsters and evil tribes. Sverrir Jakobsson (ibid.) points out, that *Guðmundar saga* version B (AM 657c 4°, ca. AD 1320) and the writers of saints' lives describe Iceland's marginality and hence partake in the continental discourse and world view.

[189] Gillis in Moser 2005, 412.

[190] "Denn die Attribute der Marginalität, Begrenztheit und inneren Homogeneität sind der Insel gerade nicht von Natur aus zu eigen, sie werden ihr [der Insel] vielmehr durch einen bestimmten Diskurs zugewiesen, sind also das Produkt einer symbolischen Praxis" (Moser 2005, 412).

the same lines, liminality is temporarily assigned by a cultural and social context and is not genuinely inherent in the island itself.

4.2.2 ISLANDS IN THE *ÍSLENDINGASÖGUR*

Being informed by the split discourse of how islands are portrayed in (medieval) literature, many Old Norse scholars presume that saga-islands are inevitably liminal. However, when taking a closer look at islands in the *Íslendingasögur*,[191] they are mostly embedded in what Turner calls the social-structural. Thus, they are palpable and clearly defined entities which do not leave much room for speculation and uncertainty.

For the purposes of the present chapter, the sagas have been combed for incidents which either take place on or are closely connected to islands. Since so many instances of islands appear in the corpus it only makes sense to discuss a selection of examples – accordingly there are various examples of islands which remain unmentioned. In order to structure the selected examples, they have been divided into four categories, which naturally overlap to some extent: 1) islands as homesteads, pasture, and other parts of properties; 2) islands as places for raids, duels (*hólmganga*), *Alþingi*, *níðstǫng*; 3) islands as places of exile and hiding places;[192] 4) islands as parts of social networks. The islands are merely mentioned and no elaborate descriptions of them are provided. It is only in relatively few instances in which an island plays a key role in the narrative.

ISLANDS AS HOMESTEADS, PASTURE AND OTHER PARTS OF PROPERTIES

The sagas repeatedly mention instances where influential figures or clans have established their seat of residence on islands and are therefore strongly connected to these places. Why these locations were chosen in the first place is never explained. It is debatable whether islands were chosen as places to live because they were easy to control.

One of the most famous and prominent islanders (and later on Icelanders) is Þórólfr Mostrarskegg in *Eyrbyggja saga*. Before migrating to Iceland, he lives on the Norwegian island Mostr and is highly respected by the community: "[Bjǫrn Ketilsson] kom í ey þá, er Mostr heitir ok liggr fyrir Sunnhǫrðalandi, ok þar tók við honum sá maðr, er Hrólfr hét …. Hrólfr var hǫfðingi mikill ok inn mesti rausnarmaðr. … Hann var gǫfgastr maðr í eyjunni."[193] *Egils saga* and *Grettis saga* also mention properties of high-ranking personalities on islands. The Norwegian King Eiríkr owns a large property on the island Atley: "Svá bar til ferð þeira, at þeir kómu aptan dags til Atleyjar ok lǫgðu þar at landi, en þar var í eyjunni skammt upp bú

[191] For a discussion of islands in Old Norse genres other than *Íslendingasögur*, see e.g. Zilmer (2011).

[192] Note that the island Drangey in *GS* is not discussed in detail in this thesis. Drangey is a special case which deserves individual scrutiny. For further reading, cf. Ástráður Eysteinsson (2002).

[193] *EbS*, ÍF 4: 5 and 6 (ch. 2 and 3). "[Bjǫrn Ketilsson] sailed until he came to the island of Moster, which lies off southern Hordaland, and there he was received by a man named Hrolf, the son of Ornolf Fish-driver. … Hrolf was a prominent chieftain and a man of great largesse. … He was the most eminent man on the island" (*EbS*, Quinn 1997, 132).

mikit, er átti Eiríkr konungr."[194] In *Grettis saga*, it is the local liege who has his farm on Háramarsey: "Þar var ein ey skammt frá þeim til meginlands, er heitir Háramarsey. Þar var byggð mikil í eyjunni; þar var ok lends manns ból."[195] In addition to having homesteads on islands, *Grettis saga* also mentions the use of islands as naturally fenced off meadows.[196] The farmer Þorgils Arason owns the Óláfseyjar where he keeps a good bull throughout the grazing period: "Þat segja menn, at Þorgils bóndi átti eyjar þær, sem Óláfseyjar heita; þær liggja út á firðinum, hálfa aðra viku undan Reykjanesi. Þar átti Þorgils bóndi uxa góðan."[197]

Similar to the Óláfseyjar, the famous island Drangey, on which Grettir takes refuge, is not a no man's land either but property of farmers: "Þeir [bændur] áttu allir part í Drangey. Svá segja menn, at eigi ætti færi menn í eyjunni en tuttugu, ok vildi engi sinn part ǫðrum selja."[198] The farmers who use the island as a pasture for their sheep are not at all happy that Grettir, the great bringer of woe,[199] has occupied their island and takes the liberty of keeping the sheep to himself: "Þar var þá áttatigi sauða í eynni, er bœndr áttu; þat váru mest hrútar ok ær, er þeir ætluðu til skurðar. ... Bœndr svǫruðu: 'Lát oss ná fé váru ok far til lands með oss ok haf frjálst þat, sem þú hefir niðr lagt af fé váru.'"[200] Islands which serve as a place of living or meadow are embedded in daily life, that is, in Victor Turner's structure. It is thus debatable to what extent they can figure as liminal places at all.

RAIDS, *HÓLMGANGA, ALÞINGI* AND *NÍÐSTǪNG*

Daily life on Scandinavian saga islands is not always as peaceful and idyllic as it is imagined at times. Battles and duels are rather often fought on islands. In addition, Norsemen also go raiding on various larger and smaller islands all over Northern Europe. Especially in the case of raids, it is doubtful whether the islands mentioned have been targeted because they are islands or the raiders decided to loot there for other reasons, which are not revealed to the audience.

[194] *EgS*, ÍF 2: 106. "On their journey they arrived in Atloy island in the evening and moored there. Just up from the shore was a large farm which King Eirik owned" (*EgS*, Scudder 1997, 80).

[195] *GS*, ÍF 7: 56. "There was an island called Haramsoy a short way off towards the mainland, where a lot of people lived, and the local landholder had his home" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 74).

[196] In addition to grasslands, islands are also used to make and keep hay on, as e.g. in *DlsS*: "Þorgrímr torðyfill ok Ásmundr fóru at heyi út í ey" (*DlsS*, ÍF 11: 145). "Thorgrim Dung-beetle and Asmund went out onto the island to get hay" (*DlsS*, McTurk 1997, 359). And in *NjS*, dried fish and flour are kept on the Bjarneyjar, a small group of islands in Breiðafjörður: "[Þorvaldr Ósvífrsson] átti eyjar þær, er heita Bjarneyjar; þær liggja út á Breiðafirði; þaðan hafði hann skreið ok mjǫl" (*NjS*, ÍF 12: 30). "He was well off for property and owned the islands in Breidafjord known as the Bjarneyjar, from which he got dried fish and flour" (*NjS*, Cook 1997, 13).

[197] *GS*, ÍF 7: 159-160. "People say that Thorgils owned the islands called Olafseyjar, about six miles out into the fjord off Reykjanes. [There] Thorgils owned a fine ox" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 126).

[198] *GS*, ÍF 7: 228. "All of these men owned a share in the island of Drangey. Some people say that no fewer than twenty men shared the island and that none of them would sell his share to any other" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 160).

[199] *GS*, Scudder 1997, 160. "mikill vágestr" (*GS*, ÍF 7: 228).

[200] *GS*, ÍF 7: 225 and 228 (ch. 69 and 71). "Eighty sheep were kept on the island, too, owned by farmers by the mainland. They were mainly rams and ewes that were intended for slaughter. … The farmers answered, 'Let us fetch our sheep and take them back to land with us, and you can keep for nothing the sheep of ours that you've slaughtered'" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 159).

- Þeir herjuðu um Suðreyjar … .[201]

- Síðan fór hann með liði sínu suðr fyrir Skotland ok herjaði þar; þaðan fór hann suðr til Englands ok herjaði þar.[202]

- Í þann tíma hafði Sigurðr jarl Hlǫðvésson í Orkneyjum herjat til Suðreyja ok allt vestr í Mǫn.[203]

Only the *hólmganga* – the duel – originally took place on small islands (*hólmr*, m.) exclusively and in this way came by its name.[204] On the basis of the texts, it can be assumed that the setting on the island was abandoned in the course of time, so that the term *hólmganga* lost part of its meaning and simply referred to *duel*, irrespective of the location.[205]

This change in setting can also be observed in the sagas. In *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Ljósvetninga saga* for example, some duels are still set on islands. The former saga tells of the duel between Þórólfr bægifótr and Úlfarr kappi. It is Þórólfr's opinion that in the vicinity of their farms there is not enough good ground for both him and Úlfarr. As Úlfarr does not voluntarily give in and move his house, belligerent Þórólfr challenges him to a *hólmganga* on an island in Álptafjǫrðr which results in Úlfarr's death: "Þórólfi þótti þat lítit búland ok skoraði á Úlfar kappa til landa ok bauð honum hólmgǫngu ... Úlfarr vildi heldr deyja en vera kúgaðr af Þórólfi; þeir gengu á hólm í Álptafirði ok fell Úlfarr."[206]

In *Ljósvetninga saga* (ch. 16) it is the *goði* Þórir Helgason who challenges Guðmundr ríki to a duel because of their tense and hostile relation: "Vil ek þat nú reyna, hvárt þetta er sannmæli eða eigi, því at ek vil skora á þik til hólmgǫngu, at þú komir á þriggja nátta fresti í hólm þann, er liggr hér í Øxará, er menn hafa áðr vanir verit á hólm at ganga, ok berjumsk þar tveir, svá sem forn lǫg liggja til."[207] It is interesting how Þórir insists that the fight should be carried out according to ancient rules (*forn lǫg*), but as the duel never takes place, it remains unclear what these old rules entail, especially with regard to the setting on the island.

In *Egils saga*, Gyða, an old farmer's wife, complains to Egill that the *berserkr*, Ljótr, has challenged her son Friðgeirr to a *hólmganga* on the island Vǫrl because Friðgeirr has denied Ljótr his sister in marriage: "Hann [Ljótr] kom hér ok bað dóttur minnar, en vér svǫruðum skjótt ok synjuðum honum ráðsins; síðan skoraði hann til hólmgǫngu á Friðgeir, son minn, ok

[201] *GS*, ÍF 7: 3. "They [Qnundr Ófeigsson and his men] went raiding in the Hebrides" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 50).
[202] *EgS*, ÍF 2: 176. "Then he [Arinbjǫrn] travelled south with all his men to Scotland and raided there, and from there he continued southwards to England and raided there as well" (*EgS*, Scudder 1997, 116).
[203] *EbS*, ÍF 4: 76. "At that time Earl Sigurd Hlodvesson of the Orkney Islands had been raiding in the Hebrides and all the way west to the Isle of Man" (*EbS*, Quinn 1997, 165).
[204] For further reading on *hólmganga*, see, Wetzler (2014), Foote/Wilson (1970), Bø (1969), Sieg (1966), and Ciklamini (1963, 1965).
[205] This also applies to related phrases such as *at bjóða e-m hólmgöngu* 'to challenge sb. to a duel'.
[206] *EbS*, ÍF 4: 13-14. "Thorolf considered his mother's land inadequate and challenged Ulfar the Champion for his land, inviting him to a duel ... . Ulfar would rather have died than be cowed by Thorolf. They fought a duel in Alftafjord and Ulfar was killed" (*EbS*, Quinn 1997, 135).
[207] *LvS*, ÍF 10: 40. "I now wish to test whether that is true or not, so I am challenging you to a duel to be held in three days on the islet in the Oxara river where duels used to be fought. Let the two of us do battle according to the ancient laws" (*LvS*, Andersson/Miller 1997, 222).

skal á morgin koma til hólmsins í ey þá, er Vǫrl heitir."[208] Since Friðgeirr is not the strongest of men and would lose this duel, Egill steps in and fights the *berserkr*, Ljótr.

Upon arriving at Vǫrl, Egill and his party spot the field and find the fighting area already marked out with stones: "Þar var fagr vǫllr skammt frá sjónum, er hólmstefnan skyldi vera; var þar markaðr hólmstaðr, lagðir steinar útan um."[209] In *Ketilsbók*[210] Ljótr is said to quote one aspect of the *hólmganga*-rules, namely, that the combatant who first steps out of the ring should be called a *níðingr* ('villain, scoundrel'): "Ljótr gekk á hólminn, ok segir upp hólmgǫnguløg, at sá skal bera níðingsnafn jafnan síðan, er út hopar um marksteina, þá er upp eru settir í hring um hólmgǫngustaðinn."[211] Ljótr, who is overly confident about his victory, does not anticipate at this point that he is tempting fate with his statement and that it will not be long until he will be a *níðingr* himself. The men start fighting but soon Egill proves to be the superior man. He attacks Ljótr quickly and most fiercely and thus forces Ljótr to back down and eventually to step over the boundary of stones: "Ljótr fór út um marksteinana ok víða um vǫllinn."[212] In the second round of their *hólmganga*, Egill kills Ljótr and thus saves Friðgeirr's sister.

While a couple of sagas include short extracts of the *hólmganga*-rules (e.g. *Kjalnesinga saga*, ch. 9), it is first and foremost *Egils saga* and *Kormáks saga* that reveal the most about *hólmganga*-rules and ritual activities connected to the duel.[213] Probably the most extensive set of *hólmganga*-rules ever presented in an *Íslendingasaga* is the passage in *Kormáks saga*[214] (ch. 10):

[208] *EgS*, ÍF 2: 201-202. "He [the *berserkr* Ljótr] came here and asked for my daughter's hand in marriage, but we turned him down on the spot. So he challenged my son Friðgeir to a duel. He'll be coming to fight him at Valdero island tomorrow" (*EgS*, Scudder 1997, 128).

[209] *EgS*, ÍF 2: 202. "There was a fine field a short way from the shore where the duel was to be held. Stones had been arranged in a circle to mark out the site" (*EgS*, Scudder 1997, 129).

[210] *Ketilsbók* refers to two paper manuscripts dated to the mid-17th century and written by the Icelander Ketill Jörundsson. The manuscrips have been given the shelf numbers AM 453 4° and AM 462 4°, and are kept in the Arnamagnaean Institutes in Copenhagen and Reykjavík respectively.

[211] *Ketilsbók*, AM 262, 4°, 75v, lines 5-8. I thank Dr. Silvia Hufnagel for her assistance in transcribing this text passage and rendering it into standardised Old Norse. Manuscript page available at <https://handrit.is/is/manuscript/imaging/is/AM04-0462/1r-108v#>, last accessed August 16, 2016. Printed edition of *Ketilsbók* published in the series of Editiones Arnamagnæanæ (2006: 118): "Ljotur gjeck ä hölminn, og seiger upp hölmgøngu lǫg, ad sä skal bera nïdïngs nafn jafnan sïdan, er üt hopar um marksteina, þä er upp eru setter ï hrïng, um hölmgøngu stadinn." "Ljótur went to the island and recites the laws of the island duel, that one shall carry a name of shame always thereupon, the one who jumps through the boundary markers that are set up in a circle around the setting of the duel" (trans. Ryan E. Johnson).

[212] *EgS*, ÍF 2: 204. "Ljot went outside the circle of stones and all over the field" (*EgS*, Scudder 1997, 130).

[213] One of those ritual activities revolves around the *blótnaut*, a bull that is sacrificed and slaughtered by the victor of the *hólmganga*, see *EgS* (ch. 65) and *KmS* (ch. 23).

[214] According to Vésteinn Ólason (2005, 115), *KmS* counts among the early *Íslendingasögur* and is dated to ca. AD 1220, and the oldest extant fragment stems from ca. AD 1350.

> Þat váru hólmgǫngulǫg, at feldr skal vera fimm alna í skaut ok lykkjur í hornum; skyldi þar setja niðr hæla þá, er hǫfuð var á ǫðrum enda; þat hétu tjǫsnur; sá er um bjó, skyldi ganga at tjǫsnunum, svá at sæi himin milli fóta sér ok heldi í eyrasnepla með þeim formála, sem síðan er eptir hafðr í blóti því, at kallat er tjǫsnublót. Þrír reitar skulu umhverfis feldinn, fets breiðir; út frá reitum skulu vera strengir fjórir, ok heita þat hǫslur; þat er vǫllr haslaðr, er svá er gǫrt. Maðr skal hafa þrjá skjǫldu, en er þeir eru farnir, þá skal ganga á feld, þó at áðr hafi af hǫrfat; þá skal hlífask með vápnum þaðan frá. Sá skal hǫggva, er á er skorat. Ef annarr verðr sárr svá at blóð komi á feld, er eigi skylt at berjask lengr. Ef maðr stígr ǫðrum fœti út um hǫslur 'ferr hann á hæl', en 'rennr'[215], ef báðum stígr. Sinn maðr skal halda skildi fyrir hvárum þeim, er bersk. Sá skal gjalda hólmlausn, er meir verðr sárr, þrjár merkr silfrs í hólmlausn.[216]

To what extent these *hólmgǫngulǫg* can truly be called 'laws' or are rather traditional rules is difficult to say. Duels were banned in Norway and Iceland as early as the beginning of the 11th century. It is thus possible that the laws as formulated in *Kórmaks saga* date to a later time and are coloured by retrospective.[217] In the *Íslenzk fornrit* edition, Einar Ól. Sveinsson explicitly states that what is said about the duelling rules in *Kormáks saga* is not found in other sources.[218] The quoted passage could just as well be a product of the saga narrator's fantasy and not have any roots in Old Norse legal dealings.

The beginning of the quote suggests that *hólmgǫngur* either no longer or do not necessarily take place on islands and skerries. Regardless of the location of the area, a clear demarcation of the fighting place – a *hólmstaðr* – remains essential.[219] As can be seen in the

[215] The expressions in single quotation marks should be understood as technical terms of the *hólmganga*.

[216] *KmS*, ÍF 8: 237-238. "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 and one end. They were called tarses, and he who made the preparations was to approach the tarses in such a way that he could see the sky between his legs while grasping his ear lobes with the invocation that has since been used again in the sacrifice known as the tarse-sacrifice. There were to be three spaces marked out all around the cloak, each a foot in breadth, and outside the marked spaces there should be four strings, named hazel poles; what you had was a hazle-poled stretch of ground, when that was done. You were supposed to have three shields, but when they were used up, you were to go onto the cloak, even if you had withdrawn from it before, and from then on you were supposed to protect yourself with weapons. He who was challenged had to strike. If one of the two was wounded in such a way that blood fell onto the cloak, there was no obligation to continue fighting. If someone stepped with just one foot outside the hazel poles, he was said to be retreating, or to be running if he did so with both. There would be a man to hold the shield for each one of the two fighting. He who was the more wounded of the two was to release himself by paying duel ransom, to the tune of three marks of silver" (*KmS*, McTurk 1997, 194-195).

[217] Schier 1996, 286. The prohibition of *hólmgǫngur* is partly also reflected in the sagas, which assume different stands towards the value of the *hólmganga*. At times, this form of duelling seems socially acceptable as a valid, legal means of enforcement but in other cases the saga narrator seems to consider *hólmganga* as a dated institution, a remnant of the pagan time rather than part of Christian society and law. In *LvS*, for example, it is the figure of Gellir Þorkelsson through whom the narrator seems to speak his mind: "Illa læt ek yfir því, er hólmgǫngur haldask uppi, ok er þat heiðinna manna" (*LvS*, ÍF 10: 102). "I dislike the idea of fighting duels … They are a heathen custom" (*LvS*, Andersson/Miller 1997, 253). That *hólmgǫngur* were officially abolished is partly also mirrored in the younger sagas where *hólmgǫngur* are quite rare. Most younger sagas depict fights with revenants and ogres, but no fights take place within a prescribed frame and a certain set of rules such as the *hólmganga*. In the present case *KjS* is the only younger saga which features a duel (Búi against his rival Kolfiðr, ch. 9).

[218] *KmS*, ÍF 8: 237, fn 2.

[219] Note that neither *EbS* nor *LvS* mention any kind of demarcation. Maybe the island is demarcation enough or – more likely – the saga narrator simply takes for granted the audience's knowledge on the rules of *hólmganga*.

example from *Egils saga* above, the demarcation of an arena is indispensable even if the fight is about to take place on an island. While *Egils saga* features *marksteinar* (ch. 64), *Kormáks saga* (ch. 10) mentions both *höslur*[220] ('hazel-poles') as well as a *feldr* ('cloak, hide') which is put on the ground to denote the arena. *Kjalnesinga saga* (ch. 9) also defines the arena on the basis of a *feldr*, and so describes a very restricted fighting space.

All the same, it is not so much the demarcation itself that assumes an essential meaning but – as can be seen in the case of Ljótr – the crossing of this artificial boundary. As long as the fighters keep within the demarcated area, the boundary is of no importance, but when one of the combatants violates the physical boundary he becomes a *níðingr*. Hence the *marksteinar* or the edge of the *feldr* figure as the dividing line not only between life and death but – probably even more importantly – also between honour and dishonour, two aspects of a concept which is of paramount importance within Old Norse society and therefore repeatedly and intensively dealt with in the sagas.

Even if the *hólmganga* is no longer primarily defined as taking place in an insular setting, the demarcated fighting arena remains a figurative insular space of some kind. It is set apart from its surroundings and controlled by a particular set of rules which pertain exclusively to the happenings within the given context. In this regard, the *hólmganga* can be called a liminal occasion which takes place in a liminal space.

On the one hand, it can be argued that the *hólmganga* belongs to socio-structural life since it is a valid means of the legal sphere and is intended to settle and decide on conflicts which have arisen from the wheelings and dealings and social interactions in daily life. On the other hand, the duel can equally well be thought of as liminal, because it is what Victor Turner calls a redressive means whose purpose it is to re-establish a social equilibrium. Since a specific set of rules pertain to the challenge, the preparations and the proceedings of a *hólmganga*, this type of (scheduled) duel is embedded in a ritual-like frame, which is clearly set apart from daily life.

[220] Hazel poles are mentioned in the context of public events which require the demarcation and symbolical charging of a specific area. Apart from *KmS* it is *EgS* which features *haslað* sites, sites demarcated with hazel poles. In chapter 56, Egill attends the Gulaþing in Norway and the saga mentions how the assembly was organised spatially: "En þar er dómrinn var settr, var vǫllr sléttr ok settar niðr heslistengr í vǫllinn í hring, en lǫgð um útan snœri umhverfis; váru þat kǫlluð vébǫnd; en fyrir innan í hringinum sátu dómendr" (*EgS*, ÍF 2: 154). "The court was held on a flat plain, marked out by hazel poles with a rope around them. This was known as the staking out of a sanctuary. Inside the circle sat the court" (*EgS*, Scudder 1997, 105). The jury consisting of 36 judges is placed within an area, which is not only demarcated with hazel poles but also with *vébǫnd* ("the ropes fastened to stakes (heslistengr) by which the court was surrounded" Zoëga, 1910). *EgS* mentions the hazel-poles and the *vébǫnd* earlier on in the context of the Vínheiði-battle (ch. 52): "En er þeir menn kómu í þann stað, er vǫllrinn var haslaðr, þá váru þar settar upp heslistengr allt til ummerkja, þar er sá staðr var, er orrostan skyldi vera" (*EgS*, ÍF 2: 132). "When they reached the place chosen for the battlefield, hazel rods had already been put up to mark where it would be fought" (*EgS*, Scudder 1997, 94). Kurt Schier (1996, 272) thinks it unlikely that a battle-arena was truly marked with hazel poles. Similar to the (semantic) change of the term *hólmganga*, he considers the phrase *halsa vǫll* to mean the choosing of the battle field.

What is more, the fighting arena also features van Gennep's pivoting of the sacred: fighting arenas are only temporary constructs, which blend in again with their surroundings once the fight is over. Especially in this regard, the arena is ambiguous because it does not have an explicit connotation. Regarding the island discourse, it can be stated that although the *hólmganga* is a liminal proceeding, it does not automatically make the island liminal. The transformational aspect of the *hólmganga* lies in the fact that a duel can have fatal consequences as well as bring about changes in social position and reputation. It is the performance of the combatants rather than their place of combat which is decisive.

Like the later, more figurative meaning of *hólmganga* as an island, the *Alþingi*, the annual assembly held at Þingvellir, can also be seen as a figurative island.[221] For Guðbrandur Vigfússon the *Alþingi* is one of the Norse social outlets,[222] and for Victor Turner the assembly is a phase of normative communitas,[223] because it figures as an attempt to overcome, or at least, to unite the various local communities and to establish for the time being one big community which is subjected to a momentarily centralised legal system.[224] Turner calls the *Alþingi* liminoid, even though he introduced the concept of the liminoid with reference to post-industrial modern societies. What is more, the liminoid aspect of voluntariness does not apply to all *Alþingi*-participants. The law speaker (*lǫgsǫgumaðr)*, all the *goðar* and part of their followers were required to attend the *Alþingi*. Unfortunately, Turner does not elaborate in detail on how the *Alþingi* can be considered liminoid.

I argue that the *Alþingi* should be considered liminal due to the social setting and above all the role of the juridical proceedings. The *Alþingi* reveals liminal aspects in various regards. In terms of the seven liminal qualities, five of them can be attributed to the *Alþingi*, namely spatial segregation, temporary suspension of daily life, changes and transformations, paradoxes and ambiguities, and irreversibility.

Firstly, the *Alþingi* is clearly set apart from everyday socio-structural life. It always took place at Þingvellir,[225] a specific and predetermined place, which not only offers enough

[221] The comments made here on *Alþingi* should be understood as preliminary observations which require further, detailed research, which is beyond the scope of the present study. – The insular character of *Alþingi* is not exclusively figurative since the nameless island in the middle of the river Øxará was used for duels (Byock 1993b, 289).

[222] Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1879, xxi.

[223] Normative communitas evolves when existential communitas (mostly in a ritual context) is either kept up too long and/or attempted to be preserved. In this case communitas automatically starts developing an idiosyncratic structure (Turner 1969, 132) and tries to set up a(n) (alternative) social system.

[224] Turner 1985, 118.

[225] The geological features add an intriguing aspect to *Alþingi*: Þingvellir is exactly placed on the fissure between the European and the American tectonic plates and is thus literally situated between two worlds. Þingvellir does not truly belong to either side and yet is based on both plates. Even though the Norsemen knew nothing about this fact, it is nevertheless a remarkable observation, which makes Þingvellir as a setting for the *Alþingi* even more interesting.

pasture for all the horses but is also the junction of the two main traffic arteries.[226] What is more, the area of the *þing* is defined by set boundaries and is also consecrated. In Old Norse, the term *þinghelgi* is used to refer to this demarcated *þing*-location.

Secondly, due to its legal and social importance, the *Alþingi* becomes a point of reference in the calendar of medieval Iceland and is also often used in the sagas to demarcate and structure time. More importantly for the liminal point of view is the fact that the General Assembly is temporally limited to two weeks in June and July.[227] It is only during this short period that Þingvellir is assigned its meaning and authoritative role, before it blends in with the rest of the landscape. It seems to lose its importance as a location for the rest of the year. This shift of significance strongly echoes van Gennep's pivoting of the sacred: Þingvellir's qualities as a place of ritual, social and political significance depends on and peaks during the social gathering in summer.

The temporal demarcation of the *Alþingi* allows for a transient experience of community, i.e. a feeling of communitas. The feeling of communitas is also represented and expressed by the events accompanying the annual gathering: "For two weeks the ravines and lava plains became a national capital. Friendships and political alliances were initiated, continued and broken; news were passed; promises were given; stories were told; and business was transacted."[228] In view of these pastimes, Turner's claim of *Alþingi*'s liminoid nature can be supported.

The most paradoxical or ambiguous aspect about the *Alþingi*, however, is its interconnection of Turnerian structure and anti-structure. Despite its anti-structural aspects, the *Alþingi* is the very occasion where socio-structural life is (re-)organised and dealt with, both on a legal and political as well as a social level. Even though the legal issues were dealt with in a temporal and spatial bubble, the decisions made at the *Alþingi* were binding and carried full legislative and judicial weight for socio-structural life to come. Everybody was subject to the verdicts handed down at the *Alþingi*, even if the defendant was not present during the process, as it is the case with Grettir Ásmundarson.[229]

What is more, in the course of all the negotiations at the *Alþingi*, the attending men were not allowed to carry weapons. It was only at the end of the *Alþingi* that the *vápntak*, the taking

[226] Schutzbach 1985, 16. Jón R. Hjálmarsson (2012, 24) reports how Þingvellir was selected: Around the time of the *Alþingi*'s foundation a farmer, who lived in Bláskógr close to Reykjavík, was sentenced for having killed a slave. The defendant had to leave his property which then belonged to the general Icelandic public. As the estate bordered on the northern rim of the plane close to Þingvallavatn, it was decided to use this place for the *Alþingi*.

[227] From the year AD 999 onwards we know that "the opening day was set as the Thursday after the first ten weeks of the summer, that is, between June 18 and 24" (Byock 1993, 10).

[228] Byock 2002, 5. See also Gunnell 1995, 32.

[229] In his article "Goðsögnin um Gretti," Óskar Halldórsson states that passing a verdict on outlaws *in absentia* is well known in outlaw-narratives: "Oftast hefur útlaginn verið hrakinn í urð fyrir sakleysi að mati fólksins; hann er fórnarlamb ranglætis, ofsóttur fyrir eitthvað sem lög og valdsmenn telja glæp, en réttlætiskennd almennings getur afsakað" (1977, 633). "Most often the outlaw has been cast out to desolation without due cause in the opinion of the people; he was a victim of injustice, persecuted for something which laws and men in power consider criminal, but the common people's sentiment of justice could forgive" (trans. Ryan E. Johnson).

of the weapons, officially concluded and sealed all the agreements made.[230] This whole paradoxical situation of shaping structure in a non-structural phase illustrates once more how closely Turner's modalities are intertwined, how much they mutually complement and influence each other, and consequently how difficult it is to clearly distinguish between these two social modes.

For the last topic of this subchapter – the *níðstǫng* – the discussion returns to *Egils saga* which is a rich source of events taking place on or in close relation to islands. Towards the end of his second trip to Norway, Egill Skalla-Grímsson erects the famous *níðstǫng* against King Eiríkr blóðøx and his mother Queen Gunnhildr (ch. 57). Egill does so on the island of Herðla. Similar to *hólmganga* and battlefields, Egill uses a hazel-pole for the *níðstǫng* on which he puts a horse's head, writes runes into the pole and recites the required formulas:

> Gekk Egill upp í eyna. Hann tók í hǫnd sér heslistǫng ok gekk á bergsnǫs nǫkkura, þá er vissi til lands inn; þá tók hann hrosshǫfuð ok setti upp á stǫngina. Síðan veitti hann formála ok mælti svá: 'Hér set ek upp níðstǫng, ok sný ek þessu níði á hǫnd Eiríki konungi ok Gunnhildi dróttningu,' – hann sneri hrosshǫfðinu inn á land, – 'sný ek þessu níði á landvættir þær, er land þetta byggva, svá at allar fari þær villar vega, engi hendi né hitti sitt inni, fyrr en þær reka Eirík konung ok Gunnhildi ór landi.' Síðan skýtr hann stǫnginni niðr í bjargrifu ok lét þar standa; hann sneri ok hǫfðinu inn á land, en hann reist rúnar á stǫnginni, ok segja þær formála þenna allan.[231]

To what extent the setting of this cultic action on the island is important is hard to say since only very few instances of *níðstǫng* are known; the most prominent examples are to be found in *Egils saga* and *Grágás*. Only Jǫkull Ingimundarson ins gamla and Faxa-Brandr in *Vatnsdœla saga* (ch. 34) also raise a *níðstǫng*, which is called *súla* (f., 'pillar, column'), against the inhabitants of the settlement Borg:

> Þá fóru þeir Jǫkull ok Faxa-Brandr til sauðahúss Finnboga, er þar var hjá garðinum, ok tóku súlu eina ok báru undir garðinn; þar váru ok hross, er þangat hǫfðu farit til skjóls í hríðinni. Jǫkull skar karlshǫfuð á súluendanum ok reist á rúnar með ǫllum þeim formála, sem fyrr var sagðr. Síðan drap Jǫkull meri eina, ok opnuðu hana hjá brjóstinu ok fœrðu á súluna ok létu horfa heim á Borg.[232]

[230] Byock 1993a, 10. Men were forbidden to carry weapons while attending the Alþingi as well as during mass in church and thus they had to deposit the weapons beforehand. In the case of the church the weapons were stored in the *vapenhus*. On the *vapenhus*, cf. ch. 4.1.2, subsection *Fights in the Doorway*.

[231] *EgS*, ÍF 2: 171. "Egill went up onto the island. He took a hazel pole in his hand and went to the edge of a rock facing inland. Then he took a horse's head and put it on the end of the pole. Afterwards he made an invocation, saying, 'Here I set up this scorn-pole and turn its scorn upon King Eirik and Queen Gunnhild' – then turned the horse's head to face land – 'and I turn its scorn upon the nature spirits that inhabit this island, sending them all astray so that none of them shall find its resting-place by chance or design until they have driven King Eirik and Gunnhild from this land.' Then he drove the pole into a cleft in the rock and left it to stand there. He turned the head towards the land and carved the whole invocation in runes on the pole" (*EgS*, Scudder 1997, 113-114).

[232] *VdS*, ÍF 8: 91. "At that time Jokul and Faxi-Brand went to Finnbogi's sheep-shed, which was right by the yard, and they took a post and set it on the ground by the wall. There were also horses there, which had gone to shelter during the storm. Jokul carved a man's head on the end of the post, and wrote in runes the opening words of the curse, spoken of earlier. Jokul then killed a mare, and they cut it open at the breast, and set it on the pole, and had it face towards Borg" (*VdS*, Wawn 1997, 46).

Considering that the episode in *Vatnsdæla saga* takes place close to a settlement, it is questionable whether the fact that Egill erects his *níðstǫng* on an island is overly important and decisive for the success of his action. After all, the plot prior to the *níðstǫng* scene is also set in a landscape of islands off Norway's coast. Egill does not intentionally leave the mainland to perform the magical invocation of the *landvættir* on an island, but he does so at the same place where just prior he had fought a battle. Even though Egill is temporarily alone when performing the incantation, the scene lacks liminal elements such as transformation, paradoxes and ambiguities.

Egill's liminality appears in two closely interlinked aspects. Erecting the *níðstǫng* is a liminal act inasmuch as Egill performs this highly pagan act despite being prime-signed at that time.[233] Having been prime-signed, Egill is in an intermediate state of being, no longer pagan but not yet fully Christian either. It is only with baptism that the subject is eventually truly incorporated into Christianity:

> The candidate for baptism who had been prime-signed but not baptized was in one of the few morally and spiritually ambiguous positions allowed by orthodox Christian thought. He belonged neither to the pagan diabolic world from which he had been temporarily and partially redeemed nor to the Christian community.[234]

Egill decided on the prime-signing for practical and economic rather than religious reasons. As the saga informs the (modern) audience, only prime-signed merchants were allowed to trade with Christian merchants.[235]

Egill's religious ambiguity is enhanced by his performance of a heathen act, after agreeing to be prime-signed, which makes the deed even more vicious. Although *Egils saga* states that the person who is prime-signed keeps the religion he thinks most agreeable,[236] it is

[233] Similar incidents of heathen rituals carried out on islands can also be found in *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* in *Heimskringla*. In her article "The Powers and Purposes of an Insular Setting" (2011) Zilmer states that the motif of sacrifices being performed on islands by figures who recant their Christian belief is a recurrent motif in Old Norse texts (ibid., 29). Interestingly, the *Kings' sagas* often mention islands in the context of conversion (ibid., 33).

[234] Harris/Hill 1989, 116. Harris and Hill (ibid.) write that the prime-signed individual can be compared to a sealed, empty vessel: it is not filled with the Christian spirit yet but the 'bad'/'evil' pagan forces cannot enter it either. The usefulness of an empty vessel is also touched on in Lao Tze's poem about the wheel, which was discussed in ch. 2.1.2: "We turn clay to make a vessel; / But it is on the space where there is nothing that the usefulness of the / vessel depends." Both in the case of prime-signing as well as the clay vessel, the notions of the useful emptiness and liminality coincide.

[235] "Konungr bað Þórólf ok þá brœðr, at þeir skyldi láta prímsignask … því at þeir menn, er prímsignaðir váru, hǫfðu allt samneyti við kristna menn ok svá heiðna, en hǫfðu þat at átrúnaði, er þeim var skapfelldast. Þeir Þórólfr ok Egill gerðu þat eptir bœn konungs ok létu prímsignask báðir" (*EgS*, ÍF 2: 128-129). "The king asked Thorolf and Egil to take the sign of the cross, because that was a common custom then among both merchants and mercenaries who dealt with Christians. Anyone who had taken the sign of the cross could mix freely with both Christians and heathens, while keeping the faith that they pleased. Thorolf and Egil did so at the king's request, and both took the sign of the cross" (*EgS*, Scudder 1997, 92).

[236] "Þeir menn, er prímsignaðir váru ... hǫfðu þat at átrúnaði, er þeim var skapfelldast" (*EgS*, ÍF 2: 128; trans. cf. fn above).

nevertheless astonishing that Egill performs such a strongly heathen and disturbing act, which gets punished with full outlawry. The act fits in with Egill's at times unpredictable character and the animosities he holds towards the Norwegian rulers.

Egill is not the only saga character who carries out such a deed. Jarl Hákon from *Jómsvíkinga saga* commits an equally condemnable malpractice (ch. 32-33). When Hákon realises that his party is losing the battle in Hjǫrungavágr, he goes to the island Prímsignd, where he invokes his divine patron Þorgerðr Hǫlgabrúðr.[237] Hákon's transgression of religious boundaries is, at least from a Christian perspective, worse than that of Egill. The reason lies in the beginning of the saga which tells of Denmark's conversion at the hands of the German emperor Otto and the Norwegian king Óláfr Tyggvason. In the course of this, jarl Hákon is forced to accept Christianity, but soon after he recants the new faith and becomes pagan again.[238] Hákon's bad character as an apostate is emphasised when he goes on the island Prímsignd to carry out a heathen ritual which is reminiscent of Abraham's sacrifice of his son Isaac (Gen 1. 22). The viciousness of Hákon's deed and the (female) pagan deity, Þorgerðr Hǫlgabrúðr, illustrate Hákon's willingness to sacrifice his own child for the sake of gaining supernatural assistance in the battle: "Þar kømr at hann býðr henni mannblót, en hon vill eigi þiggja. Hann býðr henni um síðir son sinn er Erlingr hét sjau vetra gamall; ok hon þiggr hann. Fær jarl sveininn nú í hendr Skopta, þræli sínum, ok ferr hann ok veitir sveininum skaða."[239]

At first sight, it is puzzling and paradoxical that Hákon chooses for his barbarous deed an island with a name that alludes to Christianity. It is unlikely that this location is chosen randomly; rather it considerably adds to Hákon's heresy and the viciousness of his deed. Instead of deeming Hákon's conjuration pagan and even sinister, as the saga's Christian point of view suggests, it is debatable to what extent the invocation is an act of religion or rather of (black) magic. As has been discussed in the context of the threshold-instances, the sagas seem to make different judgements on magic performances. As offensive as his invocation and sacrifice appear to the Christian mind, his act is neither liminal nor a rite of passage. Egill, in contrast, does not recant his prime-signing and his formal connection to Christianity and therefore he keeps moving in a religious interspace; hence his *níðstǫng* is an instance of liminality.

[237] *JvS* 1962, 36.

[238] "En Hákon jarl gekk aptr til heiðni þegar hann kom aptr til Nóregs ok galt aldri skatta síðan" (JvS 1962, 8). "But Earl Hakon reverted to heathendom as soon as he returned to Norway and subsequently never paid tribute" (ibid.).

[239] *JvS* 1962, 36. "It came to his offering her a human sacrifice which she likewise rejected. Finally he offered her his seven-year-old son called Erlingr, and she accepted him. The earl delivered up the boy to his thrall Skopti, who proceeded to kill him" (ibid.).

EXILE AND HIDING PLACES

At times animosities between various parties develop in such a way that a group of people or an individual must flee and hide or even seek exile in a different place. The event many *Íslendingasögur* begin with and the most important migration in Old Norse literature (and history) is the exodus of the noble families from Norway because of king Haraldr hárfagri's endeavour to unite Norway under his rule. Members of the Norwegian upper class refuse to submit to Haraldr hárfagri and insist on their independence and local authority. They therefore decide to leave Norway and find a new home in Northern Europe, not infrequently on islands of various sizes: "En af þessi áþján flýðu margir menn af landi á brott, ok byggðusk þá margar auðnir víða, bæði austr í Jamtaland ok Helsingjaland ok Vestrlǫnd, Suðreyjar, Dyflinnar skíði, Írland, Norðmandí á Vallandi, Katanes á Skotlandi, Orkneyjar ok Hjaltland, Færeyjar."[240] These destinations show that the *Íslendingasögur* do not consider islands as suspicious but rather as perfectly valid places to settle on and live.

Many chapters after this report in *Egils saga*, the hero Egill has to flee and hide from his life-long enemy, the Norwegian King Eiríkr blóðøx. After Gunnhildr's attempt to kill Egill with poisoned beer at a social gathering, Egill leaves Atley, where the feast has taken place, swims to the nearby island Sauðey and hides in the shrubs. Since King Eiríkr has his men (mistakenly) search on Atley, Egill is not found.[241]

It is not only Egill who hides on an island. Þormóðr from *Fóstbræðra saga* also chooses an islet or skerry for retreat after a strenuous fight with Falgeirr. The men have been fighting for quite a while and during their fight in the sea Falgeirr drowned. Þormóðr, all exhausted, makes his way to a skerry: "Þormóðr var þá mjǫk farinn. Hann lagðisk þá í eitt sker ok skreið þar upp á grjótit ok lá þar ok vætti þá einskis annars en hann myndi þar líf láta, því at hann var mjǫk móðr ok sárr, en langt til lands."[242] It is his friends Skúf and Bjarni who collect him on the skerry and take him to Gríma (cf. ch. 4.1.1 subsection *Performing Magic*). Not long after, Þormóðr is again chased by Þórdís, who still wants to avenge the death of her sons. Þormóðr, who is wounded, first stays at the shore on a stack of seaweed, but later on rows to a low-lying island where he digs himself into the seaweed. Although Þórdís has this very island searched carefully, she does not find Þormóðr. When Þórdís has left, "stendr Þormóðr upp ór

[240] *EgS*, ÍF 2: 12. "Many people fled the country [Norway] to escape this tyranny [Haraldr hárfagri's tyranny] and settled various uninhabited parts of many places, to the east in Jamtland and Halsingland, and to the west in the Hebrides, the shire of Dublin, Ireland, Normandy in France, Caithness in Scotland, the Orkney Islands and Shetland Isles, and the Faroe Islands" (*EgS*, Scudder 1997, 36).

[241] "Þá hljóp hann [Egill] á sund ok létti eigi fyrr en hann kom til eyjarinnar; hon hét Sauðey ok er ekki mikil ey ok hrísótt … Eiríkr konungr lét rannsaka eyna [Atley], þegar ljóst var; þat var seint, er eyin var mikil, ok fannsk Egill eigi" (*EgS*, ÍF 2: 111 and 112). "Then he [Egill] leapt into the sea and swam without stopping until he reached the island, which is called Sauðey, a small island covered with low shrub. … King Eirik had Atley combed when it was light. This was a lengthy task because it was a large island, and Egil was nowhere to be found" (*EgS*, Scudder 1997, 83).

[242] *FbS*, ÍF 6: 240-241. "By this time, Thormod's strength was much depleted. He made for some rocks that stood up out of the water, crawled up onto them and lay down. He had no other expectations than to die there, since he was wounded and weary and a long way from the shore" (*FbS*, Regal 1997, 382).

brúkinu. Hann svimr þá þangat á leið, sem honum þótti skemmst til lands. Hann hendir sker þau, er á leiðinni váru, ok tók þar hvíldir. Ok er skammt var til meginlands, þá komsk Þormóðr á eitt sker ok var þá orðinn svá, at hann mátti hvergi þaðan komask."[243] Similar, though more dramatic than in *Egils saga*, the island becomes a place of refuge and saves the protagonist's life. These islands are neither idealised nor portrayed in any particularly positive light and so do not explicitly represent Gillis's positive characteristics of islands (cf. ch. 4.2.1). Although the islands mentioned are safe places, the sagas stick to their sober and rather factual style. While Egill soon leaves the island again with a stolen boat, Þormóðr would probably die on the skerry if it were not for his helpers who save him.

Besides violent incidents, the sagas also tell of rather hilarious episodes in connection with islands, for example when the stay on an island is an involuntary and ultimately very expensive one. In chapter 29 of *Eyrbyggja saga*, some of earl Sigurðr Hlǫdvésson's men are shipwrecked on a small uninhabited island after having collected the taxes on the Isle of Man. Fortunately, the Icelandic merchant Þóroddr, who is on his way back from Dublin to Iceland, sails past and sells them his small boat for an extortionate sum and thus receives most of the taxes the men had previously collected. This incident gives Þóroddr his nickname *skattkaupandi* ('the Tribute-trader'):

> Ok er þeir hǫfðu siglt um stund, gekk veðr til landsuðrs ok austrs ok gerði storm mikinn, ok bar þá norðr um Írland, ok brutu þar skipit í spán við ey eina óbyggða; ok er þeir váru þar at komnir, bar þar at þeim Þórodd Íslending, er hann sigldi ór Dyflinni. Jarlsmenn kǫlluðu á kaupmenn til hjálpar sér. Þóroddr lét skjóta báti ok gekk þar á sjálfr … Ok svá kom, at hann seldi þeim bátinn frá hafskipinu ok tók þar við mikinn hlut af skattinum … Hann var síðan kallaðr Þóroddr skattkaupandi.[244]

ROLE IN SOCIAL NETWORKS

Njáls saga demonstrates in chapter 154 that islands are by no means cut off from the mainland but play a vital and essential role in the Scandinavian social network. Kári Sǫlmundarson and Kolbeinn svarti leave Iceland and arrive on Friðarey: "Tóku þeir Friðarey; hon er á millum Hjaltlands ok Orkneyja. Tók við Kára sá maðr, er Dávíð hvíti hét. … Hǫfðu þeir þá fréttir vestan ór Hrosseyju, allar þær er þar gerðusk."[245] This scene as well as the following one from *Egils saga* emphasise the function of islands as small-scale hubs or

[243] *FbS*, ÍF 6: 255. "He stood up from the pile of seaweed, and then swam for the nearest part of the coast. He stopped at a number of skerries on the way to rest, but when there was only a short distance left to the shore he climbed up onto a skerry and was so exhausted that he could go no farther" (*FbS*, Regal 1997, 389).

[244] *EbS*, ÍF 4: 76 and 77. "After they had been at sea a while the wind swung round to the south-east, and then to the east, and a storm blew up and drove them north of Ireland where their ship broke up on the shore of an uninhabited island. It was there that Thorodd found them on his voyage back from Dublin. The earl's men called out to the traders for help, and Thorodd had a boat launched and went in it himself. … Finally Thorodd sold them the boat from the ship for a large portion of the tax they had collected. … From that time on he was known as Thorodd the Tax-trader" (*EbS*, Quinn 1997, 165).

[245] *NjS*, ÍF 12: 440. "They made land at Fridarey island, between Shetland and Orkney. A man named David the White received Kari … There they heard from west in Mainland of all the things that were going on there" (*NjS*, Cook 1997, 209). *Hrossey* is the ancient name of the island Mainland of the Shetland islands.

promoters of circulation.[246] Back in Norway for the second time, Egill gets his ship ready and sails to the island Vitar, which is stated as being an ideal place to catch up with the latest news despite it being off the beaten path: "Þá lagði Egill skipi sínu til hafs ok helt í útver þat, er Vitar heita, út frá Alda; þat er komit af þjóðleið; þar váru fiskimenn, ok var þar gott at spyrja tíðendi; þá spurði hann [Egill], at konungr hafði gǫrt hann útlaga."[247]

Earlier in *Egils saga*, the social network connecting islands is demonstrated in the context of Þórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson's death. Þórólfr and his men have fought another battle against the Norwegian king north of Trondheim. After having killed Þórólfr, the king sails away from the battlefield through the fjords, and he is surprised to meet numerous men in rowing boats between the islands. The saga narrator explains that before the battle began, Þórólfr had summoned all these men for assistance. Apparently, the call for help had spread fast among the islands and the people readily headed towards the battle field, but too late to help Þórólfr:

> En er á leið daginn, þá fundu þeir konungr róðrarskip mǫrg í hverju eyjarsundi, ok hafði lið þat ætlat til fundar við Þórólf, því at njósnir hans hǫfðu verit allt suðr í Naumudal ok víða um eyjar. Hǫfðu þeir orðit vísir, at þeir Hallvarðr brœðr váru komnir sunnan með lið mikit ok ætluðu at Þórólfi.[248]

THE SEA

A discussion of islands entails a discussion of the sea as the element that connects or separates island and mainland, depending on the point of view. Guðbrandur Vigfússon has already been quoted on the two great social outlets of Old Norse society, the *Alþingi* and the sea.[249] Similar to islands, however, the sea cannot sweepingly be called the realm of liminality within the *Íslendingasögur*. On the contrary, as the subchapters above have shown, the sea is a strongly connected element which makes it possible that people choose to live on islands or use them as pasture for their cattle, and at times they hide or – if necessary – fight on islands. So, islands are not peripheral but social hubs where both people and news circulate. In the *Íslendingasögur*, the travels on sea prove as equally unspectacular settings as islands do. The sea does not acquire poetic or deeply symbolic associations and is neither stereotypically dramatic nor sublime.[250]

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[246] Moser 2005, 429, in the original: "Insel als Katalysator der Zirkulation".

[247] *EgS*, ÍF 2: 164-165. "Egill set sail for the fishing camp called Vitar which lies off Alden, well away from travel routes. There were fishermen there who were good sources for the latest news. [Then] he heard that the king had declared him an outlaw" (*EgS*, Scudder 1997, 110).

[248] *EgS*, ÍF 2: 54. "In the course of the day the king and his men notice many rowboats in all the sounds between the islands. Their crews were on their way to see Thorolf, because he had planted spies all the way to Naumdal and in many islands" (*EgS*, Scudder 1997, 56).

[249] Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1878, xxi. Victor Turner (1985, 117) claims that "both of these [i.e. the *Alþingi* and the Sea] represented 'liminoid' alternatives to life in the local community."

[250] *NjS* features two rare and brief descriptions which contain a negative and threatening image of the sea. In chapters 12 and 30, boats are deliberately destroyed and the saga notes that the black sea water streams into the vessels: "En á skútunni féll inn sær kolblár ok sǫkk hon niðr með ǫllum farminum" (*NjS*, ÍF 12: 35). "The coal black sea poured into the skiff and it sank with all its cargo" (*NjS*, Cook 1997, 15). And "Kolskeggr þreif upp akkeri ok kastaði á skip Karls, ok kom fleinninn í borðit ok gekk út í gegnum, ok fell þar inn sjór kolblár, ok hljópu menn allir af skeiðinni ok á ǫnnur skip" (*NjS*, ÍF 12: 78). "Kolskegg picked up the anchor and threw it at

In a great many cases where saga characters travel between Iceland and mainland Scandinavia, their trip is often mentioned without further comment. In *Njáls saga* (ch. 88) Þráinn Sigfússon leaves Norway after having tricked jarl Hákon and hidden Víga-Hrappr Qrgumleiðason on his ship: "Þráinn var skamma stund í hafi ok kom til Íslands ok fór heim til bús síns."[251] *Droplaugarsona saga* (ch. 1) tells of Ketill Þrymr Þiðrandason who makes the opposite journey and travels from Reyðarfjörðr to Konungahella in Sweden: "Eitt vár bjó Ketill skip sitt í Reyðarfirði, því at þat stóð þar uppi, ok síðan sigldu þeir í haf. Þeir váru úti lengi ok tóku Konungahellu um haustit ok settu þar upp skip sitt."[252] In *Laxdœla saga* (ch. 11), it is Hǫskuldr Dala-Kollsson who makes a trip to Norway and arrives with no problem in Bergen: "Nú láta þeir [þeir Hǫskuldr] í haf, ok gefr þeim vel, ok tóku Noreg heldr sunnarliga, kómu við Hǫrðaland, þar sem kaupstaðrinn í Bjǫrgvin er síðan."[253]

Also, the trips from and to Greenland seem to be unspectacular and unproblematic. This is at least what *Króka-Refs saga* (ch. 12) suggests. "Bárðr lætr nú í haf ok ferst vel. Kom hann í þær stöðvar, sem hann mundi kjósa. Hann færði Haraldi konungi margan grænlenzkan varning ágætan."[254] And after having consulted the Norwegian king on how to defeat Króka-Refr, Bárðr Sigurðarsonar sails back to Greenland, this time exceedingly well: "Frá ferð Bárðar er þat at segja, at honum ferst einkar vel."[255]

Apart from cases of drowning, there are also more turbulent journeys overseas, which often bear an element of fate.[256] Such a journey is Jǫkull Búason's involuntary trip to Greenland (*JþB*, ch. 1). The vessel manned by Jǫkull and his companions is tossed around in a storm until they are finally shipwrecked off Greenland's coast. In this case, the troublesome journey mirrors Jǫkull's confused and upset state of mind after having killed his father Búi Andríðsson. Even though the saga does not reveal much about this voyage, it constitutes a

Karl's ship. The fluke went right through the hull and the dark blue sea came pouring in, and all the men on this warship leaped onto other ships" (*NjS*, Cook 1997, 33).

[251] *NjS*, ÍF 12: 220. "Thrain had a swift sea journey to Iceland and went home to his farm" (*NjS*, Cook 1997, 105).

[252] *DlsS*, ÍF 11: 137. "One spring Ketil prepared his ship in Reydarfjord, for it was laid ashore there, and then they put out to sea. They were at sea a long time, reached Konungahella in the autumn and beached their ship there" (*DlsS*, McTurk 1997, 355).

[253] *LxdS*, ÍF 5: 22. "They set out to sea, had favourable winds and made land in the south of Norway, in Hordaland, where the trading town of Bergen was later established" (*LxdS*, Kunz 1997, 10).

[254] *KRs*, ÍF 14: 142. "Bard put out to sea and his voyage went well. He came to the ports he would have chosen to visit. He brought many excellent Greenland wares to King Harald" (*KRs*, Clark 1997, 410).

[255] *KRs*, ÍF 14: 146. "It should be reported that Bard's voyage went extremely well" (*KRs*, Clark 1997, 413).

[256] Apart from characters travelling the sea, there are also objects which are sent on missions over the sea and which have seminal or fateful consequences. Firstly, there are the highseat pillars which are put into the sea to designate to the settler where to build their farm. In *EgS* (ch. 27) Kveld-Úlfr dies on the passage to Iceland. Just before he ordered Skalla-Grímr to consign his coffin to the sea and to settle where the coffin washes ashore. There are, however, also objects carrying evil elements. Most prominent is probably the rootstock (*rótartré*) in *GS* (ch. 79). In a ritual-like manner, Þorbjǫrn ǫngull's foster mother, Þuríðr, who is knowledgeable and skilled in magic, puts a spell on the rootstock and makes it swim magically to Drangey so as to harm Grettir (*GS*, ÍF 7: 249-50). Irrespective of the object that crosses the sea, it often has an impact on the life and fate of the person who sends and/or finds it.

liminal time because it brings Jǫkull from his old to his new life: Jǫkull travels from his past – a life with his father – to his future – a life as a ruler in Saracene land and married to princess Marsibilla. Apart from the (indirect) transformation Jǫkull undergoes, he is also temporally and spatially segregated from structural life. A sense of otherness intrudes on the situation in the form of fate. Nonetheless it is up for discussion whether the notion of fate does not automatically exclude liminality as the former force is of a numinous nature whereas the latter is part of the human sphere. What is missing in the case of Jǫkull's trip is the presence of paradoxical and ambiguous elements. Seen from van Gennep's and Turner's perspective, the trip is only partly liminal. Considering the beginning of *Jǫkuls þáttr* from a literary perspective, though, the sea scene figures not only as the transition from *Kjalnesinga saga* to *Jǫkuls þáttr Búasonar* but also as the coming to maturity of the protagonist and so it is a liminal phase on two different levels of the narrative.

A trip of a similar kind is Óláfr pái's journey to Ireland in search of his father, king Mýrkjartan (*LxdS*, ch. 21-22). While the trip from Iceland to Norway goes smoothly, the passage to Ireland turns out to be troublesome. The men face bad weather and fog so that they fear that they are lost. Only when the fog mystically lifts, can they eventually sail on and soon they spot land:

> Þeim [þeim Óláfi] byrjaði illa um sumarit; hafa þeir þokur miklar, en vinda litla ok óhagstœða, þá sem váru; rak þá víða um hafit; váru þeir flestir innan borðs, at á kom hafvilla. Þat varð um síðir, at þoku hóf af hǫfði, ok gerðusk vindar á; var þá tekit til segls. Tóksk þá umrœða, hvert til Írlands myndi at leita, ok urðu menn eigi ásáttir á þat.[257]

Óláfr's meeting with his grandfather Mýrkjartan is successful and he leaves Ireland as an acknowledged relative. Interestingly – or rather consequently – Óláfr's journey back home to Iceland is unproblematic. He easily reaches Norway and later on Iceland.[258] Although Óláfr does not experience an extraordinary incident on sea, apart from the storm, it is a liminal phase for him, which is emphasised by the saga through the fog that eventually lifts, allows navigation again and discloses the destination.

[257] *LxdS*, ÍF 5: 53. "They had poor winds during the summer, the breezes light and blowing from the wrong direction, and spells of thick fog. They drifted long distances at sea. Most of the men on board soon lost their sense of direction. Eventually the fog lifted and a wind came up. The sail was hoisted and a discussion began on which direction to take to head to Ireland. There was no agreement among the men on the question" (*LxdS*, Kunz 1997, 26).

[258] "Eptir þat sigla þeir Óláfr í haf. Þeim byrjaði vel ok tóku Nóreg, ok er Óláfs fǫr allfræg"; and in the following spring when "hann er búinn ok byr gefr, þá siglir Óláfr í haf, ok skiljask þeir Haraldr konungr með inum mesta kærleik. Óláfi byrjaði vel um sumarit; hann kom skipi sínu í Hrútafjǫrð á Borðeyri" (*LxdS*, ÍF 5: 59 and 61). "Then Olaf and his men put to sea and had favourable winds until they made land in Norway, where news of Olaf's journey spread widely … After completing his preparations to leave, he sailed his ship out to sea, taking leave of King Harald on the best of terms. Olaf was favoured by good winds that summer. His ship sailed south into Hrutafjord and landed at Bordeyri." (*LxdS*, Kunz 1997, 29 and 30).

Óláfr's liminal state is expressed in him being the grandson of the Irish king and yet merely having in Iceland the status of an "ambáttarsonr"[259] (i.e. the son of a slave-woman) as long as Mýrkjartan has not accepted him as a grandson. Hence Óláfr's journey to Ireland aims to establish himself and indirectly his mother, Melkorka, in Icelandic society as royal descendants by receiving Mýrkjartan's official acknowledgement. This act, however, is not a royal initiation in the strict sense because Óláfr declines to become Mýrkjartan's successor on the throne. With regard to the context of Icelandic society, Óláfr's journey can be viewed as an initiation. Having officially proven his noble descent, Óláfr is eventually free to establish himself as an independent farmer and so becomes a main protagonist in *Laxdœla saga*. He then woos Egill Skalla-Grímson's daughter Þorgerðr and builds the new farm at Hrappsstaðir which he re-names Hjarðarholt.

By and large, the *Íslendingasögur* tend not to portray the sea as the stage of dramatic incidents but rather as unspectacular journeys to and from Iceland and in Northern Europe which underlines the connecting function of the sea. Although the sea is present throughout most sagas, it is not given much narrative and symbolical importance. There are only very few episodes such as the ones from *Jǫkuls þáttr* and *Laxdœla saga* which introduce the sea as a part, though not the centre piece, of a liminal phase. Episodes like these are, however, exceptions and do by no means represent a recurrent pattern in the *Íslendingasögur*. With their use of bad weather and fog in connection to a fateful turning point, the episodes from *Jǫkuls þáttr* and especially *Laxdœla saga* are reminiscent of fairy tales.[260] This aspect is also supported by the fact that such phenomena only appear abroad and not when sailing back to Iceland.

Considering that there are about 150.000 islands off Norway's coast alone, mainland Scandinavians as well as Icelandic settlers had no reason for either portraying islands in a negative light or making them a special or even liminal place. This assumption is supported by the majority of island examples discussed. The portrayal of islands in the *Íslendingasögur* does not fall prey to marginality, stagnation and alienation, perhaps with exception of the duel (*hólmganga*) in its original form. Rather they constitute a normal element of Icelandic and mainland Scandinavian life and daily experience:

[259] *LxdS*, ÍF 5: 50.

[260] There are also inconspicuous instances of fog in the sagas. *NjS* reports of Grímr and Helgi Njálssynir who get caught in fog on one of their trips. When they realise that they are close to the shore, they ask Bárðr svarti where they might be, he says: "Mǫrg eru til … at því, sem vér hǫfum veðrfǫll haft, – Eyjar [Orkneyjar] eða Skotland eða Írland" (*NjS*, ÍF 12: 201). "After the weather we've been through there are many possibilities … the Orkney Islands, or Scotland, or Ireland" (*NjS*, Cook 1997, 95). Here the fog does not act as a narrative element which announces a change, as is sometimes the case in more fantastical texts, rather it refers to a natural phenomenon when approaching the British Isles. This scene is neither remarkable nor liminal in any way.

> Many of the island references provided in the saga literature, i.e. in kings' sagas and the sagas of Icelanders but also in the skaldic poetry, fit into the scheme of events that are typical of the portrayal of Viking activities – islands emerge as strategic sites and central stopping places along one's travel and/or battle route.[261]

The positive portrayal of Iceland and islands in general goes hand in hand with the fact that all islands mentioned are named and clearly located, mostly by providing points of reference in relation to the mainland. Islands are an integral part of social life and are neither cut off from communication nor from trade. These lively actions on islands can only take place because the sea is in no way deemed an impediment. On the contrary, the sea and the ships are connecting elements between numberless islands and the mainland.

Although the sagas do not paint as paradisiac a picture of Iceland as *Landnámabók* does, they still keep a neutral to positive attitude towards islands and thus do not correspond with the learned, medieval teachings of the North being evil, or of the negative depiction of islands. The narratives do not (intend to) make islands special in any way, but portray them as ordinary places. This insular experience clearly has roots in the context of the Nordic world view, and depicts the island as a miniature version of the world.[262] Consequently whatever is possible on the mainland is also possible on islands. This does not mean, however, that the *Íslendingasögur* do not feature liminal or supernatural incidents, but they are not necessarily located on islands.

4.3 *UNDIR JÖKLI*: SOJOURNS AT THE GLACIER

4.3.1 *JQKULL* IN/AS PROPER NAMES AND TOPONYMS

Although Iceland can call quite a number of big glaciers its own, it is astonishing how few glaciers are actually mentioned in the sagas.[263] This might partly be due to the geological and climatological fact that Iceland's glaciers were not as vast as in later centuries.[264] They thus neither loomed prominently over the landscape nor had the same presence in the medieval mind. It is more likely that the glaciers made their way in to Icelandic folk tradition and imagination during the Little Ice Age (ca. AD 1300-1900) when the glaciers grew considerably.

[261] Zilmer 2011, 27.

[262] Glauser/Kiening 2007, 13.

[263] The following observations are based on a full text search in the *Íslendingasögur* with the Modern Icelandic term 'jökull'. The full text search was conducted on the webpage *Íslenskt textasafn*, provided by Stofnun Árna Magnússonar.

[264] Between roughly AD 950 and 1250 the northern hemisphere and especially northwestern Europe experienced the Medieval Warm Period or Medieval Climate Anomaly (see Goosse et al. 2011; Bradley et al. 2003). Around the year AD 1000 the temperature was up to 2°C higher than the average temperature of AD 1000-1800. This developement was favourable for the Icelandic settlement but at the same time led to a reduction of the size of the Icelandic glaciers (see Kasang [2014]). During the Little Ice Age (roughly AD 1300-1900) the Icelandic glaciers expanded considerably and reached their greatest extent. The latest melting and withdrawing of the glaciers only started in the late 19th/early 20th century.

Often the Old Norse noun *jǫkull*[265] is – at least by non-Icelandic natives – solely associated with its Modern Icelandic meaning 'glacier', and it is not taken into consideration that this term has also other meanings related to ice. Zoëga and Fritzner[266] both translate *jǫkull* first and foremost as 'icicle'/'ned-hangende istap', 'ice'/'is'[267] and 'glacier'/'isbræ'. Only the *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* lists a figurative meaning of *jǫkull*, mostly regarding emotional coldness, and translates it as 'ispanser, isnende kulde' (frost/ice crust, chill).[268]

Even if glaciers do not feature as prominently in the sagas as anticipated, few texts (*LxdS, LvS, Þsh)* do not mention the term *jǫkull* at all. Most *Íslendingasögur* make use of *jǫkull* either in reference to the personal name[269] or toponyms. *Jǫkull* is encountered most often as a spatial or topological reference but by no means regularly. The term appears as a compound of farm names (e.g. Jǫkulskelda in *FbS*) or as a geological proper name such as Jǫkulsfjörðr (also in *FbS*), Jǫkulsdalr and Jǫkulsá (in *HsF*). Furthermore, the sagas mention glaciers in brief landscape descriptions:

- Gamli hét maðr, er bjó í Eiríksfjarðarbotni uppi undir jǫklunum.[270]

- Skalla-Grímr kannaði land upp um hérað; fór fyrst inn með Borgarfirði … en síðan með ánni fyrir vestan, er hann kallaði Hvítá, því at þeir fǫrunautar hǫfðu eigi sét fyrr vǫtn þau, er ór jǫklum hǫfðu fallit.[271]

- Jöklar ganga allt til suðrs í sjá út … Jöklar girtu þar um allt báðumegin.[272]

[265] Regarding the etymology of *jǫkull,* de Vries (1961) traces the term back to Proto-Norse *ekulaR and Germanic *jekulaz both meaning 'glacier'. Furthermore all dictionaries consulted suggest a (semantic) relationship between *jǫkull* (m., also *jukull*, 'hanging down icicle' or 'glacier') and *jaki (*m., 'broken ice', 'ice-floe') because of their common Indo-Germanic root. Old Norse *jaki* has developed out of Proto-Norse *ekan-, Germanic *jekan- and derives from the Indo-Germanic root *i̯eg-/ig-, which simply denotes 'ice'. Only Jóhannesson (1956) and Pokorny (1948-69) go one step further and identify *jǫkull* as the diminutive form of *jaki*, a claim that appears rather surprising considering that this diminutive form 'little ice' refers to the largest morphological form of ice: the glacier.

[266] Johan Fritzner. *Ordbog over det gamle norske Sprog* (1972-1973), online edition.

[267] 'ice'/'is' in the sense of water that has only recently turned into ice, in contrast to permanent ice such as glaciers.

[268] Online dictionary *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog*.

[269] Within the saga corpus of the thesis *Jǫkull* as a male Christian name occurs only in *FbS*, *KjS* and *GS*.

[270] *FbS*, ÍF 6: 242. "There was a man named Gamli who lived at the end of Eiriksfjord, just beneath the glacier" (*FbS*, Regal 1997, 382). Gamli is the husband of Gríma, who is a healer skilled in (pre-Christian) magic arts. She heals Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld Bersason and shelters him from his persecutor Þórdís Einarsdóttir á Lǫngunesi in the penultimate chapter of the saga (ch. 23; see also ch. 4.1.1 subsection *Performing Magic*). While the threshold leading to the main room figures rather prominently in that episode, the vicinity of the glacier is of no significance to the (ensuing) plot. The glacier does not have liminal qualities which link to or influence the threshold scene. When Gríma foresees Þórdís's arrival she ponders how and where to hide Þormóðr and briefly considers but then discards the idea of sending him onto the glacier: "En þó nenni ek eigi at senda ykkr á jǫkla í brott …" (*FbS*, ÍF 6: 245). "And I don't want to send you up onto the glacier" (*FbS*, Regal 1997, 384). After that, the glacier nearby is not mentioned again in the narrative; it remains part of a non-liminal landscape description and does not become a plot setting.

[271] *EgS*, ÍF 2: 74.

Related to landscape descriptions, glaciers are repeatedly used as spatial reference points in itineraries. In *Njáls saga* all five instances of *jǫkull* appear in context of the saga's descriptions of Flosi's riding routes. Flosi and his men ride back and forth from his farm Svínafell in the east to the *suðrland* by passing Eyjafjallajökull.[273] *Hrafnkels saga* mentions glaciers as parts of a landscape and route description only in chapter 3, when Einarr Þorbjarnarson searches for the horses that have disappeared and breaking his word to Hrafnkells rides the horse Freyfaxi in order to find the runaway animals: "Nú tekr hann [Einarr] hestinn [Freyfaxa] ok slær við beizli, lætr þófa á bak hestinum undir sik ok ríðr upp hjá Grjótárgili, svá upp til jǫkla ok vestr með jǫklinum, þar sem Jǫkulsá fellr undir þeim."[274] In *Droplaugarsona saga* (ch. 14) Ingjaldr Niðgestsson travels past glaciers in order to get to Hornafjǫrðr where he organises a (secret) passage to Norway for Grímr Droplaugarson: "Ingjaldr ok Þorkell trani fóru heiman um várit it efra suðr um jǫkla ok kómu ofan í Hornafjǫrð."[275]

The use of the term *jǫkull* as outlined above is of a very factual nature and does not suggest any liminal properties. As a male first name, toponyms, parts of landscape descriptions and itineraries, *jǫkull* is not associated with extraordinary events or a sense of otherness. The following sub-chapter discusses the few cases of glaciers serving as settings or the immediate surroundings for the saga plot.

4.3.2 GLACIERS AS SETTINGS

Very rarely do glaciers appear as a narrative setting within the corpus of the *Íslendingasögur*. Indeed, it is only *Grettis saga* and *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* that set a couple of episodes in the vicinity of glaciers. In *Grettis saga*, both Grettir as well as the outlaw Grímr get to Hallmundr's/Loptr's cave at the foot of Balljǫkull,[276] and Grettir spends some time in

[272] *KRs*, ÍF 14: 131 and 132. "On both sides of the fjord, glaciers reached south and out into the sea. … Glaciers girded it on both sides" (*KRs*, Clark 1997, 404 and 405).

[273] *NjS* employs very similar formulations for these itineraries: "[fara] fyrir norðan (Eyjafjalla-)jǫkul" (*NjS*, ÍF 12: 317, 342, 414, 428); "létu þeir þá Eyjafjallajǫkul á vinstri hǫnd" (ibid., 323); and "fara austr undir Eyjafjǫlljǫkul" (ibid., 414).

[274] *HsF*, ÍF 11: 103. "Then he took the stallion, bridled him, placed the saddle-cloth beneath himself on the horse, and rode up by Grjotagil, up to the glaciers, and west alongside the glaciers to where the Jokulsa river flows out from beneath them" (*HsF*, Gunnell 1997, 264).

[275] *DlsS*, ÍF 11: 177. "Ingjald and Thorkel Crane went from home in spring by the upper route southwards around the glaciers and came down into Hornafjord" (*DlsS*, McTurk 1997, 376).

[276] Balljǫkull is the (former) name of the North(-Western) part of Langjökull. Svavar Sigmundsson (2003) says: "Nafnmyndin *Baldjökull* er eldra nafn á Eiríksjökli eða norðvesturhluta Langjökuls og er upphaflega nafnmyndin *Balljökull* (nefndur til dæmis í Harðar sögu, *Íslensk fornrit* XIII:131) vegna kúptrar lögunar jökulhettunnar. Orðið *böllur* merkti í fornu máli 'hnöttur, kúla'." "The noun formation *Baldjökull* is an older name for Eiríksjökull or the North-Western part of Langjökull and is originally the noun formation *Balljökull* (named for example in Harðar saga, *Íslensk fornrit* XIII:131) because of the convex shape of the cap of the glacier. The word *böllur* meant in olden language 'sphere, ball'" (trans. Ryan E. Johnson). Living in the vicinity of the glacier, Hallmundr/Loptr is in good company. Folkloristic figures of different kinds have always been associated with the glacier Langjökull, part of which is Hallmundr's Balljǫkull (Helgi Björnsson 2009, 178). Hallmundr is

Þórisdalr, which is surrounded by glaciers. In *Bárðar saga* the main protagonist Bárðr retreats from the human world and moves literally into the glaciers after having (supposedly) lost his daughter Helga. With regard to both texts, it is interesting to observe that they make rather extensive use of fantastical elements and introduce (partly) supernatural beings such as Þórir, Hallmundr and Bárðr, who seem to have a special connection to glaciers.

The discussion of the examples to follow could just as well be subsumed under the heading 'caves' (cf. ch. 4.4). The settings of glaciers and caves are closely interwoven. Reaching a glacier is often a pre-condition to finding and accessing caves or a valley in the vicinity or even beyond the glacier.[277]

GLACIERS IN *GRETTIS SAGA*

Grettir first meets the figure of Loptr (or Hallmundr as he calls himself later on) in chapter 54 after having stayed at Þorsteinn Kuggason's. At that time Grettir roams about the Kjǫlr and plunders travellers. One day he sees a man riding a good horse along the Kjǫlr-route and he stops him. After introducing each other, Grettir bluntly asks Loptr whether he is willing to hand over a couple of his possessions and he further tries to provoke Loptr to a fight, but realises relatively soon "at þessi maðr myndi hafa afl í krummum."[278] He thus does not push his luck any further and instead asks Loptr where he is heading to. Loptr answers in two rather enigmatic skaldic stanzas that he is on his way home to "þars Balljökul / bragnar kalla."[279] The two men part and Grettir continues roaming the country at random and eventually stays on Arnarvatnsheiði for a while.

After some time, Grettir's archenemy, Þórir í Garði, seizes the opportunity and rides with his followers on the Arnarvatnsheiði and attacks Grettir. Invisible both to Grettir and Þórir, Loptr assists Grettir in the fight, and together they eventually defeat the attackers. After the fight, Hallmundr – as Loptr now calls himself – invites Grettir to accompany him home: "Nú fóru þeir báðir samt suðr undir Balljǫkul; þar átti Hallmundr helli stóran."[280] There the beautiful daughter of Hallmundr heals both men's wounds, and Grettir spends the summer there. Unfortunately, the saga does not reveal more about life *undir jökli*. Note that the phrase *undir jökli* (dative) or *undir jǫkul* (accusative) is somewhat misleading in its meaning and tends to be mistranslated by non-Icelandic natives. In this phrase as well as similar ones referring to mountains the preposition *undir* does not translate as English 'underneath' but rather as 'at the foot of' or 'submontane'. Hallmundr's cave should not be pictured as being truly underneath Balljǫkull but rather in close proximity to the glacier.

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also the eponym for Hallmundarhraun, a lava field situated between Langjökull and Eiríksjökull and stretching northwards from the latter (ibid., 183). It has been dated to the early 10th century.

[277] An example thereof can be found in *JþB*. A glacier is mentioned but it is of no further narrative importance. In chapter 2 Jǫkull and Úlfr venture in the direction of the glacier in order to find the cave of Gnípa's parents.

[278] *GS*, ÍF 7: 176. "that this man certainly had some power in his hands" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 134).

[279] *GS*, ÍF 7: 177, stanza 44. "Balljokul by men / it is called" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 135).

[280] *GS*, ÍF 7: 184. "They set off south together for the Balljokul glacier. Hallmund lived in a big cave there" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 139).

The saga mirrors the episode of Hallmundr and Grettir with slight changes in chapter 62, when the outlaw Grímr lives in Grettir's cabin on Arnarvatnsheiði. Grímr catches fish every day, but the day after it is always stolen. Grímr does not know (yet) that it is Hallmundr who does that because he does not like Grímr taking Grettir's place**.** A couple of days later, the fish thief appears again, and Grímr attacks him. Despite being badly wounded, the invader runs off towards the glacier and Grímr follows him: "Þeir [Hallmundr ok Grímr] fóru allt suðr undir Balljǫkul; þar gekk þessi maðr [Hallmundr] inn í helli. Eldr var bjartr í hellinum."[281] This time, the daughter does not heal her father's wounds; rather he orders her to take the poem, *Hallmundarkviða*, down in runes which he composes and dictates on the spot. After that Hallmundr dies and Grímr stays with the daughter during winter time in the bright cave.

The liminality of both Grettir and Grímr has roots in their status as outlaws, due to which they are pushed to the margins of society. In most cases moving at the periphery of society entails existing at a geographical periphery, which in Iceland means in or close to the highlands, where they are not constantly persecuted. While already steering clear of civilisation, the outlaws reach the extreme periphery of inhabited space. When they arrive at Hallmundr's *undir jökli*, they enter the realm of the supernatural.

Another aspect of liminality lies in the seclusion of the place. It appears that the entry to the cave is well hidden,[282] at least both Grettir and later on Grímr only get there by following Hallmundr. The seclusion and exclusiveness of Hallmundr's home affects both the saga figures as well as the saga audience: not only is the cave difficult to access, but the saga also keeps silent about what happens or is spoken in the cavern. In addition, both outlaws only stay with Hallmundr for a (relatively short) period of time and then leave again.[283] Thus, Hallmundr's cave appears to be a place and time reserved for 'insiders' – i.e. ambiguous and/or liminal beings only – and thus is not tangible for structural beings like the audience.

Despite these signs of liminality (i.e. secluded place, temporary stay, sense of otherness), none of the three main characters is a ritual subject and experiences serious changes in the sense of undergoing a rite of passage and assuming a different social status. In addition to the crucial element of transformation, the episodes lack the presence of prevalent ambiguity and paradoxes. In spite of the main figures not being easy to categorise, the episodes *per se* are pretty straightforward and clear cut: a landlord invites a guest home, and the guest spends a period of time there. Accordingly, neither Grettir nor Grímr change during their stay with Hallmundr because their in-betweenness is due to their outlawry. Only for Grímr does the

[281] *GS*, ÍF 7: 202. "They went all the way south to the foot of Balljokul glacier, where the man went into a cave. A bright fire was burning inside" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 147).

[282] With regard to Kolbjǫrn's cave in *BáS* (to be discussed below, see ch. 4.4.2), Eldar Heide states on the accessibility of the homes of supernatural beings and the Otherwold in general: "In the rest of the saga [*BáS*], in other texts and in the popular traditions, the entrance to the Otherworld is hidden or inaccessible in other ways" (2014, 177).

[283] Unlike Grímr, Grettir surprisingly spends the summer with Hallmundr, and not, as might have been expected, the lonely and dark winter when his psychic problems are most evident.

temporary stay bring about a change: he enters a relationship with Hallmundr's daughter and eventually takes leave of Iceland. This change, however, has nothing to do with the glacier, even though Grímr only gets to know the woman because he had followed Hallmundr to the cave.

Also, Hallmundr remains the same puzzling and evasive figure throughout the few episodes in which he appears in the saga. Being provided with almost no information about this character, it is impossible to assess Hallmundr in detail. He moves in the interstice between the human and supernatural sphere. To call him a liminal being is rather precarious because it can be assumed that he remains an in-between figure due to his movement at the margins of the human or supernatural spheres. He is not liminal therefore as the element of transition is missing. So, the two Hallmundr-episodes actually feature an encounter of two different (social) categories, which are both positioned at the margins of (human) society, and in the case of the outlaws they are (temporarily) invisible to Icelandic society.

Regardless of the lack of liminality, Hallmundr certainly remains a highly ambiguous figure. This is first expressed by the two different names: initially he introduces himself as Loptr, and later on as Hallmundr, and the saga refrains from explaining who Loptr/Hallmundr is. Wearing a hat half covering his face, the first description of Loptr is reminiscent of Óðinn: "Þessi maðr hafði síðan hatt á hǫfði ok sá ógløggt í andlit honum."[284] Even though the saga does not provide explicit pointers, Óðinn usually enters the stage equally unexpectedly and in a similar way as Loptr does in *Grettis saga*. Another Óðinesque element is the figure's versatility and the change of names which can both also be observed with Loptr/Hallmundr. Rather untypical of Óðinn is Hallmundr's participation in physical fights. Hallmundr's versatility could also point to Loki, for whom *Gylfaginning* lists the alternative name Loptr.[285] Loki is an ambiguous figure, a well-known trickster and often unpredictable in his moves, not least due to his affinity for crossing all kinds of boundaries. The only element that does not fit a direct comparison of Hallmundr/Loptr and Loki is the former's beautiful daughter. The sources ascribe to Loki only one daughter, namely Hel, who is not known for her good looks. In the end, however, *Grettis saga* neither explicitly hints in the direction of Óðinn nor of Loki, and it would be hasty to identify the figure of Loptr/Hallmundr as either Óðinn or Loki.

Some time after leaving Balljǫkull, Grettir follows Hallmundr's recommendation for finding a retreat. It is conjecturable that Hallmundr would recommend to Grettir a place of similar nature to his own cave. The liminal aspects of Þórisdalr can be described along the same lines as Hallmundr's cave since the access to Þórisdalr is as remote and well-hidden as Hallmundr's home. He crosses the Geitlandsjökull and keeps travelling until "hann fann dal í jǫklinum, langan ok heldr mjóvan, ok lukt at jǫklum ǫllum megin, svá at þeir skúttu fram yfir

[284] *GS*, ÍF 7: 175. "The man was wearing a wide-brimmed hat which concealed his face" *GS*, Scudder 1997, 134.
[285] *Gylfaginning*, ch. 33: "Sá er nefndr Loki eða Loptr, sonr Fárbauta jǫtuns" (*Snorra Edda*, Faulkes, 2011, 26). "His name is Loki or Lopt, son of the giant Farbauti" (*Snorra Edda*, Faulkes 1987, 26).

dalinn. ... Þar váru hverar, ok þótti honum sem jarðhitar myndi valda, er eigi lukðusk saman jǫklarnir yfir dalnum."[286] In this secluded and almost Paradise like valley Grettir stays for one winter. He lives in a small hut, has enough to eat, makes friends with the "blendingr þurs einn, sá er Þórir hét"[287] and his daughters. However, what Grettir does and experiences during his stay in the valley remains hidden to the audience. The audience certainly expects that Grettir fully enjoys the trouble-free life in Þórisdalr after constantly having been persecuted. Astonishingly, Grettir decides to leave after one winter, deeming the calm and unspectacular life in Þórisdalr boring and too remote from the world.

In order to reach Þórisdalr, Grettir had previously crossed Geitlandsjökull and then kept going until he arrived in this secluded valley. When leaving Þórisdalr he cuts again across a glacier only to arrive at the peak of the volcano Skjaldbreiður. There he does something rather unusual, unusual both for Grettir as well as for the *Íslendingasögur*.[288] Grettir erects a stone with a hole, through which it is possible to locate the ravine that leads up to Þórisdalr: "Reisti hann upp hellu ok klappaði á rauf ok sagði svá, ef maðr legði auga sitt við raufina á hellunni, at þá mætti sjá í gil þat, sem fellr ór Þórisdal."[289]

Like peeping through a keyhole, glancing through the hole in the slab allows one to spot the way to the hidden valley in a landscape where it is perhaps least expected. In the light of Eriksen's statement that doors guide glance and movement,[290] Grettir's stone slab can be considered a door that leads to a world beyond. In this regard, it is reminiscent of the Gotlandic picture stones which have been interpreted as doors to the other world.[291] Situated in a transitional zone, the slabs both in Gotland as well as in the case of *Grettis saga* mark the dividing line between the human sphere (*miðgarðr*) and the periphery of the world ruled by wilderness and uncanny beings (*útgarðr*). Andrén agrees in many aspects with Arrhenius (1970) who points out that the dead in Norse mythology had to pass through the gates *Valgrind* or *Helgrind* in order to reach Hel.[292] In *Grettis saga*, however, interpreting the slab as a door to the world of the dead does not seem fitting as Þórisdalr strongly suggests an impression of Paradise or even Heaven. The slab that helps one find the way back to the remote place can be seen as Grettir's loophole through which he could slip back to that place, should he so desire. However, Þórisdalr does not get mentioned again in the saga and Grettir

[286] *GS*, ÍF 7: 199. "Grettir forged on until he found a long and fairly narrow valley that was enclosed by the glacier on all sides and above. … There were hot springs there, which Grettir presumed was the reason that the spot was not covered by the glacier" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 146).
[287] *GS*, ÍF 7: 200. "a half-troll, a giant called Thorir" (*GS*, Scudder 1997 146).
[288] Several rocks have alledgedly been put into place by Grettir as a test of strength (Guðni Jónsson, *GS*, ÍF 7: LVII fn4).
[289] *GS*, ÍF 7: 201. "There he erected a slab of stone and made a hole in it, and it is said that anyone who puts his eye to the hole can see into the gully that runs down from Thorisdal" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 146).
[290] Eriksen 2013, 189.
[291] Andrén 1993, 36.
[292] Andrén 1993, 36.

never attempts to get back to the hidden valley, not even as an alternative to going to Drangey.

The way Þórisdalr is depicted in *Grettis saga,* is an Icelandic example of the literary and folkloristic motif of the hidden valley, which is characterised by its remoteness and inaccessibility.[293] At least in the case of Þórisdalr, the idea of the hidden valley is connected to other utopian places such as the land of plenty and "the idea of secret grazing places in the interior of the country [Iceland]."[294] As Mary Sandbach points out, "the imagined land will take colour from the particular desires of the people who invent it."[295] It is not surprising that medieval Icelanders dreamt of fertile grazing grounds and well-nourished sheep. This dream found its ultimate Icelandic expression in valleys such as Þórisdalr, which was also thought a Paradise for outlaws.[296] On the aspect of outlaws hiding in such valleys, Sandbach adds: "There are however many stories, chiefly among those of the 'útilegumenn' in which the valley and sheep motif has receded."[297]

Places like Þórisdalr are certainly remarkable by themselves but even more so are their dwellers: "They have obvious affinities with the 'landvættir', the protective spirits of the land, often friendly to men."[298] The glacier-episodes in *Grettis saga* as well as those in *Bárðar saga* (cf. below) feature fairly similar main protagonists – Hallmundr, Þórir, Grettir and Bárðr. All these characters are trolllike (or in the case of Bárðr of *trǫll-*/*risi*-descent), have supernatural abilities, live (almost) alone in the Icelandic wilderness and show a certain affinity for glaciers. Hubert Seelow comments on Hallmundr and Þórir as follows: "Neben ihrer trollhaften Natur tragen beide auch deutliche Züge des *útilegumaðr*, des Friedlosen, der in der Einöde haust, und sind darin der Figur Grettirs verwandt."[299] It almost seems that Grettir actually finds family when he meets Hallmundr and Þórir, and so he spends a peaceful and undisturbed time while staying with them.[300] Despite some similarities, Grettir seems to be of a different nature and does not belong entirely to the category of Hallmundr and Þórir,

[293] The Paradise like description of Þórisdalr has, however, nothing in common with the real Þórisdalur. Repeatedly, there have been expeditions searching for Þórisdalr, which is at times also called Áradalur, but when following the descriptions in *Grettis saga*, the adventurers found merely a rocky and cragged valley, but no trace of fertile grazing grounds and warm springs (Guðni Jónsson, ÍF 7: 199, fn 1).

[294] Sandbach 1945, 101. Sandbach mentions in this context stories from Jón Árnason's collection of folk tales as well as stories such as *Smalamaðurinn*, *Sauðamaðurinn á Grímsstöðum* or *Torfi í Klofa* (ibid., 101 and 102). Partly set in Þórisdalur and picturing it as a land of plenty and ideal grazing area is the folktale *Séra Snorri á Húsafell: Snorri prestur kemur í Þórisdal* (online version published on *Sagnagrunnur*).

[295] Sandbach 1945, 100.

[296] Comment on Þórisdalr in context of *Grettis saga* based on Lethbridge. *Icelandic Saga Map*.

[297] Sandbach 1945, 104.

[298] Sandbach 1945, 99.

[299] Seelow 1998, 246.

[300] A further expression of Grettir's rather close connection with Hallmundr is his plan to avenge Hallmundr's death. However, Grímr, who inflicted Hallmundr's fatal wound, left Iceland a couple of years before Grettir gets to hear about Hallmundr's death.

because in either case he willingly leaves the temporary hideaway after one season and so exposes himself again to his pursuers and the numerous risks and dangers of an outlaw's life.

Ástráður Eysteinsson has pointed out that Þórisdalr and Drangey share similar features, not least that both places are insular: "For the saga [*GS*] bears out, quite strikingly, the island-like character of many places. A mountain, a valley, a farm – especially when the dweller must constantly look out for comings and goings, and even for the possible treachery of those in his company – such places become islands."[301] The insular character of Drangey is obviously a given by its geographical features. Þórisdalr also is insular to the extent that it is a green and peaceful place surrounded by three glaciers. The valley is not only remote, but getting there requires as much a(n) (physical) effort as reaching an island does.

When introducing Þórisdalr and Drangey respectively, the saga emphasises how good a basis for life the places offer: "The first description of the island [Drangey] is reminiscent of the hidden valley [Þórisdalr]: there is grass, birds aplenty, and a fair number of sheep."[302] In addition, both descriptions underline that the places in question are surrounded by steep cliffs and glaciers respectively and thus keep intruders at bay. While it has already been pointed out already that Grettir's move to Drangey is a miniature version of the settlement of Iceland,[303] his arrival in Þórisdalr can be seen both as a foreshadowing of the occupation of Drangey as well as a mirror image of the *landnám*. Þórisdalr even has a remote mythological touch to it by alluding to the primordial giant, Ymir, since Grettir enters a small confined universe which is shaped and ruled by the half-giant Þórir.

The glacier scenes of *Grettis saga* prove interesting for discussion and certainly invite the audience into yet a different world that exists beyond the human social structure. All three episodes share the liminal qualities of spatial seclusion and temporal suspension of daily life; and while Þórisdalr includes paradoxes, Grímr's stay with Hallmundr brings about a change in life as the outlaw marries Hallmundr's daughter. Grettir, in contrast, neither changes during his stays with Hallmundr and with Þórir, nor does he take advantage of the quiet places and stay there. The three episodes can hardly be deemed liminal because the constellation of liminal qualities is sparse.

GLACIERS IN *BÁRÐAR SAGA SNÆFELLSÁSS*

The glaciers in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* are quite closely connected to the main protagonist, Bárðr. After having seemingly lost his beloved daughter Helga, Bárðr becomes sad and depressed and decides to leave his farm Laugarbrekka at the tip of Snæfellsnes. He vanishes and people assume that he has withdrawn *into* the glacier Snæfellsjökull and lives there in a cave: "Ok þykkir mönnum sem hann muni *í jöklana* horfit hafa ok byggt þar stóran helli."[304]

[301] Ástráður Eysteinsson 2002, 93.
[302] Ástráður Eysteinsson 2002, 94.
[303] Ástráður Eysteinsson 2002, 94.
[304] *BáS*, ÍF 13: 119, my emphasis. "It is thought by people that he vanished into the glaciers and lived there in a huge cavern" (*BáS*, Anderson 1997, 244).

This retreat is explained by Bárðr's nature but even more so by his upbringing: "Þat var meir ætt hans [Bárðar] at vera í stórum hellum en húsum, því at hann fæddist upp með Dofra í Dofrafjöllum; var hann tröllum ok líkari at afli ok vexti en mennskum mönnum."[305] By birth Bárðr is a *blendingr*, a being whose ancestors were trolls and giants (*trǫll* and *risi*). He enters another giant-realm when he is raised and educated by the mountain king Dofri who is described as *bergbúi* ('mountain dweller, giant').[306] For a short period, Bárðr participates in the human world when sailing from Norway to Iceland and settling down on Snæfellsnes. Soon, however, he withdraws to the glacier and becomes a guardian spirit (*áss*), though keeping in contact with the human world. Towards the end of the saga he turns into a kind of pagan avenger when he kills his son for having accepted baptism.[307] The frequently changing social context adds to the ambivalence of Bárðr's character and is echoed in the choice of his place of residence: "Bárðr is an ambiguous figure, at the same time human and not quite human – and the difference is at least partly defined by his dwellings."[308] In view of Bárðr's close or rather innate connection to the sphere of giants (*jǫtnar*) and trolls (*trǫll*), his retreat into the wilderness in general and into the glacier in particular is not surprising.

The fluctuation between the supernatural and human sphere and his appearance as both a positive as well as a negative character approximates Bárðr to Grettir, and even more so to Hallmundr and Þórir who are also associated with glaciers. It comes thus as no surprise that the latter two figures make their appearance in *Bárðar saga* (ch. 9), where they enter wrestling games with Bárðr and other (superhuman) competitors. Their collective appearance in this short passage suggests that the saga narrator considers them as being characters of very similar nature,[309] who are highly reminiscent of *landvættir*, as Sandman has pointed out (cf. ch. 3.4.1).

[305] *BáS*, ÍF 13: 119. "His family was more likely to live in large caves than in houses, as he had been raised by Dofri in the Dovrefjell. He was also more like trolls in strength and size than like human beings" (*BáS*, Anderson 1997, 244). Ármann Jakobsson comments on this vagueness of categories as follows: "There seems to be no distinction between humans, giants or mountain dwellers in the Mountain of Dofri, and Bárðr certainly can be classified as both human, giant and a troll, not just by birth but also by upbringing" (2005, 9).

[306] As Ármann Jakobsson (2005, 8) attentively observes, *BáS* explicitly calls Dofri a giant (*jǫtunn*) at the end of chapter 1. The term *bergbúi* does not appear very often in the Old Norse corpus; indeed Schulz (2004, 39) lists only five instances: three in *BáS*, and one each in the *Fornaldarsögur* and the Poetic Edda. Schulz adds that the descriptive nature of *bergbúi* is actually a kenning for 'giant' but is also used in prose texts and not just in poetry (ibid., 49).

[307] The Otherworld of *BáS* is populated with trolls, giants and other ogres, whose connotations cover a wide spectrum from very bad and nasty to very friendly and human like. Despite the saga narrator's initial attempt at categorising these beings, they are eventually blurred together in one big group: "While *Bárðar saga* starts with distinguishing between good and bad members of this family [of *risar, jǫtnar, trǫll*, and *þursar*], somehow they all end up as a single flock, especially in the yuletide party of Hít" (Ármann Jakobsson 2005, 11). On Bárðr's descent and mixed nature as well as a discussion of the terms *trǫll, þurs, risi* and *jǫtunn*, see Ármann Jakobsson (2005, 2017).

[308] Ármann Jakobsson 2005, 9-10.

[309] Guðni Jónsson, *GS*, ÍF 7: L.

Similar to Hallmundr, Bárðr, who often roams the glaciers, is reminiscent of an Óðinesque figure:[310] "Opt sveimaði Bárðr um landit ok kom víða fram. Var hann svá optast búinn, at hann var í grám kufli ok svarðreip um sik, klafakerlingu í hendi ok í fjaðrbrodd langan ok digran; neytti hann ok hans jafnan, er hann gekk um jökla."[311] Although it is clear that Bárðr is often out and about on the glaciers, the saga offers only one instance of a figure actually meeting Bárðr on the glacier. In chapter 10, Tungu-Oddr Ǫnundarson meets Bárðr twice while travelling and caught up in a thick fog. The first time, Tungu-Oddr is about to cross a lava field, when a figure – clad in a grey cowl and with a two-pronged staff – emerges from the fog and approaches him. Bárðr appears and invites Oddr to a Yule feast in the mountains. On his way to this Yule feast, however, Tungu-Oddr gets lost in a blizzard in the mountains.[312] It is again Óðinesque Bárðr who rescues him and leads him to safety in a cave. Despite being closely connected to glaciers and mountains, it is actually only in this episode with Tungu-Oddr that the saga depicts Bárðr as a guardian (spirit) in the mountains.

Only in chapter 8 does Bárðr actually appear as a true guardian spirit, when the fisherman Ingjaldr calls on him for rescue from bad weather, which has been conjured up by the sorceress and *trǫllkona* Hetta. Interestingly, Bárðr's appearances in the wilderness (i.e. on sea, in the lava field and on the glacier) are connected by bad weather and thick fog which enshrouds the whole landscape and robs the character in distress of any sense of orientation. While Hetta is responsible for the bad weather on sea, it is debatable in the case of Tungu-Oddr whether Bárðr conjures up the bad weather himself to make sure that Tungu-Oddr gets lost and he, Bárðr, can meet him. After all he is not completely disinterested in Tungu-Oddr's wellbeing because Bárðr wants him to marry his daughter Þórdís.

The simultaneous appearance of Bárðr and the fog away from human settlements invites the interpretation that this combination opens up a portal to the world beyond, which – in the case of *Bárðar saga* – seems to be accessible via the mountain range of Snæfellsnes.[313]

[310] Óðinn himself appears only once in *BáS*. In chapter 18, he assumes the name Rauðgrani, which he mostly uses in *Fornaldarsögur* (*BáS*, Anderson 1997, 262 n1), and joins Bárðr's son Gestr on his trip to Raknarr's burial mound. On Óðinn's appearance in the *Íslendingasögur* Annette Lassen writes: "Mest bemærkelsesværdigt er det måske, at Odin kun optræder i ganske få islændingesagaer. Kun i to af disse sagaer [i.e. *BáS* and *Harðar saga holmverja*] spiller han en decideret rolle i sagaens handling, til trods for at islændingesagaernes handling for det meste udspilles i førkristen tid eller omkring overgangen til kristendom" (2011, 119). In both sagas, Óðinn assumes an antagonistic position to the main protagonist (ibid., 127).

[311] *BáS*, ÍF 13: 129. "Bard often wandered around the country, appearing far and wide. He was usually clad in a grey cowl with a walrus-hide rope around him, and a cleft staff in his hand with a long and thick gaff. He often made use of it when travelling the glaciers" (*BáS*, Anderson 1997, 248).

[312] "Bæði var þá hvasst ok kalt, bratt ok hált at ganga; hvarflaði hann [Tungu-Oddr] þá lengi, svá at hann vissi aldri, hvar hann fór" (*BáS*, ÍF 13: 134-135). "It was both windy and cold, steep and slippery. He wandered for a long time not knowing where he was going" (*BáS*, Anderson 1997, 250).

[313] As already pointed out in connection with the fog-scene in *LxdS* (ch. 4.2.2, subsection *The Sea*), the fog as a boundary to the world beyond is more commonly found in younger *Íslendingasögur* and the *fornaldarsögur*. In the *fornaldarsaga*, *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* (ch. 9-10), a typical fog barrier marks the boundary between the human sphere and the Otherworld, or between home and foreign parts. Oddr and his men sail from Finnmark, get caught in a heavy storm for 20 days, and when the fog eventually lifts, they arrive in giant land. Later on, Oddr and

However, only two out of the four fog-incidents support this assumption. The first incident can be found in chapter 10, when Bárðr leads (the human) Tungu-Oddr to his cave, where they spend Yule together with other supernatural beings. In contrast, the saga does not make use of the fog in the context of the Yule feast at Hít's (ch. 13). It is conjecturable that the fog as a transitional zone between the human sphere and the world beyond is not necessary as both Hít's cave as well as her guests are deeply rooted in the realm of what the modern audience deems the supernatural.[314] It is therefore not necessary to cross the boundary between the human and the supernatural spheres.[315]

The second fog-incident occurs in chapters 14-16, when Þórðr Þorbjarnarson (also from Tunga) gets lost in thick fog while looking for lost sheep at the foot of Snæfellsjökull. When Þórðr allegedly spots a man in the fog, the saga first insinuates that he sees Bárðr. Upon closer inspection, it turns out that the figure is an attractive young woman. Shortly after, he meets Kolbjǫrn, an ugly unfriendly *þurs* (giant) and allegedly the father of Sólrún,[316] the woman Þórðr saw first. Upon agreeing to Kolbjǫrn's suggestion to marry Sólrún and thus getting his lost sheep back, Þórðr enters the Otherworld for good and makes acquaintance with illustrious ogres of all kinds. In contrast to Bárðr's home that is introduced as a nice and inviting place,[317] Kolbjǫrn's abode is as unappealing as its owner: "Þeir [Þórðr ok Þorvaldr Þorbjarnarsynir] fundu helli stóran; gengu þar inn, ok var þar bæði fúlt ok kalt."[318] Astonishingly and against literary and folkloristic traditions Þórðr finds the cave of the *þurs*, Kolbjǫrn, without any guidance: "In the rest of the saga [*BáS*], in other texts and in the popular traditions, the entrance to the otherworld is hidden or inaccessible in other ways."[319] It has been pointed out that neither Grettir nor Grímr can find and access Hallmundr's cave on their own.

Irrespective of how positive or negative the experiences in the mountains of Snæfellsnes are, it seems to be a transitional place where it is possible to enter the Otherworld. Even though Bárðr moves *í jǫklana*, the glaciers do not play as prominent a role in the saga as the

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Ásmundr overhear the giants say that the Finns caused the storm that drove Oddr and his companions to giant land, and the giants on their part want to send them heavy gusts of wind to have them sail back to Finnmark. The party has to endure another 20 days of bad weather at sea in order to reach Finnmark again. Storms and fog not only mark the boundary to the Otherworld but are also conjured up both by giants as well as the Finns.

[314] In chapter 12, Bárðr seeks his son Gestr at the farm, Tunga, after Helga has travelled the country with Gestr, her half-brother.

[315] Similarly, when Bárðr goes on a journey on his own initiative, be it within the Otherworld (e.g. Hít's Yule feast) or to the human world (e.g. to Reykir, where he lies with Skeggi's daughter Þórdís) there is no foul weather accompanying the trip, and he does not have to make an effort to cross boundaries.

[316] As Sólrún tells Þórðr in chapter 15, she is actually human and her true father is called Bárðr (!). Kolbjǫrn has abducted her with the help of sorcery from her home at Sólarfjǫll in Greenland.

[317] "Þeir [Tungu-Oddr ok Bárðr] koma í helli stóran ok því næst í afhelli, ok var þar bjart í honum; þar sátu konur heldr stórar ok þó hreinligar" (*BáS*, ÍF 13: 135). "They came to a huge cave, and then to another cave, which was bright within. Some rather large, but nevertheless presentable, women sat there" (*BáS*, Anderson 1997, 250).

[318] *BáS*, ÍF 13: 150. "They came upon a huge cave. They went in, but was both foul and freezing" (*BáS*, Anderson 1997, 256).

[319] Heide (2014), 177.

audience might expect. They render the setting for these episodes and thus frame the narrative both geo-morphologically as well as semantically, but they are in neither case vital to the plot nor do they carry symbolic meaning. In the sagas discussed, and especially with respect to *Bárðar saga*, glaciers are home to otherworldly beings of all kinds, some of which are positively connoted, others rather negatively. What is more, the sagas suggest that figures such as Bárðr, Hallmundr and Þórir, who all are ambiguous figures (partly) of giant descent, tend to be drawn to the neighbourhood of glaciers. The motif of giant figures living in mountains close to glaciers which are only reachable when making one's way through bad weather and fog, does not strike one as a typical saga element but points rather in the direction of folklore and fairy tales.

Despite being outstanding places of some kind and fairly closely connected to the supernatural, the glaciers are neither liminal nor do the protagonists undergo a liminal phase there. Most examples discussed feature only three out of the seven initially defined liminal qualities: spatial segregation, momentary suspension of daily life and the intrusion of otherness. Only for Grímr and Tungu-Oddr does the stay in the mountains bring about a change: both men get to know their future wives. However, the narrative is not interested in the match and does not dedicate any attention to it. Apart from these fairly marginal incidents, no changes in character or behaviour can be traced in the glacier-episodes.

4.4 CAVES

The appearance of glaciers and caves often coincide, as the discussion of *Bárðar saga* and *Grettis saga* has already shown. Since the Hallmundr-episodes and several episodes from *Bárðar saga* have already been discussed, they are not taken up again in the present chapter. Similar to glaciers, caves appear only a few times as the setting for saga plots. The occurrences are noteworthy to the extent that cave episodes can almost exclusively be found in the younger sagas, in the present case in *Fóstbræðra saga*, *Grettis saga*, *Bárðar saga*, *Kjalnesinga saga* (including *Jǫkuls þáttr Búasonar*) and *Gull-Þóris saga*. Only one instance makes an appearance in the classic *Eyrbyggja saga*. Caves serve mostly as hiding places and repeatedly also as habitations; while humans use caves temporarily, a couple of supernatural beings live in caves permanently. The liminal qualities in all those episodes are – as so often – debatable. None of them appears as a prime example of liminality and they thus require more thorough scrutiny.

4.4.1 CAVES AS (TEMPORARY) HABITATIONS OF HUMANS

The cave-episodes in *Fóstbræðra saga*, *Grettis saga*, *Kjalnesinga saga* and *Droplaugarsona saga* feature rather close parallels:[320] in all four sagas, the main character, who is mostly

[320] Helga Bárðardóttir (*BáS*) is the only female character who chooses to live in caves. Upon her return to Iceland, which is forced by Bárðr, Helga breaks with her father and hides in the mountains: "Eigi undi Helga hjá föður sínum ok hvarf þaðan í burt ok þýddist hvárki náliga menn né fénað eða herbergi. Var hon þá optast í

known as a trouble-maker and who has been outlawed in some of these sagas, has to take refuge in a cave after having committed homicide. As the discussion will show, in neither case do the caves assume a crucial role within the narrative, but merely provide temporary shelter to the characters without having any serious influence on them.

In *Fóstbræðra saga* (ch. 23), Þormóðr Bersason kills Þorgrímr trolli Einarsson in revenge for his sworn brother Þorgeirr Hávarsson. After the manslaughter, Þormóðr's helpers Skúf and Bjarni bring him to a cave, which is difficult to reach because it is situated in the steep cliffs of Eiríksfjǫrðr: "Nú flytja þeir Þormóð til Eiríksfjarðar ok fylgja honum í helli þann, er nú er kallaðr Þormóðarhellir. Sá hellir er í sævarhǫmrunum ǫðrum megin fjarðarins en Stokkanes. Hamrar eru upp ok niðr frá hellinum, ok hvárttveggja illt at fara."[321] Initially probably relieved about the hide-out, Þormóðr soon becomes bored by the life in the cave,[322] and he sets out to assault the Þórdísarsynir anew. After yet another strenuous fight, Skúf and Bjarni collect Þormóðr, who lies wounded and completely exhausted on a skerry. They intend to bring him back to the cave but realise that this is not possible because of his injuries. Instead they take him to Gríma, whom they ask to cure Þormóðr (cf. ch. 4.1.1, subsection *Performing Magic*).

This cave scene in *Fóstbræðra saga* is not liminal because it is neither a turning point in the narrative nor for the protagonists. The stay in the cave does not trigger any change in Þormóðr, who keeps pursuing his initial plan of avenging his sworn brother, Þorgeirr. In addition, there is no suspension of daily life, and there is neither an intrusion of otherness nor can paradoxes and ambiguities be detected. The only features that hint in the direction of liminality are the spatial segregation and the suspension of daily life. Yet, these two criteria alone do not constitute a liminal phase.

Having stayed under the glacier with Hallmundr, Grettir needs a new hiding place because his archenemy, Þórir í Garði, keeps persecuting him relentlessly. Grettir asks Bjǫrn Hítdœlakappi, who advises him to move to a cave, which is situated in a mountain facing Hítará (ch. 58):

> At því hefi ek hugat, at í því fjalli, sem fram gengr fyrir útan Hítará, mun vera vígi gott ok þó fylgsni … Er þar bora í gegnum fjallit, ok sér þat neðan af veginum, því at þjóðgatan liggr niðri undir, en sandbrekka svá brǫtt fyrir ofan, at fáir menn munu upp komask.[323]

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hreysum eða hólum" (*BáS*, ÍF 13: 122-123). "Helga could not abide her father and thereafter disappeared. It is thought that she could not stay near men or beast, or in lodgings. She was most often in small caves and hills" (*BáS*, Anderson 1997, 245). However, the saga does not say anything more about Helga's life in the caves.

[321] *FbS*, ÍF 6: 237. "So they took Thormod to Eiriksfjord and went with him to a cave, which now bears his name, in the sea cliffs on the opposite side of Stokkanes. With the cliff below and above it, the cave is hard to approach from either direction" (*FbS*, Regal 1997, 380).

[322] "Þormóði þótti daufligt í hellinum, því at þar var fátt til skemmtanar" (*FbS*, ÍF 6: 238). "Thormod found the cave dull for there was little for him to do to pass the time" (*FbS*, Regal 1997, 380).

[323] *GS*, ÍF 7: 186. "I have noticed that there is a good fortress and hiding-place, if you use your ingenuity, in the mountain beside the river at Hitara. There is a hole right through the mountain that can be seen from the road,

His remote dwelling does not hinder Grettir from roaming the region. He visits friends and gets involved in skirmishes mostly because he repeatedly steals food from the nearby farms. The people in this region are not amused about his presence but are unsuccessful in their attempts to get rid of him. After having stayed in this cave for a couple of years, Grettir again steals some wethers and gets into a serious fight with the people of Mýrar and thereby kills some of Bjǫrn Hítdœlakappi's relatives. Despite this loss, Bjǫrn stands by Grettir but asks him to leave the region of Fagraskógafjall.

Similar to *Fóstbræðra saga*, the stay in the cave does not imply a liminal experience for Grettir. He neither changes in personality nor attitude during the four years in Fagraskógafjall and keeps up his usual way of life. Apart from the initial description of the cave's location, it is neither given special attention nor is it provided with any outstanding features. Hence the cave is not a liminal place, nor does it become one, where the protagonist undergoes a transition of some kind. After the stay in the cave, the protagonists in both *Fóstbræðra saga* and *Grettis saga* experience a period of security and shelter. While Þormóðr is brought from the cave to Gríma's farm, Grettir moves from the non-liminal cave to Þórisdalr, another outstanding and partly liminal place offering a hiding place and security. Although neither protagonist participates in social-structural life while staying at Gríma's and in Þórisdalr respectively, neither site involves a liminal experience as the discussions above have disclosed (cf. ch. 4.1.1 subsection *Performing Magic*, and 4.3.2 subsection *Glaciers in Grettis saga*).

After his return to Iceland, Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi Ásbrandsson takes up again his frowned-upon affair with Þuríðr Barkardóttir ins digra, who is married to Þóroddr skattkaupandi (*EbS*, ch. 40). The fooled husband does not want to put up with the situation any longer and orders the sorceress Þorgríma galdrakinn to conjure up a heavy snow storm when Bjǫrn is on his way home. One evening while crossing the highlands to get home, Bjǫrn gets caught in very bad weather, has to seek shelter in a cave and is forced to hold out there for three days. Irrespective of the discomfort in the "kalda búð" ('cold abode'),[324] Bjǫrn keeps composing skaldic stanzas on his situation and makes the point that Þuríðr, if she knew of his fate, would certainly not like him lying in the cold cave. Furthermore, he laments the fact that, having travelled the world and experienced a lot, he now finds himself in a cave in the mountains instead of in his lover's bed: "víglundr nú um stund / helli byggir hugfullr / hingat fyr konu bing."[325] Arriving back home, he tells his kinsmen in a stanza of the unpleasant stay in the highlands and reveals in the end that he knows who had summoned the storm. He has seen

because the main path lies below it, with a scree slope stretching up to it which hardly anyone could scale" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 140.)

[324] *EbS*, ÍF 4: 110.

[325] *EbS*, ÍF 4: 111. "But now the hardy battle-tree / has made a cave his home a while, / instead of a woman's pillow" (*EbS*, Quinn 1997, 182).

through the situation and is aware that Þorgríma galdrakinn acted on behalf of Þuríðr's husband Þóroddr skattkaupandi.

Despite this involuntary stay in the highlands, the cave does not influence or alter Bjǫrn's attitudes regarding his relationship with Þuríðr. Although he refrains from visiting her during that winter, he still keeps seeing her. A few chapters later (ch. 47), Þóroddr skattkaupandi complains to his brother-in-law, Snorri goði, that Bjǫrn regularly pays visits to Fróðá to meet Þuríðr. Þóroddr is concerned that these visits bring him shame and annoyance and wants Snorri to do something about it. Snorri rides to Bjǫrn's place and urges him to leave the district. It is only after this intervention by Snorri goði that things change for the better as Bjǫrn leaves Iceland again. *Eyrbyggja*'s cave scene functions as a cold and uncomfortable intermezzo without having any immediate, further reaching effects on the plot and the characters. It does not, therefore, qualify as a liminal episode.

Kjalnesinga saga also tells of a main protagonist who must take refuge in a cave. This time it is Búi Andríðsson who needs a safe shelter. Not only has Búi destroyed Þorgrímr goði Helgason's heathen temple,[326] but he has also brutally killed Þorgrímr's son Þorsteinn, who was worshipping there.[327] Upon returning home, his foster mother Esja brings Búi to a cave in the mountains because she knows that he will not be safe from Þorgrímr's persecution at her place.[328]

> Sneru þau [Esja ok Búi] þá fyrir ofan garð með fjallinu ok þar yfir ána, ok síðan gengu þau einstigi upp í fjallit ok til gnípu þeirar er heitir Laugargnípa; þar varð fyrir þeim hellir fagr. Var það gott herbergi. Þar var undir niðri fögr jarðlaug. Í hellinum váru vistir ok drykkr ok klæði.[329]

[326] As it has variously been pointed out, there is hardly any literary evidence for pre-Christian Scandinavian temples and religious practices. The temple description found in chapter 4 of *KjS* belongs together with the one from *EbS* (ch. 4) to the small group of extant textual witnesses.

[327] It is not quite clear why Búi destroys the temple. Búi's father is an Irish Christian and it is most likely that Búi has adopted his father's religion. This is most probably the reason why Búi holds no regard for the pre-Christian religion, which is stated quite explicitly by the saga: "Búi var kallaðr einrænn í uppfæzlu. Hann vildi aldri blóta ok kveðst þat þykja lítilmannligt at hokra þar at" (*KjS*, ÍF 14: 9). "Bui was thought to be peculiar as he grew up: he never wanted to make sacrifices and said it was undignified to prostrate himsef in this manner" (*KjS*, Cook/Porter 1997, 308).

[328] Indeed, Esja is quite a similar figure to the second Gríma in *FbS* (ch. 23; cf. ch. 4.1.1 subsection *Performing Magic*). Not only is Esja skilled in magic, she also protects and shelters Búi. Most notable is the fact that after taking Búi to the cave, Esja goes home to her farm and "lét hon gera elda í húsunum af vatntorfi því, er sviðnaði, en yrði sem mestr reykr eða remma" (*KjS*, ÍF 14: 14). "She had fires made in the house with wet turf, which sizzled and made a lot of smoke and stench" (*KjS*, Cook/Porter 1997, 311.). Like Gríma, Esja produces smoke in her house so that Þorgrímr and his party cannot thoroughly search her house for Búi. Although Esja does not palpably work magic on the threshold as Gríma does, she nevertheless welcomes the persecutors standing in the doorway and stays there while Þorgrímr and his men (unsuccessfully) search the house. These close parallels suggest that *FbS* and *KjS* are dialogically connected.

[329] *KjS*, ÍF 14: 13-14. "They went down from the hayfield and along the mountain, over the river and then up a narrow path in the mountain to a peak called Laugargnipa (Bath peak). In front of them was a fine cave, It was a good place to stay. Just below was a fine warm spring for bathing. In the cave were provisions and drink and clothing" (*KjS*, Cook/Porter 1997, 310-311).

In strong contrast to the previously discussed cave-examples, the narrator of *Kjalnesinga saga* presents us with one of the very few instances of a comfortable cave, where it seems possible to live and not just to dwell in poor conditions.[330] While Þormóðr and Grettir can almost be pitied for having to stay in a cold cave for some time, Búi gets the privilege of moving to a cave which appears pretty luxuriously prepared for its new inhabitant.[331] Despite making a stately appearance, the cave is not given a more prominent role. After the first description, the cave becomes merely a background to the plot. Certainly, Búi lives there for quite a while and retreats to it after his excursions, but even then, the cave itself does not have any further influence on the plot and on the personal development of Búi and hence can hardly be called liminal.

The cave is mentioned again when Búi has abducted Ólof Kolladóttir and brought her to his cave (ch. 9). Búi's rival, Kolfiðr, sets out to attack Búi in his cave but refrains from doing so because of the narrow path leading up to it, which does not allow for an attack by fifteen men. Kolfiðr thus challenges Búi to meet him, but when the latter is about to leave the cave, he feels such a strong pain in the eyes[332] that he cannot go. He refrains from meeting Kolfiðr and realises that Esja must have something to do with the pain since it vanishes as soon as Kolfiðr leaves the site. Although the cave is part of the scenery, it is a much more the steep and narrow path (*einstigi*, nt.) that the saga focuses on and considers an impediment to a possible fight between the two rivals. The cave itself does not play a role at all in this narrative strand. The surprisingly welcoming and warm impression of the cave does not make it a different and more outstanding place and hence does not have an influence on the plot either.

Droplaugarsona saga is the oldest saga in the corpus of the thesis to feature a cave scene (ch. 14). Having killed Helgi Ásbjarnarson, Grímr Droplaugarson gets sentenced to full outlawry and he hides at first in a cairn and then moves to a cave close to the farm of his father-in-law, Ingjaldr Niðgestsson. During his stay in the cave and yet near the farm, Grímr experiences a liminal phase. Being outlawed, he is actually not allowed to take part in structural social life, and yet he does so in secret. Though invisible to most people, his presence is felt at the farm of Ingjaldr: sheep disappear and the water of the creek is turbid. The explanation for the latter is only given a few lines later: Grímr digs a tunnel leading from his cave to the bedchamber of his wife Helga Ingjaldsdóttir – another cave, if you will – where he spends his nights. While digging the tunnel, Grímr pours the soil into the creek which is why the water is turbid: "En

[330] Other instances of caves that are inviting to stay in are Hallmundr's cave in *GS*, where the warm fire is emphasised, and Bárðr's cave in *BáS* (ch. 10) where Tungu-Oddr spends Yule *undir jǫkli*.

[331] The saga does not state whether Esja has prepared the cave so comfortably, but it probably goes without saying. Given that she is skilled in magic and clairvoyance, she might have anticipated that Búi would need a shelter sooner or later.

[332] For a discussion of the saga motif of pain in the eyes, see Kanerva (2013).

þat var reyndar, at Grímr gerði jarðhús, ok kom munninn upp við sæng konu hans, ok lá hann þar um nætr, en mold var færð á lækinn."[333]

It is above all Victor Turner who considers the tunnel a symbol of liminality,[334] and the tunnel (*jarðhús*[335]) in *Droplaugarsona saga* certainly is a liminal place. The tunnel is at once the separating impediment as well as the vital link between the opposites of the social-structural and the wilderness. When passing through the tunnel, Grímr is – speaking in more psychoanalytical terms – reborn into one or the other context and hence assumes two different roles alternately: while the cave stands for Grímr's status as an outlaw and hence is located at the margins or even outside of civilisation, the (matrimonial) bed represents Grímr's wife and consequently his former structural life embedded in family ties.

As a matter of fact, this tunnel-scene is preceded by a repeated connection made between the *jarðhús* and the bed over three chapters (ch. 12-14). Grímr's brother Helgi gets killed by Helgi Ásbjarnarson. After the skirmish, the latter retreats to the lonely farm, Eið, in the woods and has a locked bed-closet constructed for himself out of fear of Grímr's revenge (ch. 12). It is only a couple of winters later that Grímr finally prepares for the revenge by digging a *jarðhús* close to Eið. The actions of Grímr and his companions foreshadow how, later on, he will build his (second) *jarðhús*: "Við lækinn grófu þeir sér jarðhús ok færðu mold alla út á lækinn."[336]

One evening the men leave the *jarðhús* and approach the farm, Eið (ch. 13). Sneaking through the stable into a connecting, transitional corridor, they observe the hustle and bustle in the house and take notice of where Helgi Ásbjarnarson sleeps. At night, Grímr goes back again, enters the sleeping room and approaches Helgi's bed – this evokes a scene highly

[333] *DlsS*, ÍF 11: 176. "But the fact of the matter was that Grim had made an underground chamber, and the opening came up by his wife's bed, where he slept at nights, and the earth had been moved to the brook" (*DlsS*, McTurk 1997, 376).

[334] Although Victor Turner takes up van Gennep's symbol of the threshold, he considers the tunnel an equally (or even more) appropriate symbol for liminality: "[the threshold is] signifying the great importance of real or symbolic thresholds at this middle period of the rites [of passage], though *cunicular*, 'being in a tunnel', would better describe the quality of this phase in many cases, its hidden nature, its sometimes mysterious darkness" (Turner 1974, 232, italics in the original). Already in *The Ritual Process* (1969, 15ff.), Turner presents the tunnel as a liminal place when describing the Ndembu's Isoma ritual. This ritual is designed and performed to chase away the shadow that "causes a woman to bear a dead child or brings death on a series of infants" (1969, 16). So as to regain her fertility, the woman has to crawl through a tunnel from the "hole of life" to the "hole of death" (ibid., 28) and back again.

[335] A full-text search for the term *jarðhús* rendered a list of 11 instances in the *Íslendingasögur* but only in two sagas selected for this thesis, namely in *DlsS* and *LxdS*. Some instances of a *jarðhús* refer to a chamber in the ground; others suggest that *jarðhús* should be pictured as a tunnel. While the *jarðhús* in *DlsS* assumes a liminal role, the two *jarðhús* in *LxdS* are only briefly mentioned and remain ordinary places to the extent that they serve – similar to caves – as hiding places for criminals and outlaws. In chapter 49 of *LxdS*, the Ósvífrssynir take refuge in a *jarðhús* after having killed Kjartan; and in chapter 80 of *LxdS* (or ch. 2 of *Bolla þáttr Bollasonar*), Þórólfr stertimaðr, who has killed the boy Óláfr, is given shelter in Guðdala-Starri's *jarðhús.* – The full-text search was conducted on the webpage *Íslenskt textasafn*, provided by Stofnun Árna Magnússonar.

[336] *DlsS*, ÍF 11: 168. "By the brook they dug themselves an underground chamber and moved all the earth out into the brook" (*DlsS*, McTurk 1997, 372).

reminiscent of the intimate touching scene in *Gísla saga Súrssonar*. Then he seizes the opportunity and injures Helgi fatally before escaping and returning to the *jarðhús*. Shortly after the men leave the *jarðhús*, Grímr is outlawed *in absentia* (ch. 14) and soon moves to Grímshellir.

While the *jarðhús* and the bed pertain to two antagonised groups in chapters 12 and 13, the saga combines the two elements in chapter 14 in the context of one character, Grímr Droplaugarson. In both cases, the bed and the *jarðhús* are associated with the need for security and temporary retreat. The *jarðhús* seems to be the safer place since it does not get attacked, while the bed does not prove as safe as it was initially wished for and expected to be. Grímr's crawling through the tunnel to get to his wife thus remains a daring undertaking because he could just as easily find himself in the same unfortunate position as Helgi Ásbjarnarson did and get killed in bed.

Although the caves offer hiding places and temporary habitations, they vary in the composition of the surrounding narrative. In three cases (*FbS, GS, KjS*), the cave is not a special or liminal place. Certainly, they feature some liminal characteristics such as spatial segregation or remoteness and temporary occupation, but they do not show most of the central characteristics of liminality such as paradoxes and ambiguities or triggering a transformation in the (central) character. Regarding the intruding sense of otherness, it is only in the examples of *Kjalnesinga saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga* that a sense of otherness in the guise of magic is involved. However, the magic is not immanent in the cave but is the result of Esja's and Þorgríma's performances respectively.

It is interesting to observe how the individual episodes are embedded in the rest of the narrative. *Eyrbyggja saga*, for example, can be said to follow the Turnerian structure: Bjǫrn moves from the structural world in Fróðá over the highlands, where he is forced to hold out in a cave for a couple of days, down to his home in Breiðavík. Even though the narrative structure suggests a rite of passage leading from A) structural daily life via the highlands, that are in general literary terms predestined to be a topos of liminal space, to B) structural daily life. It remains doubtful to what extent this scene can be called liminal since this episode brings about change neither in the plot nor in the characters.

Interestingly, the cave episode in *Grettla* reverses the Turnerian pattern of liminality being embedded in social structure. After his stay with Hallmundr, Grettir moves to the cave in Fagraskógafjall, and from there he goes to Þórisdalr. As already discussed above, the Hallmundr- and the Þórisdalr-scene are remarkable and suggest some degree of liminal space. The Fagraskógafjall-episode in-between – or rather: betwixt and between? – might at first glance appear to be of an outstanding nature, too. Yet upon closer inspection, and in comparison to its adjacent episodes, the cave scene appears as a rather mundane and straightforward narrative strand that does not leave space for ambiguity and uncertainties.

Having his new base in the cave, Grettir is out and about in the region and participates in social structural life to the extent that his status as an outlaw allows him to.

By and large it can be said that, at least in *Droplaugarsona saga* and *Laxdœla saga*, the *jarðhús* – both as a chamber and as a tunnel – fulfils similar (narrative) functions like caves: they are temporary hideaways for criminals and outlaws. The *jarðhús* differs from the cave to that extent and also because it does not get attacked. There are no special entrances leading to the *jarðhús*, such as narrow paths or steep cliffs which separate the *jarðhús* from its surroundings.

4.4.2 CAVES AS HABITATIONS OF SUPERNATURAL BEINGS

In the selected saga corpus, there are not many supernatural beings which are said to live in caves. The famous Norwegian mountain king, Dofri, makes his appearance in two of the sagas, namely in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and in *Kjalnesinga saga*. Cave-dwelling giants and trolls can be found in *Grettis saga* and *Jǫkuls þáttr Búasonar* (in *Kjalnesinga saga*), and in *Gull-Þóris saga* even dragons make their appearance.

While the caves in the previous chapter remain unspectacular, giving the impression of being rather provisional, the caves of the supernatural beings bring to mind at times of a rather rambling subterranean dwelling place. Keeping in mind that *supernatural* does not equate to *liminal*, it would not be correct to sweepingly call these caves liminal because they are home to supernatural beings. Caves have neither an immediate nor a lasting effect on the (human) figures entering or staying within them. The same holds true with supernatural beings: caves do not have a lasting effect on them either. To the extent that it is visible in the sagas, the cave is their home and does not influence their character and/or their way of life in any way.

DOFRI THE *BERGBÚI*

Along with Bárðr Snæfellsáss, Dofri the *bergbúi* is one of the supernatural beings living in caves in the mountains to be portrayed in a favourable light. The episodes featuring Dofri are discussed separately because Dofri is an outstanding figure. Though of giant descent, he is given a cultivated and stately aura in contrast to other ogres which mostly act on rather base and primitive instincts.

Dofri makes a brief appearance right at the beginning of *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, where he assumes the role of Bárðr's foster father and teacher. While the saga mentions the subjects Bárðr is instructed in, the cave is only very briefly mentioned in passing.[337] Since *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* portrays first and foremost the adult Bárðr, it is not possible to speculate about how his youth in the cave could possibly have influenced his character. Nonetheless, the saga refers to Bárðr's upbringing and not his lineage when explaining his behaviour and decisions.

[337] "Váru þau þar þrjú [Dofri, Flaumgerðr ok Bárðr] saman í hellinum" (*BáS*, ÍF 13: 103). "The three of them lived together in the cave" (*BáS*, Anderson 1997, 238).

As mentioned in the discussion on glaciers, *Bárðar saga* cites Bárðr's time in Dofri's care as the reason for Bárðr's retreat into the mountains and glaciers: "Eptir þetta hvarf Bárðr í burtu með allt búferli sitt, ok þykkir mönnum sem hann muni í jöklana horfit hafa ok byggt þar stóran helli, því at þat var meir ætt hans at vera í stórum hellum en húsum, því at hann fæddist upp með Dofra í Dofrafjöllum."[338]

Kjalnesinga saga, in contrast, offers more than merely a short glimpse into Dofri's cave in the Norwegian mountains (ch. 13 and 14). When visiting Dofri, the protagonist of the saga, Búi Andríðsson, leaves the human world and enters the realm of the supernatural. Indications in this direction are strongly reminiscent of fairy tales: firstly, Búi sets off during the winter, shortly before Yule;[339] secondly, nobody knows (precisely) where Dofri actually lives; and thirdly, it takes Búi three attempts before he is granted entry to the mountain king's cave through a door in a cliff.

Nevertheless, the fact that Búi moves into a world beyond, his stay in Dofri's cave and with Fríðr are fairly straightforward and do not feature unusual or ambiguous elements. The scenes are quite reminiscent of a courtly setting: not only does Dofri's cave give the impression of being spacious and with many chambers, they are also richly and extravagantly decorated and are – at least over Yule – a place of conviviality and merriment. What is more, even though Búi has an affair with Fríðr and knows that he becomes a father, he does not digress from his initial plans, but thinks first and foremost about accomplishing his mission for the king, that is, getting hold of Dofri's precious *tafl* (game bord). So, apart from the fact that Búi repairs to giant-land, the stay in the cave does not prove special or liminal. Búi does not change during his time with Dofri.

There is, however, a liminal place in immediate proximity to the Dofri-episode: it is the home of the figure Rauðr, with whom Búi stays on his way to and from the mountains. This place is mentioned only very briefly in the beginnings of chapters 13 and 15 and poses as a rather inconspicuous, figurative gate between the human and the supernatural world. It is there that Búi's passage into the world beyond begins and ends. Even though nothing extraordinary happens at Rauðr's house, the place is liminal to the extent that firstly, Rauðr's house is situated at the edge of the inhabited area: "Öndverðan vetr, þá er snjó lagði á fjöll, sneri Búi ferð sinni upp í byggðina. Dvaldist hann þá í ofanverðri byggðinni um hríð með bónda þeim, er Rauðr hét."[340] Secondly, Búi stays as a guest with Rauðr, a stay which is not only of a temporary nature but also takes place during the liminal time of Yule. Thirdly, it is only in the outskirts of the inhabited area that Búi obtains the knowledge he requires, that is,

[338] *BáS*, ÍF 13:119. "After that Bard disappeared with all of his possessions. It is thought by people that he vanished into the glaciers and lived there in a huge cavern. His family was more likely to live in large caves than in houses, as he had been raised by Dofri in the Dovrefjell" (*BáS*, Anderson 1997, 244).

[339] Cf. footnote on Yule in ch. 4.1.2 subsection *Fights in the Doorway*.

[340] *KjS*, ÍF 14: 29. "At the start of winter, when snow lay on the mountains, Bui made his way into the interior. He stayed for a time with a farmer named Raud, on the fringe of the inhabited area" (*KjS*, Cook/Porter 1997, 319).

the information or at least a clue of where Dofri lives.[341] Rauðr is not completely sure himself where Dofri lives, but he shares his assumptions with Búi: "En þar þú hefir mik sóttan, þá skal ek til leggja nökkut. Ek mun vísa þér leið til Dofrafjalls ok svá gnípu þeirar, er flestir menn ætla at hellir Dofra muni í vera."[342]

Transformations and changes among the main protagonists are mostly searched for in vain. Rauðr cannot be expected to change because the farmstead is his home, which in consequence does not act as a liminal place for him. Regarding Búi, it seems at first sight that he does not experience any (obvious) changes either. It could be claimed that Búi experiences some sort of a bipartite liminal phase while fulfilling the Norwegian King's task on which Búi's life depends. The first part includes finding Dofri's home which Búi can only achieve thanks to Rauðr's advice. Certainly, this is no numinous knowledge in the strict sense but it is indispensable for moving on and completing the mission successfully. Later on, it is also Rauðr who predicts that Búi will have to fight King Haraldr's *blámaðr* before he will let Búi go in peace and not to persecute him for having destroyed Þórgrímr's temple and killed Þórgrímr's son Þorsteinn. Rauðr also supports Búi in getting ready for this second task and provides him with a wrestling jacket. As is to be expected, Búi overcomes the *blámaðr* in the fight and consequently the King vindicates Búi and re-establishes him in society. In this way, Búi's temporary state as a persecuted outcast is terminated and he is free to assume again the role of a respected member of society.

What is missing in the Rauðr-episode are paradoxical and ambiguous elements. It is certainly inviting to call Rauðr an ambiguous figure due to the location of his home. It can further be speculated whether the name *Rauðr* suggests some connection to pagan deities, as for example various red-bearded figures which appear repeatedly in saga narratives (e.g. *Ólafs saga helga,*[343] *Bárðar saga*[344]), and hint more or less explicitly in the direction of Óðinn or Þórr. It might well be possible that the saga narrator attempted to shape Rauðr in this direction. The character, however, remains too marginal to allow for anything more than mere

[341] According to Rauðr, King Haraldr is the only person who actually knows where Dofri lives because he was fostered by the mountain king (cf. *BáS*, ch. 1): "en öngra manna veit ek þeira ván, at viti, hvar Dofri ræðr fyrir, nema Haraldur konungr" (*KjS*, ÍF 14: 29). "I think that the only person who knows where Dofri rules is King Harald himself" (*KjS*, Cook/Porter 1997, 319.). However, Haraldr does not reveal the location to Búi and thus presents him with a double challenge: firstly, finding out where Dofri lives, and secondly getting the valuable game board in his possession.

[342] *KjS*, ÍF 14: 29. "But since you've come to me, I'll give you some help. I'll show you the way to Dovrefjell, and to the peak in which most people think that Dofri has his cave" (*KjS*, Cook/Porter 1997, 319).

[343] In *Heimskringla*'s *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* (ch. 80), there is the figure of the Norwegian Rauðr hinn rami, a stout pagan who refuses to be christened by King Ólafr. The king therefore has Rauðr brutally put to death by means of a snake, which he forces into Rauðr's mouth. However, drawing a parallel between Rauðr from *Heimskringla* and Rauðr in *KjS* would be too bold, not least because we know so little about the latter Rauðr.

[344] In *BáS* there are two red-bearded figures: firstly, Grímr (ch. 9) who lures Ingjaldr out to sea in bad weather and who is often interpreted as Þórr; and secondly, Rauðgrani (ch. 18) who joins Gestr and his companions in the wastelands of Dumbshaf but is soon thrown overboard after having been attacked by the priest with a crucifix.

speculation. He stays ambiguous to the point that he could be considered human, some kind of a wood gnome (as e.g. Rübezahl) or some deity in disguise.

While the modern saga audience has probably expected the Dofri-episode to be liminal because of its setting in a remote place in the realm of the supernatural, it is actually Rauðr's unremarkable home which features liminal qualities and frames the much more prominent and spectacular scene in Dofri's cave. This observation shows (again) that the concepts of the supernatural and liminality are not synonymous, irrespective of their reference to something extraordinary, lying outside the experiences of daily life.

OGRES

The focus in this subsection lies on *Jǫkuls þáttr Búasonar* and *Grettis saga*, both of which feature an episode with giants and trolls living in caves. In contrast to the glacier and cave scenes discussed above, *Jǫkuls þáttr Búasonar* consists of two central cave scenes (ch. 2 and 3), which are both set in Greenland. The following discussion as well as comparable examples will reveal that the caves in the *þáttr* are eventually of no narrative importance and recede almost completely into the background.

Having killed his father Búi, Jǫkull is so devastated about this deed that he and his companions sail away from Iceland. The subsequent loss of orientation at sea due to the recurring motif of the long period of bad weather is not merely an expression of realism, rather it reflects Jǫkull's agitated mental state. Eventually Jǫkull and his companions are shipwrecked off the shore and barely manage to reach the beach, where they seek shelter in an abandoned hall. Soon after, they spot the *tröllkonur* Gnípa and Geit. Jǫkull kills Geit right away, and Gnípa then informs the men that they have been stranded – very tellingly – "að óbyggðum í Grænlandi … og inn á fjörðinn Öllumlengri."[345] So Jǫkull and his companions have clearly entered another world, which will go on to challenge them.

In its depiction of Greenland, *Jǫkuls þáttr Búasonar* presents a strong contrast to *Fóstbræðra saga* and *Króka-Refs saga* which are partly set in Greenland, too. In the latter two texts Greenland is depicted as a non-extraordinary setting that is in no way different to Iceland or Norway. In the case of *Króka-Refs saga*, the audience hears about the standard elements of slander in the form of *níð*, outwitting attacks and revenge. The only exception to this generalisation is Króka-Refr's carving and engineering skills which are only truly displayed while he is in Greenland. *Jǫkuls þáttr Búasonar* (as part of *KjS*) is thus the only one of these three sagas (*FbS, KRs, KjS*) that depicts Greenland as a supernatural faraway land, which is home to trolls and giants, and therefore not very welcoming to humans who probably reach the island accidentally, or when they are predestined to go there and accomplish a feat.[346]

[345] *JþB*, ÍF 14: 50. "to the wilderness in Greenland… and into Ollumlengri (Longer-than-anything) fjord" (*JþB*, Porter 1997, 330).

[346] For further reading on the depiction of Greenland and its relation to Iceland, cf. Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson (2015).

The first cave scene in *Jǫkuls þáttr* (ch. 2) is rather unique within saga narratives: Gnípa complains to Búi that her siblings do not want her to have an inheritance on an equal footing. Therefore, she eggs Jǫkull on to kill her family. Soon after, Jǫkull and Úlfr venture towards the glaciers, find the cave and start killing the ogresses (*flögð*, f. pl.) as soon as they enter the cave. Then the two protagonists inspect the cave and discover a chamber off to the side. There they encounter Gnípa's parents Surtr and Syrpa, whom they also kill. Upon searching the giants' cave, Jǫkull and Úlfr find enormous riches of all sorts. And when Gnípa's brothers return home from attacking Jǫkull's men, Jǫkull and Úlfr put them to death as well. Having wiped out her whole family, Gnípa meets the men again, and although she wanted her relatives dead in the first place, she requests compensation for her loss. On this paradoxical note, the first cave-scene ends.

Nonetheless, the cave is not liminal in any way. As already stated with regard to the Dofri-examples above, Jǫkull's arrival in and entrance into the supernatural wilderness of Greenland does not automatically imply that the visited places are liminal due to their unusual appearance. Neither does the cave's location at the foot of the glacier influence the narrative set-up. Indeed, the glacier is only mentioned once right at the beginning of chapter 2 and assumes an utterly marginal role. Also noteworthy is the fact that *Jǫkuls þáttr Búasonar* continues directly with a second cave scene without any intermission at a different setting.

In chapter 3, Gnípa and Jǫkull move deeper into giant land since Gnípa has asked Jǫkull to accompany her to the Yule feast held by the *jötunn* Skrámr, the king of wilderness. Jǫkull agrees to go with her and before they set out, Gnípa gives him a ring which has the power to make the person who wears it invisible. After a long walk, they finally reach a narrow path (*einstigi*), which leads over "hömrum stórum og bröttum björgum"[347] to Skrámr's cave. Soon the Yule feast begins and the *jötnar* and *flagðkonur* entertain themselves with ribaldry and little brawls. Jǫkull, who does not approve of this behaviour, puts on the magic ring and starts killing the ogres one after the other until only Skrámr's son Grímnir is left. To him Jǫkull leaves the choice whether he (Grímnir) wants to be killed on the spot or whether he agrees to marry Gnípa. He decides on the latter and so fulfils her long-held wish. Afterwards, they explore Skrámr's cave, and not only do they find riches but also discover the fettered and almost starved Saracene siblings Hvítserkr and Marsibilla, who have been held captive by Skrámr. They free them and eventually accompany them home to their father, king Soldán.

This second cave scene is strongly reminiscent of *Bárðar saga* and earlier episodes in *Kjalnesinga saga*. Given the highly eclectic nature of *Kjalnesinga saga* as a whole, these borrowings are not surprising. Though less refined than Dofri, Skrámr, the ruler of (Greenland's) *jötunheimar*, is to some extent reminiscent of how the Norwegian mountain King is presented in *Bárðar saga* and *Kjalnesinga saga*. Like Dofri and other giants, Skrámr possesses vast riches, including a valuable *tafl* (game board). Further parallels include the

[347] *JþB*, ÍF 14: 54. "large cliffs and steep rocks" (*JþB*, Porter 1997, 332).

Yule feast, which not only reminds one of the Dofri-episode in *Kjalnesinga saga* but also of Hít's Yule feast in *Bárðar saga*. The narrow path leading up to Skrámr's cave mirrors the narrow path that has to be traversed to reach Búi's cave in chapter 4 of *Kjalnesinga saga*. The captives Hvítserkr and Marsibilla call to mind poor Sólrún who was also held captive in a cave in *Bárðar saga*. And last but not least, the marriage of Grímnir and Gnípa makes the audience think of Þórðr and Sólrún (*BáS*).

Regardless of these striking parallels to or borrowings from other sagas, the second cave does not evolve as a liminal place, at least in the narrower classic definition of liminality as suggested by van Gennep and Turner. The cave's inhabitants certainly belong to the supernatural world; this circumstance, however, alone is not necessarily a pre-condition for making the cave a liminal place. It can be argued though, that the Greenland episodes figure as a liminal phase for the character of Jǫkull. Having been forced to kill his father Búi against his will, Jǫkull loses his direction in life which shows in his sailing without orientation before being almost literally washed ashore in Greenland, which is portrayed in the present text as a preternatural faraway land outside of real(istic) geography. There Jǫkull accomplishes a couple of great deeds which result in him getting married to Marsibilla, the daughter of King Soldán of the Saracens. Thus his liminal phase, which can be termed a coming-of-age, draws to a close. Finally, Jǫkull is re-integrated into society and achieves a new and higher social status as a future king. Jǫkull's stay in Greenland, which is, admittedly, reminiscent of a fairy tale, tells first and foremost of Jǫkull's liminal experience in Greenland.

Although Jǫkull is not a typical ritual or liminal subject because he is not stripped of all his structural features, the scene nevertheless qualifies as liminal. Indeed, it meets five out of the seven liminal qualities sketched earlier on: spatial segregation, temporal suspension and the intrusion of otherness are self-evident. Jǫkull and his men move outside of the social-structural while dwelling in the realm of the supernatural in Greenland. While he wears Gnípa's ring, Jǫkull is invisible, though not in the sense of a presumed death as the anthropological writings describe it, rather it is of magical origin. Still, it allows the protagonist to be there and not to be there (or rather not to be seen) at the same time. Hence the criterion of invisibility is closely bound up with the aspect of paradoxes and ambiguities. These two liminal criteria only apply, if Jǫkull's invisibility is interpreted from an anthropological point of view. And last but not least, the changes and transformations that have been touched upon above are irreversible.

Another rather outstanding cave is the giant's dwelling place close to Sandhaugar in *Grettis saga* (ch. 65-66).[348] Having wrestled with the *flagðkona*, who has attacked the farm at Sandhaugar, Grettir has a closer look at the gorge, into which the *flagðkona* disappeared after their fierce fight. Grettir and the priest, who accompanies him, spot a cave entrance in a steep

[348] I acknowledge the literary proximity of *GS* to the Old English epic *Beowulf* but do not discuss the issue here. For further reading, cf. Swinford (2002), Fjalldal (1998), J. Turville-Petre (1977), Liberman (1986).

cliff behind a waterfall: "En er þeir kómu til forsins, sá þeir skúta upp undir bergit."[349] While, in previous examples, the difficulty of accessing the caves lay in crossing a narrow path, *Grettis saga* does not feature a path at all but a waterfall which not only poses an impediment to reaching the cave, but also emphasises and visualises – in a similar way to the fog – the boundary between the human world and the sphere of the supernatural behind the waterfall. The waterfall is liminal to the extent that it is dangerous for Grettir to cross the waterfall and that he has to dive deep down to the bottom of the pool in order to get behind the waterfall and climb up to the cave. Furthermore, Grettir has to pass through this quasi-liminal passage to the cave entrance alone since nobody can (or rather, dares to) accompany him. The last thing that the priest, who assists Grettir and holds the rope, sees of the hero are the soles of his feet: "Sá prestr í iljar honum ok vissi síðan aldri, hvat af honum varð."[350] Soon the priest gives up on Grettir and when he sees bloody water running down the river a short time later he is convinced of Grettir's death.[351] Not only invisible to the structural world but considered dead, Grettir clearly moves outside of society and attains liminal or even primordial state by fighting the cave-dwelling giant half-naked and armed merely with a sword.

Nevertheless, the cave as such is not a liminal place in the Sandhaugar-episode, and Grettir's stay in the cave and his fight with the ogre do not differ from comparable scenes in other sagas: the protagonist enters the cave, spots the enemy sitting by the fire, attacks and kills the ogre, explores the cave and finds – in the case of *Grettis saga* – the skeletons of the ogre's previous victims.[352] Hence, the place Grettir visits is neither given particular attention as an extraordinary setting nor does it have an influence on Grettir.

Still, the time at Sandhaugar and especially the fight with the "jǫtunn ógurliga mikill"[353] certainly remains an outstanding experience for the saga hero. Even though the incidents do not have as obvious and immediate an impact on Grettir as the fight with Glámr does, they partly rehabilitate him,[354] because the enormous feat is a sign of empathy and humanity.[355] It terminates his acting within the structural world, to which he does not in fact belong due to his status as an outlaw (cf. ch. 4.1.2 subsection *Fights in the Doorway*).

[349] *GS*, ÍF 7: 214. "When they reached the waterfall they saw a cave in the cliff face" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 153).
[350] *GS*, ÍF 7: 215. "The priest watched the soles of his [Grettir's] feet disappear, then had no idea what had become of him" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 153).
[351] The priest does not know at this point that the blood and intestines he sees floating down the river do not stem from Grettir but from the giant who Grettir has killed in the cave (ch. 66).
[352] In most other cave scenes, the protagonist finds and collects riches in the cave. In the Sandhaugar episode, however, the saga does not specify what valuables Grettir plunders.
[353] *GS*, ÍF 7: 215. "a giant… monstrous in size" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 154).
[354] At least after his stay at Sandhaugar in Bárðardalr it was thought that Grettir did a lot to clear the land of ogres and evildoers: "Þótti Grettir þar gǫrt hafa mikla landhreinsun" (*GS*, ÍF 7: 218). "Grettir was considered to have rid the place of a great evil" (*GS*, Scudder 1997, 155).
[355] Ármann Jakobsson (2009, 310 and 312) argues on the other hand that characters such as Grettir and Glámr not only move away from humanity themselves but also deprive their victims of humanity.

DRAGONS

The motif of the cave behind the waterfall can also be found in *Gull-Þóris saga* (ch. 4). This time, however, the cave is home to greedy dragons, and Gull-Þórir and his men enter the cave with the sole interest of plundering their riches. Gull-Þórir got to know the whereabouts of the dragon cave in a dream, when his long deceased ancestor, Agnarr Reginmóðsson, appeared to him (ch. 3). Agnarr stops Gull-Þórir breaking into and plundering his (i.e. Agnarr's) burial mound and in return he tells Gull-Þórir of a man called Valr. Valr owns an extraordinary amount of gold and other valuables, and together with his sons he retreated to a cave at Dumbshaf. There they all have turned into dragons and are still lying on their riches. In addition to an itinerary describing the way leading to the cave, Agnarr offers Gull-Þórir a drink, which should protect him from the dragons' attacks. Gull-Þórir and his companions set out to Dumbshaf straight away and find the right place: "Þar fellr á mikil í gljúfrunum fram af bergi ok allt út í sjó."[356] Unlike Grettir, the men do not have to dive through the waterfall but prepare to swing to the cave entrance with the help of a cut tree to which they attach a rope. Gull-Þórir is the first who dares to swing, lightly clad like Grettir, through the waterfall.[357] Together with his men he attacks the dragons, but the beasts leave the cave and fly away through the waterfall. Upon witnessing this, the men who have stayed behind are convinced, like the priest in Grettir's case, that their companions inside the cave are dead. This is not the case though: Gull-Þórir and his men collect as many treasures as possible during the next three days and bring them back to the camp.

These passages of *Gull-Þóris saga* work intensively with the notion of fate and the element of foreshadowing future events. Especially in the context of fate, it is doubtful to what extent the concept of liminality still applies. Can liminality influence or be part of developments that are bound to happen anyway because of fate? Indeed, Gull-Þórir changes in character but these changes are not triggered by a liminal experience but after the dream of Agnarr. The first significant alteration in Gull-Þórir's disposition is noticed by his men just before he enters the dragons' cave: "Þeir fundu, at Þórir var allr maðr annarr en hann hafði verit."[358] This as well as the later transformations of Gull-Þórir's personality are not tied to his stay in the cave but rather to Agnarr's drink, which Gull-Þórir finishes completely against Agnarr's prohibition of taking the last sip and the prophecy that such a trespassing will turn against him (ch. 3). Most likely Gull-Þórir enters the dragons' abode driven by the prospect of

[356] *GÞs*, ÍF 13: 186. "A great stream was flowing down the ravine in the face of the cliff and all the way to the sea" (*GÞs*, Maxwell 1997, 340).

[357] "Þá skaut hann [Gull-Þórir] spjótinu yfir ána ok festi þat öðrumegin árinnar í viðinum. Eptir þat fór hann í festina ok lét línuna draga sik af berginu undir forsinn" (*GÞs*, ÍF 13: 187). "Then he threw the harpoon over the river and into some wood on the other side of the waterfall. Afterwards he tied the rope around himself and lowered himself down off the cliff and in behind the waterfall" (*GÞs*, Maxwell 1997, 340).

[358] *GÞs*, ÍF 13: 187. "They felt that Thorir had become a completely different man from what he had been before" (*GÞs*, Maxwell 1997, 340).

gaining heaps of gold and other valuables. As early as in chapter 3, the greedy dragons at Dumbshaf are a clear foreboding of Gull-Þórir's fate.

Towards the end of the saga, Gull-Þórir is said to undergo further changes in character as he grows older. In chapter 19, Gull-Þórir has a fight with Steinólfr lági Hrólfsson and receives some serious injuries which heal quickly but at the same time his mood changes for the worse (again): "En eptir þenna fund tók Þórir skapskipti; gerðist hann þá mjök illr viðfangs."[359] And one chapter later the saga re-emphasises this transformation by saying: "Þórir bjó á Þórisstöðum langa ævi ok átti annat bú í Hlíð. Hann gerðist illr ok ódæll viðskiptis æ því meir, er hann eldist meir."[360] Triggered by a message about his son Guðmundr's alleged death, Þórir's transformations ultimately culminate in his disappearance. Like Bárðr Snæfellsáss,[361] Gull-Þórir changes for good and ultimately retreats when he is convinced that his child has died. Rumours start going around that Gull-Þórir has met the same fate as Valr and his sons before him and has transformed into a dragon, sitting on his gold:

> Hann hvarf á brott frá búi sínu, ok vissi engi maðr, hvat af honum væri orðit eðr hann kom niðr, en þat hafa menn fyrir satt, at hann hafi at dreka orðit ok hafi lagizt á gullkistur sínar. Helzt þat ok lengi síðan, at menn sá dreka fljúga ofan um þeim megin frá Þórisstöðum ok Gullfors er kallaðr ok yfir fjörðinn í fjall þat, er stendr yfir bænum í Hlíð.[362]

The most remarkable aspect of *Gull-Þóris saga*, however, is the fact that Gull-Þórir becomes probably the only dragon (in the *Íslendingasögur*) which is 'reported' to dwell in Iceland. While the cave of the dragon Valr and his sons was situated in the mystical faraway land of Dumbshaf, Gull-Þórir turns into a dragon close to his farm in Hlíð and the settlers in the neighbourhood see him fly. In the corpus studied here, ogres of all kinds (*jǫtnar, þursar,*

[359] *GÞs*, ÍF 13: 223. "Yet after this battle, Thorir's mood changed. He became very hard to deal with" (*GÞs*, Maxwell 1997, 358).

[360] *GÞs*, ÍF 13: 226. "Thorir remained at Thorisstadir until old age, and kept another farm at Hlid. He became meaner and harder to deal with the older he grew" (*GÞs*, Maxwell 1997, 359).

[361] As a matter of fact, *GÞs* shares some elements with *BáS*. Along with the main protagonist's withdrawal from the human world, it is first and foremost the end of *BáS* that comes to mind when reading *GÞs*. When Þórir starts exploring the dragons' cave (ch. 4), he soon calls on his (pagan) ancestor Agnarr for help. Agnarr shows his presence by sending "elding mikil frá hellisdyrunum" (*GÞs*, ÍF 13: 188). "Lightning flashed from the cave's entrance" (*GÞs*, Maxwell 1997, 340). This puts the dragons temporarily to sleep. This element of a protagonist in distress calling for help in an enclosed space strikes a familiar note with *BáS*. When Gestr Bárðarson enters the burial mound of Raknarr, he soon calls on his father for assistance but as Bárðr does not have the power to help, Gestr calls on (the Christian) Óláfr Tryggvason for support. Like Agnarr, Óláfr appears "með ljósi miklu" (*BáS*, ÍF 13: 168. "with a great light" *BáS*, Anderson 1997, 264) and so paralyses Raknarr and the other mound-dwellers. In either case the sudden light has the desired effect, irrespective of whether it is of pagan or of Christian origin.

[362] *GÞs*, ÍF 13: 226. "He disappeared from his farm. No one knew what happened to him or where he ended up, but people believe that he turned into a dragon, and lay down on his gold chests. It also happened for a long time afterwards that people saw a dragon flying down from the mountains above Thorisstadir – at the place called Gullfoss (Gold Falls) – and over the fjord to the mountain that rises above the farm at Hlid" (*GÞs*, Maxwell 1997, 359).

riser, troll, aptrganga, …) make their appearance in relative proximity to the protagonist's place of origin as well as settlements in Iceland and mainland Scandinavia respectively.

It is noteworthy that the younger sagas of the selected *Íslendingasögur* here feature two different approaches to the portrayal of preternatural beings. On the one hand, the supernatural is encountered close to homesteads, the figurative centre of the narrative. This is the case in *Bárðar saga*, where the Otherworld is accessed via the Snæfellsnes mountain range; in *Gull-Þóris saga* the second dragon cave is in the vicinity of settlements; and in *Kjalnesinga saga* even Dofri's home in the Norwegian mountain seems relatively close to the social-structural. On the other hand, *Jǫkuls þáttr Búasonar* (*KjS*) and *Bárðar saga* make use of a more fairy tale like element, namely the long journey leading the hero to the home of the supernatural being, which is located at the very margin of the world. While *Jǫkuls þáttr Búasonar* pretends to send Jǫkull to Greenland by accident, Gestr Bárðarson (*BáS*) has to endure a seemingly endless journey (ch. 18 and 19) in order to reach the revenant Raknarr's grave mound. The audience is presented with typical fairy tale or folk legend elements: Gestr and his party first have to sail for a very long time until they reach Helluland. Then they cross a glacier and a lava field on foot, only to spot a long reef leading out to an island,[363] on which the grave mound is situated. This incredibly long and strenuous journey to meet a revenant, a being that is more often encountered close to settlements, stands in contrast to Gull-Þórir who turns into a dragon in Iceland nearby his home. However, no matter how close the realm of the supernatural is, the saga hero has to overcome a natural impediment to reach the world beyond, be it fog and bad weather, journey on sea or a waterfall. Caves, therefore, are not necessarily far away from society but can be difficult to access.

From a liminal point of view, the cave scenes in *Gull-Þóris saga* prove partly similar to Jǫkull's trip to Greenland. Indeed, the saga tells of Þórir's transformation from a regular saga hero to a vicious man who eventually ends up as a greedy dragon safeguarding his gold. The liminal quality of changes is on the one hand self-evident, but on the other hand these continuous changes have been triggered by Agnarr's potion, which is handed to the hero in a dream. Similar to Jǫkull's magic ring, it is highly debatable whether Gull-Þórir's transformation is not sparked off by human liminality but rather by some sort of supernatural power which is beyond human influence. Indeed, out of the seven liminal qualities only the intrusion of otherness and irreversibility are truly met; the others either do not apply or are questionable, such as the abovementioned aspect of transformation or spatial segregation.

The discussion has revealed that neither glaciers nor caves are genuinely liminal places in the *Íslendingasögur*. The caves play a minor role in the narrative and immediately recede into the background. Whether the cave is described at first or not, it never gains importance for or influence on the protagonist or on the passage in question. Despite featuring some scattered

[363] "Út til hólmsins lá eitt rif mjótt ok langt" (*BáS*, ÍF 13:165). "Out to the island lay a reef, narrow and long" (*BáS*, Anderson 1997, 263). The reef or isthmus leading from the shore to the island is actually what the second meaning of Old Norse *þreskǫldr* refers to.

liminal qualities, the caves are not places of a liminal transformation but remain either strongly rooted in the structural human world, or are part of the realm of the supernatural, which does not equate to liminality but constitutes a world of its own. The most liminal places are those between the two spheres such as Rauðr's farm in *Kjalnesinga saga* or the tunnel in *Droplaugarsona saga*. These liminal places are literally non-descript and thus pass almost unnoticed.

The distribution of caves is partly reminiscent of the situation for the glaciers, that is, caves clearly appear more often in younger sagas. Among the older sagas it is only *Droplaugarsona saga* that briefly mentions Grímr Droplaugarson's cave, and the classical sagas feature only a single cave scene, namely in *Eyrbyggja saga* when Bjǫrn retreats to a cave. While Bjǫrn's temporary stay is forced by the supernatural, the reason for Grímr's dwelling in the cave lies in his outlawry. Younger sagas on the other hand (*BáS, GS, KjS, GÞs*) make use of caves far more often and predominantly turn them into the home of preternatural beings. These supernatural caves are in some cases astonishingly close to a settled area, as for example the ogres at Sandhaugar or Gull-Þórir the dragon at Hlíð.

It is also noteworthy that with the exception of Bjǫrn in *Eyrbyggja saga*, the majority of the cave scenes force criminals of some kind, often outlaws, to stay in caves temporarily. Considering that it is mostly giants and trolls which are portrayed as cave-dwellers, one might wonder whether the sagas – intentionally or unintentionally – put criminals and ogres on a similar level of social (non-)acceptability so that both groups are pushed to the margins of society and into the wilderness. This leads to the conclusion, or rather confirms the repeatedly made observation, that the cave does not act as a liminal place but belongs to the wilderness and is dominated by the supernatural.

5 EXPERIENCING LIMINALITY IN THE *ÍSLENDINGASÖGUR*

So far, the discussion has revealed that the task of tracing explicit cases of liminality proves to be rather complex. Many saga episodes do not allow for a classical straightforward characterisation as being liminal; rather they show some aspects of liminality. Figure 5.1 below gives an overview of all 70 saga-examples discussed with regard to the distribution of the seven initially introduced liminal qualities. From left to right there are the following columns: 1) the different kinds of places, at times with a specification in brackets; 2) the abbreviation of the saga and the chapter number of the episode in question; 3) a very short summary of the episode; 4-10) the seven liminal criteria based on van Gennep and Turner; 11) the category 'liminal points' shows how many liminal qualities can be found in an episode. Note that it has only been indicated whether a criterion applies to an episode or not, but it is not graded to what extent the criterion is met. This category offers only a preliminary comparison on the axis of liminality, but it does not in any way replace individual, textual analyses.

Decisions on the individual criteria have been made on the following basis:

Spatial segregation from daily life	A spatial segregation requires that an activity is deliberately separated from everyday surroundings. Regarding islands, spatial segregation does not automatically apply unless the spatial distance is explicitly emphasised by the narrative.
Momentary suspension of daily life	An event or activity suspends daily life when it clearly takes place outside structure. Such instances can include events outside of daily routine or already made plans, or in cases of obscure temporal dimensions.
Sense of otherness intruding	This rather open category is ticked if some sort of magic and/or supernatural element appears in an episode. This criterion might appear somewhat inconsequential since it has been argued against confusing liminality with magic and the supernatural. Nevertheless, liminal procedures (can) involve some connection to the beyond. – The decision of what is magic or supernatural is obviously made on the basis of modern perceptions.

Invisibility or the individual is presumed dead	The criterion of invisibility or presumed death is considered applicable if a figure is made invisible to others, be it by retreating or by being removed from daily structural surroundings for some time.
Changes and transformations are triggered	This criterion proves especially difficult because changes of some kind are taking place in almost every narrated scene. Hence it is only ticked if a change or a transformation of a figure is deliberately intended, either by himself or a third party. After long consideration, all killings are included in this column.
Paradoxes and ambiguities	No special comments necessary.
Irreversibility	The question of irreversibility is a rather philosophical one since no action is truly irreversible. In the present context, this criterion is marked if a figure experiences – be it by himself or a third party – serious damage or a change of a sort that lastingly influences his life.

Figure 5.1 (below): Overview of all the discussed *Íslendingasögur*-episodes and their liminal qualities.

place	saga, ch.	scene	spat. segregation from daily life	momentary suspension of daily life	sense of other-ness intruding	invisibility or presumed death	changes/trans-formations	paradoxes, ambiguities	irreversibility	liminal points
thresholds (*þreskǫldr*)	*FbS* 23	Gríma hides Þormóðr with the help of magic and she herself stays sitting on the threshold			●	●		●		3
	FbS 3	While standing in the doorway, the farmer Jǫðurr is speared by Þorgeirr.					●		●	2
	FbS 13	While standing in the doorway, the farmer Þórir is speared by Þorgeirr.					●		●	2
	FbS 24	Þorgeirr attempts to spear Ljótr, who is standing in the doorway.					●			1
	EbS 43	The farmhand Egill sterki falls over a threshold and thus cannot execute the killing which would have made him a free man.	●	●[1]			●	●	●	5
	GS 24	Grettir is attacked in a pub but the attackers are defeated and trip backwards over a threshold.					●		●	2
	GS 45	Grettir's brother Atli is killed while standing on a threshold.					●	●[2]	●	3
threshold (varia 1)	*EbS* 20	Katla hides her son Oddr with the help of magic and makes him invisible to his persecutors three times. Eventually the persecutors get hold of Katla and Oddr and kill them.			●	●	●	●	●	5

[1] Temporal suspension and spatial segretation are ticked because Egill sterki is ordered to do the killing during the *leikar* at Leikskálavellir.

[2] The situation is ambiguous because Atli is standing on the threshold and thus is situated between indoor and outdoor spaces.

place	saga, ch.	scene	spat. segregation from daily life	momentary suspension of daily life	sense of other-ness intruding	invisibility or presumed death	changes/trans-formations	paradoxes, ambiguities	irreversibility	liminal points
threshold (varia 2)	*EbS* 26	The slave Svartr inn sterki is promised his freedom if he kills Snorri goði. But Svartr tumbles in the doorway of Helgafell and is caught.	●	●			●	●	●	5
	LxdS 17	Víga-Hrappr is buried under the threshold according to his wish.			●		●	●		3
corpse-door	*EbS* 33	Arnkell removes the dead body of Þórólfr bægifótr from the house.		●	●[3]		●	●	●	5
	EgS 58	Egill removes the dead body of Skalla-Grímr from the house.		●					●	2
door-ways	*GS* 35	Grettir fights with Glámr in the doorway of Þórhallsstaðir.			●		●	●	●	4
	GS 65	Grettir fights with the *trollkona* in the doorway of Sandhaugar.			●		●		●	3
dyradómr	*EbS* 18	A door-court is announced for settling a horse theft.		●						1
	EbS 55	A door-court is held to ban the revenants from Fróðá.		●	●		●	●	●	5
islands (property)	*EbS* 2-3	Þorólfr Mostrarskegg owns a farm on a Norwegian island.								-
	EgS 43	King Eiríkr owns a farm on the Norwegian island Atley.								-
	GS 17	Liege has his farm on the Norwegian island Háramarsey.								-
	GS 50	Farmer grazes a bull on the Óláfseyjar.								-
	GS 71	Farmers use Drangey for grazing sheep.								-

[3] The sense of otherness intrudes in this scene because Þórólfr's death appears "óþokki" (*EbS*, ÍF 4: 92) to the people and Arnkell offers his father the *nábjargir* so as to protect the people against the dead's evil glance and to prevent Þórólfr from turning into a revenant.

place	saga, ch.	scene	spat. segregation from daily life	momentary suspension of daily life	sense of otherness intruding	invisibility or presumed death	changes/transformations	paradoxes, ambiguities	irreversibility	liminal points
islands (raids)	*GS* 1	Plundering and ransacking on various islands in Northern Europe								-
	EgS 60	Raids in England and Scotland								-
	EbS 29	Raids on the Orkney islands, Hebrides and the Isle of Man								-
islands (*hólmganga*)	*EbS* 8	Þórólfr bægifótr fights a duel against Úlfar on an island in Álptafjǫrðr.	●	●			●		●	4
	LvS 16	Þórir Helgason challenges Guðmundr ríki to a duel on the island in Øxará.								-[4]
	EgS 65	Egill steps in for a young lad and duels Ljótr the *berserkr*.	●	●[5]	●		●		●	5
islands (*níðstǫng*)	*EgS* 57	Egill erects a *níðstǫng* against King Eiríkr and queen Gunnhildr of Norway.	●	●	●		●	●	●	6
islands (*Alþingi*)	varia	*Alþingi* as a figurative island: during this non-structural time decisions are made which crucially shape daily structural life.	●	●			●	●	●	5
islands (exile/refuge 1)	*EgS* 4	Norwegian families seek exile in Ireland, Katanes, the Orkney islands and the Hebrides.					●		●	2
	EgS 45	Egill hides on a small island in Norway and the king has him searched for on the wrong island.			●					1
	FbS 23	Þormóðr retreats to a skerry after a fight, 1.								-

[4] As this duel is never fought, no liminal criterion is ticked for this example.

[5] The criterion of otherness is ticked because Ljótr is a *berserkr* and thus has superhuman powers.

place	saga, ch.	scene	spat. segregation from daily life	momentary suspension of daily life	sense of other-ness intruding	invisibility or presumed death	changes/trans-formations	paradoxes, ambiguities	irreversibility	liminal points
islands (exile/refuge 2)	*FbS* 24	Þormóðr retreats to a skerry after a fight, 2.								-
	EbS 29	Men are shipwrecked on a small skerry and buy a rescue boat for a lot of money.	●							1
islands (social network)	*NjS* 154	On their sailing trip, men make a stopover on Friðarey to get the latest news.								-
	EgS 57	Egill sails to the island Vitar to get the latest news.								-
	EgS 22	Farmers come rowing from different islands to assist Þórólfr Egils-son in a battle.								-
sea (sailing trips)	*NjS* 88	Þráinn Sigfússon sails from Norway to Iceland after having tricked jarl Hákon and hidden Viga-Hrappr on his ship.								-
	DlsS 1	Ketill Þrymr Þiðranda-son travels from Reyðarfjǫrðr to Ko-nungahella in Sweden.								-
	LxdS 11	Hǫskuldr Dala-Kollsson makes a sailing trip from Iceland to Bergen in Norway.								-
	KRS 12	Bárðr sails from Greenland back to Norway to ask the king for advice.								-
	KRS 14	Bárðr is on his way back from Norway to Greenland.								-
	JþB 1	Jǫkull Búason accidentally sails to Greenland after having killed his father.	●	●	●					3
	LxdS 21	Óláfr pái sails to Ireland to meet his grandfather, the king.	●		●		●	●	●	5

place	saga, ch.	scene	spat. segregation from daily life	momentary suspension of daily life	sense of other-ness intruding	invisibility or presumed death	changes/trans-formations	paradoxes, ambiguities	irreversibility	liminal points
glaciers (landscape)	*FbS* 23	Description of the location of Gríma's and Gamli's farm								-
	EgS 28	Skalla-Grímr inspects his *landnám.*								-
	KRS 6	Description of Króka-Refr's settlement in Greenland								-
	NjS 124 126 131 145 149	Repeated reference to Eyjafjallajökull as point of orientation								-
	HsF 3	Einarr rides along glaciers hoping to find runaway horses.								-
	DlsS 14	Ingjaldr travels along glaciers in order to get to Hornafjǫrðr.								-
glaciers (setting 1)	*GS* 57	Grettir follows Hall-mundr (aka. Loptr) to Balljǫkull and stays with him for a while.	●		●					2
	GS 62	The outlaw Grímr meets and stays with Hallmundr.	●		●		●[6]			3
	GS 60	Grettir spends winter in Þórisdalr.	●		●			●[7]		3
	BáS 6	Bárðr retreats from the human world into the glacier.	●		●		●[8]			3
	BáS 9	Reminiscent of Óðinn, Bárðr appears on the glacier.			●					1
	BáS 10	On his way to the Yule feast, Tungu-Oddr en-counters Bárðr in the fog in the mountains.	●	●	●					3

[6] For Grímr the stay at Hallmundr's cave changes his life because he marries Hallmundr's daughter.

[7] It can be considered paradoxical or at least weird and unreasonable that Grettir leaves Þórisdalr although it is an utterly peaceful place where he is neither found nor persecuted.

[8] Bárðr's decision for retreating into the mountains is triggered by his mourning over the loss of his daughter Helga.

place	saga, ch.	scene	spat. segregation from daily life	momentary suspension of daily life	sense of other-ness intruding	invisibility or presumed death	changes/trans-formations	paradoxes, ambiguities	irreversibility	liminal points
glaciers (setting 2)	*BáS* 14-16	Þórðr Þorbjarnarson is looking for his sheep in the fog and encounters the vicious *þurs*, Kolbjǫrn.	●		●					2
	BáS 8	Ingjaldr is in distress at sea because of bad weather caused by magic. Bárðr appears and saves him.			●					1
caves (hide-outs)	*FbS* 23	Þormóðr is brought to a cave after a fight.	●							1
	GS 58	Grettir stays in a cave which is difficult to reach and spot from the main path.	●							1
	EbS 40	Bjǫrn has to stay a few nights in a cave in the highlands.	●	●	●					3
	KjS 4	Búi is brought to a cave after having destroyed the temple and killed a man.	●							1
	DlsS 14	Grímr hides in a cave and digs a tunnel to his wife's bed.	●							1
caves (supernatural sphere 1)	*BáS* 1	Bárðr Snæfellsáss is raised by Dofri the *bergbúi*.	●		●		●		●	4
	KjS 13-14	Búi Andríðsson arrives at Dofri's in the mountains in order to get hold of a valuable game board. Búi spends some time there and fathers a child with Dofri's daughter Fríðr.	●	●	●				●	4
	JþB 2	Jǫkull and Úlfr arrive at the cave of Gnípa's family, and they immediately kill all her relatives upon her request.	●[9]		●		●		●	4

[9] The quality of spatial segregation is a complex decision in this case: while Greenland and hence the cave is far away from Iceland, where the original centre of the saga (*KjS*) lies, the cave is relatively close to Jǫkull's new dwelling in Greenland from where he sets off.

place	saga, ch.	scene	spatial segregation	momentary suspension of daily life	sense of otherness	invisibility or presumed death	changes/trans-formations	paradoxes, ambiguities	irreversibility	liminal points
caves (supernatural sphere 2)	*JþB* 3	Jǫkull accompanies Gnípa to a troll cave to celebrate Yule there. Previously, Gnípa gives Jǫkull a ring which makes him invisible. Thanks to the invisibility, Jǫkull can kill several *trǫll.*	●	●	●	(●)[10]	●	(●)	●	5 (7)
	GS 66	Grettir fights the *jǫtunn* in the cave close to Sandhaugar	●		●	●	●		●	5
	GÞs 4	Gull-Þórir and his men cross the waterfall and enter the dragon cave of Valr and his sons. The men attack the beasts and collect as much of their riches as possible.	●		●		●		●	4
	GÞs 20	Gull-Þórir, who has turned into a vicious old man, retreats into the mountains. People say that he has turned into a dragon as well, and he safeguards his gold.			●		●		●	3

After the detailed discussion of the episodes in the previous chapters, the focus lies now on the overall impressions and statements that can be made on the basis of figure 5.1. While some of the statements to follow have already been made or have begun to appear during the close readings, other findings and observations are rather surprising and do not answer to (some) initially held expectations and convictions about liminality and its appearance in the *Íslendingasögur*.

Perhaps most seminal is the insight that none of the spaces focused on is genuinely liminal, and that there is no correlation between a place and a specific event or action and liminality, with the exception of the original form and understanding of *hólmganga*, the duel.

[10] As discussed in the previous chapter, the aspects of invisibility and paradoxes depend on whether the invisibility is considered liminal or only the effect of the ring. In view of the general argumentation of the thesis against mixing the supernatural and liminality, I strongly suggest that the invisibility and consequently the paradoxical aspect are explained by the magical ring alone and thus do not count as liminal.

However, these sweeping statements need to be put into perspective: on the one hand, the finding is *not* astonishing when seen through Gennepian and Turnerian glasses because both scholars have emphasised in their work that no place is inherently liminal, but only occasionally so, depending on the actions or rituals taking place. On the other hand, the finding *is* astonishing when expecting results in line with the Western European topos-discussions of the selected places. Regarding the present focus on the cross-section of places and liminality, we repeatedly experience such dichotomies because the settings in the sagas do not correlate with the topoi usually found in Western European literature and folklore. This 'outsider perspective' clashes however with the Old Norse point of view which has impregnated its perceptions and values on the sagas. So far, this dichotomy has most explicitly crystallised in the discussion on the traditions informing the discourse of islands. Especially regarding the early perception of Iceland, the European and the Scandinavian view on the North and on islands contrast strongly: while the tradition initiated by ancient Greek texts consider islands have either positive or negative connotations, the Norse scribes portray islands to a large extent as unstigmatised and fairly neutral settings, which host both ordinary as well as unusual events and actions.

This dichotomy, however, is the 'problem' of a modern audience whose education is strongly influenced by the teachings of the long-standing classical tradition and thus they hold certain expectations about the saga narratives. Inevitably, Old Norse texts are read and interpreted through the glasses of Western European literary and cultural traditions. We often run into the danger of not reading texts carefully enough and simply assuming that, for example, islands and the sea must be liminal places or at least settings of extraordinary activities because we have experienced this hitherto. We must approach the sagas, therefore, – and indeed any old text – more attentively and neutrally and should not hastily impose our ideas upon them.

The overall distribution of the examples on the 14 selected sagas (cf. figure 5.2 below) shows that a few sagas provide numerous examples in several spatial categories while other narratives are represented with one or two episodes only, or at times none at all. Although the portrayal of all 14 sagas was the aim, the resulting distribution is imbalanced because of the different characteristics and focuses of the sagas. In addition, many more examples for all spatial categories could have been included but a selection had to be made in view of the study's scope.

Íslendingasögur	**Number of liminal examples discussed**
Grettis s. Ásmundarsonar	13
Eyrbyggja saga	11
Egils s. Skalla-Grímssonar	10
Fóstbræðra saga	8
Bárðar s. Snæfellssáss	6
Kjalnesinga saga (incl. *Jǫkuls þáttr Búasonar*)	5
Króka-Refs saga	3
Laxdœla saga	3
(Brennu-)Njáls saga	3
Droplaugarsona saga	3
Gull-Þóris saga	2
Hrafnkels s.Freysgoða	1
Ljósvetninga saga	1
Þórðar saga hreðu	-

Figure 5.2 Overview of how many examples have been discussed from each saga.

On a rather general level, the distribution of examples appears balanced in the sense that sagas from all three periods of writing (i.e. early, classical, post-classical) are represented as well as sagas from all corners of Iceland. Neither a writing period nor a main setting in one of the four parts of Iceland is preferred, perhaps with the exception of the east of Iceland which is currently only represented through *Droplaugarsona saga* and *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, as *Þórðar saga hreðu* does not feature a single liminal criterion.

Most stunning about figure 5.1 is perhaps its emptiness. None of the examples listed features all seven characteristics, and 25 out of the 70 examples do not feature any of the seven liminal criteria at all. It is first and foremost the categories of islands, trips on sea and glaciers (i.e. landscape descriptions involving glaciers) which show differently than a modern audience may have expected. Nevertheless, liminal actions can and do happen at these settings. There is Egill's erection of the *níðstǫng* on an island (*EgS*, 57); and Óláfr pái sails to Ireland to meet his grandfather, king Mýrkjartan, in order to become acknowledged as a royal descendant (*LxdS*, 21).

In the context of all episodes, no matter how many liminal qualities they feature, a second astonishing observation can be made, namely, that the settings do not play as prominent a role in an episode as it has often been assumed. Instead of crucially influencing or looming over a scene, the setting soon recedes into the background or is completely ignored once it has briefly been introduced and described. In many cases it is easy to ignore the setting and simply focus on the social interactions and plot alone.[11] This gives the impression that the

[11] When ignoring the saga setting, the saga narratives are at times reminiscent of the utterly minimalistic stage-like set of Lars von Trier's film *Dogville* (2003). Instead of a 3d-setting, the outlines of the houses and the streets are drawn on a dark wooden floor with white colour and thus give the impression of children having drawn something on the floor for their games.

sagas do not care that much about the setting of an episode or a whole narrative. Consequently, the question arises how important physical (and geographical) space actually is in the *Íslendingasögur*.

In the wake of the *spatial turn* within the Humanities, scholars have focused their attention on space and place in all kinds of disciplines and contexts. It has commonly been held that because of space being one of the two main dimensions in human perception, it must play an important role in narratives. On the one hand, this point of view is confirmed by the *Íslendingasögur*'s overwhelming and unprecedented wealth of rather precise locations, both in space and time. Not only do they render the impression of the sagas as being historical and providing highly accurate information on spatial (and temporal) location, they also anchor the narratives both in the landscape and hence in people's memory. This sense of realism has stimulated various scholars to map single episodes or even whole sagas so as to get a better overview of events and trips. Most exhaustive in this regard is Emily Lethbridge's webpage *Saga Map* that visualises and interlinks all the places mentioned in the *Íslendingasögur*.

On the other hand, and contrary to expectations, the findings of this thesis suggest that in the case of the Old Norse *Íslendingasögur* the role and importance of (material) space should be reconsidered. On closer inspection, the introduction of various natural and culturally shaped places and the illusion of realistic settings vanishes and leaves the reader with Victor Turner's (universal) social dramas floating in spacelessness. It is above all *Njáls saga* and *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* which strongly tend to do away with material space and instead focus almost exclusively on social interactions. Although both sagas are set in a particular area of Iceland and it can be retraced how and where the saga characters travel, the scattered landscape descriptions are hardly given any attention and do not influence the plot. Saga plots, generally speaking, revolve around topics which are not specific to medieval Iceland but touch on basic human issues, needs and concerns. It is thus relatively easy to relate to the sagas and to detect similarities to one's own experiences, almost regardless of spatial and temporal distances. Hence, neglecting particular physical spaces does not limit the understanding of the *Íslendingasögur* but sharpens the perception of the portrayal and exploration of social interactions.

Being situated somewhere between space and spacelessness, the *Íslendingasögur* entertain a rather split relationship towards physical space: on one hand we come across precise locations, but at the same time, the settings are almost always pushed back in favour of the plot. This relationship can certainly be termed paradoxical as well as ambiguous but I refrain from calling it *liminal* even though this characterisation certainly suggests itself.

The compilation of data showing how often each of the seven criteria is met (figure 5.3 below) is interesting but tempts one to draw misleading conclusions because the contexts are not taken into account. It is therefore not safe to assume that a high number in the table

represents a high degree of liminality. As figure 5.1 above shows, many saga-episodes feature only a few criteria that are not embedded in the context of liminality.

Liminal criteria	Appearances in fig. 5.1
spatial segregation from daily life	26
momentary suspension of daily life	15
sense of otherness intruding	28
invisibility or individual presumed dead	3
changes/transformations taking place	27
paradoxes and ambiguities	13
irreversibility	25

Figure 5.3 Overview of how often each of the seven liminal criteria appears in the episodes discussed.

Of great interest in the present study is the fact that spatial segregation has been observed in 26 cases. Even though it would be most appealing to conclude that one third of the examples are set in liminal spaces, the table actually 'merely' states that these events unfold outside of the daily surroundings or a strictly demarcated place. The importance of the setting is also relativised by the fact that the places discussed often recede into the background after the stage for an episode has been set. The focus of the scene is then shifted to the social interactions.

A true surprise, however, are the 28 examples in the category of otherness. In many cases the sense of otherness shows predominantly in interactions with the supernatural, be it by meeting preternatural beings or performances of magic. Once again it should be emphasised that otherness or the supernatural must not mistakenly be read as direct indicators of liminality. The supernatural can contribute to a liminal phase but it is certainly not the sole deciding factor.

The categories of change and transformation closely followed by irreversibility appear very often. Again, this is not necessarily an indication of liminality. Every narrative involves a change of some kind (e.g. homicide), which does not necessarily trigger changes as experienced in liminal phases. What is more, a Gennepian or Turnerian liminal transformation would inevitably include the presence of paradoxical or ambiguous elements. As figure 5.3 reveals, the presence of paradoxes and ambiguities and the category of change differs considerably and does not suggest a direct correlation between these two, or rather three, categories (i.e. change/transformation, irreversibility, paradoxes/ambiguities).

The distribution of the liminal points of all the episodes is shown in figure 5.4 below. It goes without saying that literature is not meant to be read and judged on the basis of distributed points. Here the liminal points have been introduced to facilitate the comparison of the saga-episodes discussed. As the close readings in chapter 4 have demonstrated, only individual analyses can help to crystallize what liminal qualities appear in an episode. In addition, the insights gained fluctuate depending on the point of view assumed for the

interpretation. Therefore, some of the liminal qualities indicated in the table are debatable and their applicability depends on the reading of a scene.

Amount of the liminal points fulfilled	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
Number of episodes in relation to the liminal points (70 episodes in total)	25	10	7	11	6	10	1	0

Figure 5.4 Overview of the distribution of liminal points of all the examples discussed.

The distribution shows that the question of liminality in the sagas is not a straightforward yes/no-issue. Both the introduction of the liminal points as well as the distribution of the points give rise to the question whether Old Norse texts in general, and the *Íslendingasögur* in particular, should be viewed as displaying a spectrum of liminality rather than a rigid binary. Indeed, literary studies have seen an increase in spectrums of categories which challenge or even replace previous, strict categorisation. A spectrum of liminality could resemble and maybe intersect with other spectrums and scales such as the flexible understanding of gender or monstrosity.

As promising as the idea of a spectrum is, just as quickly a new challenge confronts us, namely the question of what the prerequisites might be to classify something as liminal. While a binary system alleviates this problem, when it comes to a spectrum – as in the present case – one must decide whether zero qualities equals non-liminality and seven qualities is utterly liminal, or whether a dividing line can sensibly be drawn somewhere in-between. Apart from the fact that one third of the examples feature no liminal quality at all, the astonishingly low number of episodes with four liminal points is eye-catching and rather difficult to explain. These six episodes are most diverse in nature: Grettir fights Glámr (*GS*, 35), Þórólfr bægifótr fights a duel with Úlfar (*EbS*, 8), Bárðr is raised by Dofri (*BáS*, 1), Búi stays at Dofri's over Yule (*KjS*, 13-14), Jǫkull and Úlfr kill Gnípa's family (*JþB*, 2), Gull-Þórir and his men rob the dragon Valr of some of his riches (*GÞs*, 4). It is not overly clear whether these scenes should be considered liminal (or not, respectively); it can easily be argued either way. I thus consider four liminal points as the dividing line and argue that only saga-scenes that have been rated with five or six points are liminal, though varying in degree.

The dividing line, however, does not solve the situation. When it comes to the degree of liminality it must be asked what criteria must be fulfilled in order to reach a particular degree of liminality. If a liminal episode meets five out of the seven criteria, does it matter *what* liminal criteria can be found in the episode? If so, an (ascending) order of the liminal qualities is required. Attempting to carve out the most liminal qualities in the saga episodes, the instances that feature five or six liminal points will be revisited:

Scenes in the *Íslendingasögur*	**spatial segregation from daily life**	**momentary suspension of daily life**	**sense of otherness intruding**	**invisibility or individual presumed dead**	**changes/transformations**	**paradoxes and ambiguities**	**irreversibility**	**liminal points**
The farmhand Egill sterki falls over a threshold and cannot execute the killing which would have made him a free man. *EbS*, 43	●	●			●	●	●	5
Katla hides her son Oddr with the help of magic and makes him invisible. Eventually the persecutors get hold of Katla and Oddr and kill them. *EbS*, 20			●	●	●	●	●	5
The slave Svartr inn sterki is promised his freedom if he kills Snorri goði. But Svartr tumbles in the doorway of Helgafell and is caught. *EbS*, 26	●	●			●	●	●	5
The dead body of Þórólfr bægifótr is removed from the house through a corpse-door. *EbS*, 33		●	●		●	●	●	5
Door-court to ban the revenants from Fróðá. *EbS*, 55		●	●		●	●	●	5
Egill steps in for a young lad and duels Ljótr the *berserkr*. *EgS*, 65	●	●	●		●		●	5
Egill erects a *níðstöng* on an island directed against King Eiríkr and queen Gunnhildr. *EgS*, 57	●	●	●		●	●	●	6
During the *Alþingi*, a non-structural time, decisions are made on structural, everyday life. *varia*	●	●			●	●	●	5
Óláfr pái sails to Ireland to meet his grandfather, king Mýrkjartan. *LxdS*, 21	●		●		●	●	●	5
Jǫkull accompanies Gnípa to the cave of Skrámr and kills many *trǫll*. *JþB*, 2	●	●	●		●		●	5
Grettir fights the *jǫtunn* in the cave close to Sandhaugar. *GS*, 66	●		●	●	●		●	5

Figure 5.5 Comparison of the episodes that have been rated with 5-7 liminal points.

The comparison reveals that all eleven instances feature the qualities of change and transformation as well as irreversibility. This is indeed very much in line with the anthropological background: liminality is part of a process which cannot be reversed. The criterion of paradoxes/ambiguities further illustrates that a liminal element or a liminal constellation is temporarily caught in a state of in-betweenness which seeks to be resolved. The factors of movement and transition are essential to liminality, which always seeks to flow

into a new (stable) status. One should therefore refrain from terming stable blendings of any kind (e.g. hybridity) liminal.

The factors of spatial segregation and momentary suspension of daily life show up equally often. Probably against initial expectations, yet in line with what has emerged in chapter 4, space and time are – though important – not the first and all-decisive factors when it comes to liminality. Liminality does not necessarily equate to spatial marginality. In fact, many examples are not located at a particularly remote or foreign setting but unfold fairly close to farms and very often at well-known places. Rarely, however, do they take place at the home of the episode's main character. Yet, there are dividing elements, such as thresholds, walls or waterfalls, which demarcate the place for the duration of the episode.[12] It is rather astonishing however that eight of the examples feature some kind of otherness. As already noted earlier on, the aspect of otherness calls for cautious treatment in the context of the *Íslendingasögur*, because elements of what a modern audience considers supernatural or magical need not be congruent with medieval perceptions. Our notion of (rational) reality must not be forced onto the Norse texts.

Apparently, the criterion of invisibility or presumed death is the least important as liminality does not necessarily require invisibility. When going back to van Gennep and especially Turner, this feature is only occasionally mentioned as an emphasis of the phase's in-betweenness. In the case of Katla making Oddr invisible (*EbS*, 20) and Jǫkull killing the troll with the help of the magic ring (*JþB*, 2), the criterion is only fulfilled because of the performance of magic. It is thus debatable to what extent these two examples are actually liminal. The third episode – Grettir's fight with the *jǫtunn* in the cave at Sandhaugar (*GS*, 66) – is not as much an example of invisibility but rather of presumed death. Upon seeing blood flowing down the river, the priest assumes that Grettir has been killed. Thus, the category of invisibility and presumed death does not show in a symbolical way as Turner and van Gennep described it. This does not mean, however, that it was not applicable to the *Íslendingasögur*.

Up until now the idea of a scale of liminality that is based on the distribution of the liminal points has been applied. Looking at figure 5.5, however, it seems after all that the liminal qualities are too unevenly spread to allow for a scale: changes/transformations as well as irreversibility appear eleven times; spatial segregation, temporal suspension, sense of otherness and paradoxes/ambiguities have been found eight times; and invisibility/presumed death three times. The selection of the eleven examples strongly suggests that with the exception of invisibility, all criteria are more or less equally important for the definition of liminality, even though the examples represent varying constellations of the qualities. The study has almost come full circle by moving from a yes/no-issue to the idea of a spectrum and back to a mixture of both approaches, which allows for varying constellations of liminal

[12] With regard to the temporal aspects, esp. regarding periods such as Yule etc., no bold statements are made here because not enough attention has hitherto been paid to this aspect. In the examples studied, instances of liminality are not necessarily tied to times of festivities.

qualities and at the same time suggests that episodes which feature five qualities can be considered liminal.

Returning to the initially posed question of what places tend to be liminal in the *Íslendingasögur*, the eleven examples extracted above lead to an astonishing observation: five episodes are set in close connection to a door, a threshold or a wall. It goes without saying that this insight should not be generalised to the extent that any event unfolding in the vicinity of a door or a wall is liminal. The finding suggests or rather echoes observations made at the beginning of the study: doors have a fairly high symbolic value and are used in connection with liminal phases and, on a general cultural level, with rites of passage.

It is also noteworthy that the most liminal example – Egill's *níðstǫng* (*EgS*, 57) – is set on an island, the very physical space that has mostly shown no liminal qualities at all. To what extent it is actually significant that Egill raises the *níðstǫng* on an island is debatable since the sources neither prescribe nor suggest that a *níðstǫng* should be put up on an island. More important, however, is the insight that the *Íslendingasögur* confirm van Gennep's pivoting of the sacred: none of the selected settings can sweepingly be called liminal. This can be illustrated by very similar scenes, which differ considerably regarding their liminal qualities.

The two *dyradómr*-examples offer good examples thereof: unfortunately the first *dyradómr* (*EbS*, 18) does not really take place and so does not provide much material to work from. Nevertheless, considering that this door-court should be held because of a horse theft, the juridical actions to follow would presumably be straightforward and rooted in the secular sphere. Regarding liminality, this episode merely takes place outside of daily routine, because it is an event that interrupts everyday life. The second episode (*EbS*, 55), on the other hand, not only offers the only complete *dyradómr* we know of but is also an example of liminality. The fact that a *dyradómr* is summoned does not necessarily imply that stereotypical actions unfold.

As an analogue to the *dyradómr* examples, the corpse-door episodes (*EbS*, 33 and *EgS*, 58) offer similar observations. With respect to the described proceedings and preparations of the dead bodies, the corpse-door episodes hardly differ. *Eyrbyggja saga*, however, presents the audience with the telling phrase "at ǫllum þótti óþokki á andláti hans"[13] which foreshadows the unpleasant events to follow. In contrast, taking Skalla-Grímr's body out of the house is not treated as mysterious, even though his personality is equally apt to turn him into a revenant. Despite the shared plot and settings, these two scenes have been assessed differently regarding their liminal qualities.

Earlier on in this study, Caroline Walker Bynum's criticism of Victor Turner was introduced. She argues that Turner's concept of liminality and of the rites of passage apply first and foremost to (human) male protagonists. This is also the case in the *Íslendingasögur*: the major

[13] *EbS*, ÍF 4: 92.

protagonists in the discussed episodes are almost exclusively male. Given that female figures are seldom given as much attention as men in the sagas, it might prove difficult to conduct research on the liminal experiences of women in the *Íslendingasögur*.

While the character of a saga figure is almost completely developed when the figure is first introduced, be it as a child or as an adult,[14] many of them experience difficulties in learning and adjusting to social norms and expectations: "The sagas share several ideas with rites of passage narratives (*Bildungsroman*), which tells of individuals who learn to accommodate the moral demands of their society, unattractive as these may seem in the eyes of characters who have yet to reach full maturity."[15] In addition to the endless human struggle for upward mobility and power, the process of social maturation also includes finding and coming to terms with the religious stance given the sagas' background of conversion. This blend of basic and timeless human needs, drives and ambitions not only makes the sagas timeless narratives but also stirs the fascination that the sagas attract. Torfi H. Tulinius (2000) outlines in what regard the figures of the *Íslendingasögur* have to deal with uncertain identities and struggle to shape and define their status and role: "The characters represented are religiously, socially and morally ambiguous, which is what makes them so interesting as creatures of fiction."[16]

Hence the figures of the *Íslendingasögur* represent, on a micro-level so to speak, the difficulties of Icelandic self-perception and self-presentation in the context of troublesome times of re-definition. The sagas' ambiguous temporal reference is not of absolute crucial relevance in this respect since Iceland had to (re-)define its identity both after the settlement (i.e. the narrated time) and again in the course of the upheavals of the *Sturlungaöld* (i.e. the narrative place in time). In either case, the *Íslendingasögur* act on a literary level as a medium that processes and comes to terms with a transitional time: "This creates a hesitation about the ontological status of what is portrayed, which seems also to apply to the social position of the protagonists."[17]

In view of these crucial changes which both historical Iceland as well as those that the literary figures experience(d) in the course of the Middle Ages, it is tempting to broaden the definition or scope of liminality, against all cautionary warnings that have been voiced so far. It has repeatedly been observed and demonstrated in figure 5.5 (as well as in fig. 5.1) that – irrespective of a ritual context – liminality is essentially a temporally demarcated transition from a status A to status B, which often includes or revolves around the re-establishment of a

[14] Böldl 2005, 34. Prominent examples are Grettir Ásmundarson whose behaviour strikes one as asocial, ruthless and violent from an early age (ch. 14-15), and Egill Skalla-Grímsson who is already able to compose skaldic stanzas as a toddler (ch. 3). Torfi H. Tulinius (2014, 31-32) draws attention to the fact that the saga presents parallel scenes from Egill's childhood and his old age and comments: "The stories deliberately echo each other, drawing attention to the fact that Egill's character, which was pronounced from early childhood, remains unchanged at the end of his long life."

[15] Vésteinn Ólason 1998a, 235, italics in the original.

[16] Torfi H. Tulinius 2000, 261.

[17] Torfi H. Tulinius 2000, 257.

disrupted social equilibrium. Earlier on in this study (ch. 4), it was demonstrated that especially *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Grettis saga* feature two parallel scenes which initiate and terminate respectively the main plot of the saga. While the individual scenes themselves need not be (highly) liminal, they mark the beginning and the end of a liminal phase which is characterised by hostilities, violent skirmishes, and mysterious incidents. What the community of *Eyrbyggja saga* – and indeed almost all societies the *Íslendingasögur* depict – experiences between the two *dyradómr*-scenes is actually part of a larger literary, liminal unit: In *Eyrbyggja saga* a society of recently arrived settlers increasingly organises itself in a structure which is ruled by the law and the Christian church, a process that is mirrored or foreshadowed by the second *dyradómr* that also terminates the major liminal phase.

There is a certain irony in that by establishing the *Alþingi* and introducing Christianity, the Icelandic settlers, or at least the upper class, lay the foundation for a centralised power or authority, the very reason why they initially left Norway. In Turnerian terms, the sagas echo the concept of normative communitas:[18] the Icelandic settlers aim at setting up a structure that is significantly different to what would (have) await(ed) them in Norway. But as no form of communitas can persist forever, it eventually seeks to establish some form of social structure. Accordingly, the early settlers of Iceland feel the need to find some common values and regulations which apply to all members.

Opening up from the literary level to a broader historical perspective, the *Íslendingasögur* as a genre can well be viewed as textual witnesses of a liminal phenomenon. The settlers left Norway in order to evade an imposed social structure, if we are to believe the medieval sources. They reached an uninhabited land and had, therefore, all the freedom for establishing themselves as well as to create a new alternative society. Efforts toward creating an autonomous society were made in various regards: the *Alþingi* was founded, new laws were adopted when needed, the country was divided into different sections, a new religion was introduced and ecclesiastical sees were founded. Nonetheless, various weak spots evolved and contributed to the downfall of the Icelandic Free State, such as the absence of a central administration, authority and executive power, the secular interests dominating the church and the unstable underlying power structure which was based on a few competing chieftaincies.[19] Orri Vésteinsson states in this context that the upheavals of 12th/13th-century Iceland are

[18] Note that the term *communitas* is *not* synonymous with *liminality*: communitas is a social modality which describes a (temporarily) non-hierarchical group of individuals, so that the members meet one another as equal human beings. Communitas can be part of a liminal phase, but it can also arise in non-liminal situations. According to Turner, normative communitas evolves when existential or spontaneous communitas is kept up too long, which often occurs in an attempt to preserve the latter. In this case communitas automatically starts developing an idiosyncratic structure and tries to set up an alternative social system.

[19] Orri Vésteinsson 2000, 1.

symptomatic of a society that tries to establish a more stable political system and government.[20]

The major changes that can be observed in Iceland between AD 1096 and AD 1281 are changes regarding the nature of power within society.[21] On a micro-level the power increasingly cumulated in the hands of a few chieftains and their families, so that by 1262/1264 it was eight partly related families that actually wielded the power in Iceland.[22] This power, however, was inevitably bound to single individuals and not to institutions.[23] Once having reached a certain status and sphere of influence as well as disposing of enough financial assets, a chieftain usually grew increasingly stronger and power-hungry. It can thus be maintained that the few Icelandic chieftains in charge erected and ruled their own petty states.[24] This distribution of power was utterly unbalanced and proved unstable, and it eventually led to the inner disruption of Iceland and the collapse of the system.[25] Seen on a macro-level, Iceland not only witnessed the transformation from a (secular) system which had the power bound to individuals (*náðarvald*) to an institutionalised power (*ríkisvald*), but also the fusion of the secular and the ecclesiastical spheres,[26] an aspect that will not be dealt with here. Only when Iceland received the law code *Jónsbók* from the Norwegian king Magnús lagabœttir in 1280 did the country experience – literally speaking – law and order.[27]

Returning to Victor Turner, five of the liminal qualities apply to the Icelandic settlement: the spatial segregation is given by the fact that Iceland is an island and hence clearly segregated and out of reach from Norway, which, however, does not necessarily equate to marginality; the temporal demarcations are the *landnám* and the *Sturlungaöld*; the settlement and the ensuing period are troublesome and full of ambiguities and changes that are irreversible. Considering that those Norwegian chieftains or petty kings who were not willing to be subjects of King Haraldr were positively forced to leave the country, the settlement's character of voluntariness can also be viewed as a banishment. Van Gennep categorises the banishment as the negative version of an initiation, hence the settlers' migration acts as a (negative) rite of passage. When arriving in Iceland, the settlers are like neophytes who all face the same premises as nobody really has an economic, political or social advantage. This

[20] Orri Vésteinsson 2000, 5.
[21] Sverrir Jakobsson 2016, 275.
[22] Gunnar Karlsson 2016, 16.
[23] Sverrir Jakobsson 2016, 11, and Orri Vésteinsson 2000, 15-16.
[24] Orri Vésteinsson 2000, 8-9.
[25] Gunnar Karlsson 2000, 26, and Sverrir Jakobsson 2016, 276.
[26] Sverrir Jakobsson 2016, 11-12.
[27] Sverrir Jakobsson 2016, 276-277. Both Orri Vésteinsson and Gunnar Karlsson ponder in this regard whether or to what extent it can be said that Iceland actually lost something or even failed as an independent society. While Orri Vésteinsson points out that Iceland gained the fundamental factors of stability and law when being under Norwegian rule again, Gunnar Karlsson emphasises that the ideas and concepts of nationalism and a state sovereignty were only about to develop in Europe towards the end of *Sturlungaöld* and thus they hardly influenced the Icelanders' negotiations with the Norwegian Crown.

seeming homogeneity soon vanishes as normative communitas and social stratification and struggles set in.

The *Íslendingasögur* witness this liminal experience and offer a literary platform of (self-) reflection for this phase. What the sagas render is either a nostalgic review of the ancient *gullöld* or perhaps merely a dream of how the Icelanders would have wished the settlement to be. Assuming the Norwegian angle, Iceland's settlement and eventually Iceland's (involuntary) return to the Norwegian crown may appear like an instance of a utopian society that could not (yet) persist and collapsed because of inherent tensions. From this perspective, (medieval) Iceland is an example of Turner's ideological communitas, which is most prominent in sketches of utopian societies. This element echoes the previous discussion of the island topos in literature which pictures islands among others as the location for visionary communities. In the case of Iceland, however, the island is evidently a given, geographical fact and not a literary image.

It can also be argued for the liminal character of the *Íslendingasögur* from a generic point of view. Struggling to find and define their new identity, the descendants of the Icelandic settlers came up with a new way of writing that captures and deals with the events revolving around the *landnám*, the conversion and the time until the *Sturlungaöld*. Although the chronological frame of the *Íslendingasögur* is relatively well-defined and roughly speaking adjacent to the *konunga sögur* and the *samtíða sögur*, the narrative creativity is (highly) reminiscent and at times even confusingly similar to the *fornaldarsögur* and the *riddarasögur*, especially among the younger sagas.[28] This latter development lures modern scholars into confusing the occurrence of the supernatural with liminality. It was one of the present study's aims to demonstrate that these two concepts are not congruent despite the seeming similarity in the manner of denoting issues out of the ordinary.

In the wake of these large-scale changes, it should also be pondered to what extent the notion of liminality changes among the *Íslendingasögur* themselves. In some of the young *Íslendingasögur* that were selected, scattered examples of Brinker-von der Heyde's *Zwischenräume* (2005) can be detected. Best known from chivalric literature, the *Zwischenräume* (interspaces) refer to often unpeopled (narrative) spaces that are devoid of events and which take on the task to first and foremost get the protagonist from one adventure to the next. Some of these spaces appear vast, others are crossed relatively quickly. In any case, the protagonist is forced to pass through this space which mostly also encompasses a subconscious maturation process.[29] "Der Zwischenraum als ganzer wird zur Raumschwelle, zur liminalen Zone schlechthin, befindet sich der Artusritter doch in einem 'Zwischenstadium der Statuslosigkeit' und ist 'weder hier noch da'."[30]

[28] see e.g. Arnold 2003, 8.
[29] Brinker-von der Heyde 2005, 212 and 214.
[30] Brinker-von der Heyde 2005, 212.

In the selected sagas traces of such interludes can be found in *Kjalsnesinga saga* when Búi is on his way from King Haraldr to Dofri; in *Gull-Þóris saga* when Gull-Þórir and his men venture out to Valr's dragon cave; and in *Bárðar saga Snæfellssáss* when Gestr and his party are on the expedition to Raknarr's burial mound in Helluland. Similar in function are the instances of bad weather, storm and fog which saga figures must endure in order to move forward to the next episode. Examples have been encountered in *Laxdœla saga*, *Bárðar saga Snæfellssáss* and in *Jǫkuls þáttr Búasonar*. These often fairly brief passages figure as boundaries between the human world and the world beyond, which get increasingly more segregated from each other and thus require a linking, transitory space. To a modern audience the presence of such rather stereotypical elements and the increased use of topoi (e.g. glaciers and caves as habitations of supernatural beings) moves the younger *Íslendingasögur* closer to fairy tales or folktale legends in appearance.

While the close readings of the saga episodes suggest that liminality is rather a yes/no-issue based on how many liminal qualities can be detected, liminality has – like the Roman threshold deity Janus – also a second, different face. Indeed, it proves fairly versatile and adaptable, as long as some basic aspects (esp. changes and transformations from one defined status to another) are kept in mind. The few paragraphs above present a sketch of how the anthropological concept can fruitfully be applied to various literary layers as well as historical aspects within Old Norse society and culture. Hence the field for further research on the topic of liminality is wide open and invites further research.

6 CONCLUSION

The journey of this study has come full circle: it started by passing through a door and is coming to an end now by passing through the door of this chapter. Echoing Jim Morrison, who was quoted at the very beginning, the thesis has explored things unknown: how Arnold van Gennep's and Victor Turner's definitions and understandings of liminality can be applied to the genre of the Old Norse *Íslendingasögur*. Within this broad topic, the spotlight of attention was directed at the question as to whether there are places among the various settings of the *Íslendingasögur* which are genuinely liminal and/or trigger liminal experiences. While my interest in and focus on places in the *Íslendingasögur* have their root in the *spatial turn*, the main topic of liminality ventures on to untrodden paths. The research question of whether there are liminal places or rather whether there are places that (tend to) trigger liminality in the *Íslendingasögur*, arose in combination with the observation that, informed by the Western European literary topoi, scholars have repeatedly considered certain places such as islands or glaciers as liminal and hence have attributed them special characteristics and powers.

Within the field of Old Norse Studies, no systematic or exhaustive studies on the issue of liminality have been published up until now. Although individual scholars have repeatedly used the notion of liminality in some of their work, it can often be observed that they neither define it sufficiently and/or tend to misunderstand the qualities of liminality. Liminality is thus often used synonymously with *marginal*, *hybrid*, *magic* or *supernatural*. All of these terms lack accuracy and do not adhere to the original idea of liminality. Despite some affinity between the concepts, liminality is not co-terminous with any of them.

Since there are no previous studies in the field which could serve as points of reference and a database, it was considered necessary to provide a base-line study on how the concept of liminality, the definition of which is kept close to that of van Gennep and Turner, makes its appearance in the *Íslendingasögur*. This thesis is merely a first step in a much more complex and versatile research on liminality within Old Norse literature and culture. The present study is neither exhaustive nor does it provide detailed readings of whole sagas but restricts its attention to single episodes and contexts. It goes without saying that many complementary aspects are left untouched and invite further research.

Having studied van Gennep's and Turner's work on liminality, the question arose of how to apply this concept fruitfully to the *Íslendingasögur*. Considering that both of these anthropologists maintain that liminality is a phenomenon that can be observed regardless of time and place, it should be possible to trace liminality in the *Íslendingasögur* despite the difficult premise that they establish. However, a direct application of van Gennep's and Turner's concept(s) is not possible, because both scholars developed the concept on the basis of ritual. To them, it was especially the rites of passage that caught their interest as these rites

feature a liminal mid-phase during which the ritual subject undergoes a transformation in preparation for the (social) role or task to come. As the *Íslendingasögur* do not feature (any) rituals from whose basis one can work from, a different approach to liminality and liminal places must be sought, without bending and alienating the concept of liminality (too much).

In order not to move too far away from the original meaning of the concept, a selection of the most important main characteristics of liminality were used to assess single saga episodes. These qualities include 1) a spatial segregation from daily life because liminal phases tend to take place at the margins or outside of structure; 2) a momentary suspension of daily life, since non-structural phases interrupt the dealings of daily life for a demarcated period of time; 3) a sense of otherness intruding, since during the liminal phase some connection to the numinous is established; 4) invisibility or presumed death expresses that the subject is temporarily not a member of society; 5) some kind of transformation which prepares the ritual subject on his way to assume a different social role; 6) the strong presence of paradoxical and ambiguous elements, because liminality essentially combines elements of both the pre-ritual and post-ritual category, which necessarily mutually exclude each other and can only exist side by side during the *betwixt and between*; and 7) the irreversibility of the activity taking place at the site in question.

The places selected for the analysis are settings which are mostly considered topoi within (continental) Western European literary culture and folklore. In this rich tradition, some sites have been assigned outstanding roles and have thus assumed strongly positive or negative connotations. Being influenced by these long-standing stereotypes scholars have tended to assume that the corresponding places in the *Íslendingasögur* are equally unconventional and host or trigger extraordinary narrative episodes. It has thus remained unnoticed that in a majority of cases the ‘classic’ literary topoi do not hold true in the *Íslendingasögur*.

The settings studied – thresholds, doors and walls, islands and the sea, glaciers and caves – are by and large ordinary places but host occasionally salient, liminal actions. The choice of settings fell deliberately on physical, geographical sites and not figurative spaces so as to stay closest to van Gennep’s and Turner’s approaches, which are based mostly on (reported) fieldwork and descriptions of rituals which are carried out in real-life places. To begin with, the study turned to thresholds and doors, the epitomic place of liminality. Although Arnold van Gennep introduced the threshold as an image rather than the material threshold, he has nevertheless listed many examples of rituals which include an actual threshold or door frame. Hence, it is certainly worth stepping over the threshold into the realm of liminality in the *Íslendingasögur*. Islands and the sea, glaciers and caves were selected as natural outdoor places. As the formulation shows, these places are fairly often connected and tend to appear in rather close vicinity.

Having combed the *Íslendingasögur* for and studied a number of episodes set at the aforementioned places, it remains difficult to draw an overall conclusion on how liminality appears in these sagas. On a more general level it can be stated that when following Arnold

van Gennep's and Victor Turner's understanding and definition none of the selected spaces in the *Íslendingasögur* prove genuinely liminal. This does not mean that no liminal or at least extraordinary incidents take place at the locations studied. However, the places neither evoke nor promote such incidents. At least no consistent patterns can be detected as the sagas never explicitly state a predefined setting as the stage for a certain event, maybe with exception of the original form of *hólmganga* and the *þing*-assemblies.

This finding confirms van Gennep's idea of the pivoting of the sacred: during a (ritual) activity a place temporarily assumes a specific and symbolic meaning but loses it once the activity has ceased and the place is again unobtrusive and mundane. Only during the *dyradómr* the door frame is turned into a legal space which is given the authority to pronounce a sentence. Similarly, the island or the demarcated space becomes a fighting area for a *hólmganga* or a battle when required. In this way, mundane activities as well as magical, supernatural, or liminal incidents take place at all the places studied. What is more, despite the *Íslendingasögur*'s evident fascination for giving precise information about a site, land holdings or itineraries, space seems to vanish once an episode has started to unfold. In many cases the saga narrator briefly sketches the setting but soon focuses exclusively on the interactions of the characters. The site itself is immediately pushed into the background and hardly ever has an influence on the plot.

Acknowledging that every location can temporarily become liminal, we face another difficulty, however. In cases such as Gríma's hiding of Þormóðr from Þórdís's persecution in *Fóstbræðra saga* (ch. 23), it is impossible to determine clearly what element in the scene is actually liminal or whether it is the whole constellation which constitutes the liminality. It is very hard to discern whether it is the place (i.e. the threshold on which Gríma sits) that is liminal, or whether it is the actions (i.e. her magical incantations) or the central figures involved who are liminal (in this case Þormóðr). It is open to discussion whether it is one of these single elements that is the core of and thus triggers the liminal situation or whether it is the combination of all aspects that makes an episode move into the realm of Turner's anti-structure. We should not be too disappointed or confused about this observation; after all elusiveness and ambiguity are key issues in the concept of liminality.

Regarding the aspect or influence of magic and the supernatural it can be said that liminal incidents are not necessarily located in the realm of the supernatural. Indeed, the supernatural sphere, as for example Dofri's or other giants' caves, are in most cases clearly set apart from what the sagas portray as the 'realistic-historic' world. Insights into the realm of the supernatural[1] show that the world beyond is at times not much different to or stranger than the human world. Rather, the world of giants and trolls seems to be astonishingly similar to the human world: there are caves whose descriptions are reminiscent of human abodes, some

[1] I am aware that this thesis has not dealt in depth with the topics of the supernatural and magic in order to make bold statements and the aspects addressed here certainly require (more) systematic research so as to draw a better-informed picture. All the same, I would like to share my observations at this point.

cave chambers are richly decorated as well as lit and warmed by fires, and analogous to those found in human societies, supernatural beings also feast within their homes. Certainly, various standards can be observed among supernatural beings, yet the only crucial difference between the supernatural and the human world is that in the former all aspects are larger than life, which results in a savage and often grotesque caricature of the latter.

In spite of a clear boundary between the human and the supernatural world at least with regard to the home of the latter, the paranormal repeatedly enters the human world, be it on its own initiative or when conjured up through magic. Nonetheless, it is debatable whether or to what extent such incidents can be called liminal. Does the meeting and temporal clash or fusion of two opposite spheres necessarily result in a liminal space? This is a difficult question and can hardly be answered on a general level; rather the answer depends on individual close readings. I argue that, especially with the focus on liminality, it matters whether at least one party undergoes some kind of transformation in the encounter. While Grettir's meeting with Hallmundr, for example, has no effect on either figure, the fight with Glámr becomes a most crucial turning point for Grettir. While the supernatural can be present in liminal scenes it is all the same not its pre-condition. The supernatural constitutes a world of its own but it is free to enter the human world and vice versa. By doing so, the clashing of the two worlds does not necessarily result in liminal experiences. Accordingly, the episodes which include supernatural or magic elements are not the most liminal ones. The supernatural, therefore, is not the one key to liminality.

The 70 examples scrutinised in the course of the study allow for some astounding observations which are well worth further attention in future research. First and foremost, they illustrate that it is possible to trace liminality irrespective of the silence of the sources with regard to rituals. The approach employed here proves valid: it is possible to discover episodes of liminality with the help of a set of liminal qualities which have been described by Turner and van Gennep.

At the same time, however, the multifarious analyses and the diversity of examples also suggest that – irrespective of occasional similarities in the narrative structure – there is no single key to unlock liminality in the *Íslendingasögur*. Rather, each saga or even each episode requires individual analysis, which eventually leads to a plethora of representations of liminality. Figure 5.1 demonstrates that the distribution of the seven initially defined liminal qualities fluctuates, that is to say, not all episodes share exactly the same combination of characteristics but can nonetheless be considered liminal. These fluctuations do not imply that liminality moves on a proper spectrum. It has been suggested that only episodes fulfilling five out of the seven characteristics give the impression of liminality. Liminality remains to a large extent a yes/no-issue, yet, it allows for a minimum of alterations.

In summary, it can be stated that liminality is not primarily defined over spatial issues and neither is it exclusively dependent on one single factor. Rather, liminality can only evolve

when several qualities are united and when the aspect of changes and transformations is present. It is thus the constellation of factors that is decisive. The question of constellations does not only relate to single episodes, but applies also to larger parts of sagas, demarcated, for example, by two very similar incidents, as it has been demonstrated in *Grettis saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga*.

While the main part of the thesis has been dedicated to individual close readings of (potentially) liminal episodes, the last part of chapter 5 includes an attempt to apply the concept to a larger narrative as well on a historical level. The discussion suggests that both the literary as well as the historical context of the *Íslendingasögur* can be captured and described with the notion of liminality and Victor Turner's communitas. These two concepts apply fairly well in connection with the time between the *landnám* and the *Sturlungaöld*. The *Íslendingasögur* are literary witnesses that refer to a turbulent period which was crucially shaped by finding and defining a (new) identity as Icelanders, i.e. a new fixed socio-structural status after having passed through a liminal time of ambiguity and indeterminacy.

Having said all that, my personal liminal (or rather liminoid)[2] experience of writing a doctoral thesis is coming to an end. Like many others, I have passed through a phase of uncertainty, which leads from the status of a student to the status of a scholar. During this liminal time, one often feels lost and uncertain about one's skills and what to aim for. Forming a group of communitas, it is first and foremost the fellow doctoral students who can best and completely relate to one's situation and the struggles every doctoral candidate must go through. Writing a PhD thesis about liminality is in a way a hyper-liminal experience, trying to grasp and elaborate on a concept one experiences personally. Perhaps this overlap is conducive to looking into this complex anthropological concept.

[2] "I see the 'liminoid' as an independent and critical source … Experimental and theoretical science itself is 'liminoid' – it takes place in 'neutral spaces' or privileged areas – laboratories and studies – set aside from the mainstream of productive or political events. Universities, institutes, colleges, etc., are 'liminoid' settings for all kinds of freewheeling, experimental cognitive behavior as well as forms of symbolic action" (Turner 1982, 33).

7 APPENDIX: LINGUISTIC CONSIDERATIONS OF THE TERM *LIMINALITY*

Rosemary Zumwalt points out that van Gennep's main terms assume slightly different semantic nuances in the translation process from French to English.[1] Firstly, the original "séquences cérémonielles" is translated as "ceremonial patterns" and thus acquires a slightly more static connotation than the French original has. Van Gennep might not fully approve of this change because he attached great importance to the fluidity and flexibility of his concepts. Another semantic alteration can be observed with the French "rites de marge" and its English correspondent "transition rites". While the original term implies that the rites in the named phase are taking place at the fringe of society or social space, the English term does not denominate what specifically happens in this particular rite, but rather what happens throughout a whole rite of passage: a transition.

In addition, Zumwalt rather strongly objects to the English translation of the French terms '(rites) préliminaires', '(rites) liminaires' and '(rites) postliminaries'.[2] She sees her criticism in the 1960 translation confirmed by the fact that *Webster's Dictionary*[3] does not list entries for 'preliminal' and 'postliminal', but only for 'preliminary'[4] and 'postliminiary'.[5]

Van Gennep, French original, 1909	préliminaires	liminaires	postliminaries
Van Gennep, English translation 1960	preliminal	liminal	postliminal
Rosemary Zumwalt (1988), based on *Webster's Dictionary* (1983)	preliminary	liminal	postliminiary

Figure A.1 Comparison of different translations of van Gennep's key term *liminality*.

Regarding the etymology of the term *liminality* and its derivatives, the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*[6] defines the meaning and origin of the adjective *liminal* as: "1a) *of or relating to a transitional or initial stage*. b) *marginal, insignificant*. 2) *occupying a position on, or on both sides of, a boundary or threshold*. … Latin limin-, limen 'threshold + -AL'." Alois Walde and Johann Baptist Hofmann translate *limen* (liminis, nt.) in their Latin

[1] Zumwalt 1988, 24ff.
[2] Zumwalt 1988, 24-25.
[3] *Webster's Dictionary* 1983.
[4] *preliminary* (adj. + noun): serving as an introduction; going before the main business or major portion, prefatory, antecedent.
[5] *postliminiary* (adj): (synonyms: postliminar(y) and postliminous) pertaining to the postliminium. – *postliminium* (noun): 1. Among the ancient Romans, the return to his own country of a person who had gone abroad or had been banished or taken by an enemy. – 2. In international law, the rule by which persons and things taken by an enemy in war regain their former rights when coming again under the power of their own country.
[6] *The Concise Oxford Dictionary …* 1995.

etymological dictionary[7] as ‘threshold, barrier, beam’, poetically as ‘door, house, temple’, and figuratively as ‘beginning, end’. In addition, they trace the diachronic semantic development of the word *limen* as follows:

Indogerm. root[8]		Latin root		Latin	
***lĕi-**	>	***limos**	>	**limen** (liminis, nt.)	**limes** (limitis, m.)
‘to bend, to bow, to crook’		root of the following derivatives, which all have the meanings ‘limb, branch, member’: Anglo-Saxon *lim* (nt), Old Norse *lim* (f) and *limr* (m)		‘threshold barrier, beam; door, house, temple; beginning, end’	‘crosscut, boundary, lynchet, borderline between two fields, march[9]’

Figure A.2 Etymological development of the Latin term *limes*.

There have been different suggestions for the interpretation of the Indogermanic root *lĕi-. Alexander Jóhannesson[10] sees the root *lĕi- (and consequently also its Old Norse derivate *limr*, m.) as being related to Greek *λειμών* [leimón] ‘grassland, meadow, pasture’. Julius Pokorny’s entry[11] for *lĕi-, on the other hand, suggests that this root derives from *el-[12] and has the meaning ‘to bend, to bow, to crook’.[13] Viewed from an etymological perspective, the terms *liminality* or *liminal* denote an off-shoot or a part of the main category or entity, as well as something which derives or digresses from what is considered normal or usual.

[7] Walde 1965.

[8] Based on Pokorny 1948-1969.

[9] see *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* … 1995, s.v. “march”. As a second meaning of this entry the dictionary lists a rather historical useage: “(usu. in pl. [i.e. marches]) a boundary, a frontier (esp. of the borderland between England and Scotland or Wales).”

[10] Alexander Jóhannesson 1956.

[11] Pokorny 1948-1969.

[12] This group of roots also includes elĕi- and lĕi-.

[13] The same root can for example also be found in the component *el-* in the noun 'el-bow' or its German equivalent ‘Ellenbogen’.

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Note:

- All works are listed according to the Icelandic alphabet, i.e. titles or authors beginning with Þ-, Æ-, or Ö- follow after Z-.
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