

**The Courtly Stranger:**  
**The Description of an Old French Motif and Its**  
**Diffusion through Old Norse**

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### Introduction

This study begins with the observation of a comment. In their edition of *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* from the mid-1980s, Jón Skaptason and Phillip Pulsiano write the following:

The entrance of Raknar into King Ólaf's court (Chapter XIV) exhibits striking similarities with the entrance of the Green Knight into King Arthur's court in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Both episodes take place at a Christmas feast during which an unexpected visitor enters the hall and challenges the court to undergo some sort of trial. Even the taunt, that no one at the court is man enough to take the challenge, is the same, and in both cases the court sits silent with awe. While the similarities between the two scenes are interesting, the episode in *Bárðar saga*, like that in *Sir Gawain*, may ultimately derive from an Irish model.<sup>1</sup>

The similarities between the two scenes are indeed interesting, and raise the question of how such a connection between the works could exist. They are quite different. *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* is a late *Íslendingasaga*, composed somewhere between the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries and long remarked upon for its many fantastical elements which make it similar to a *fornaldarsaga*.<sup>2</sup> *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is one of the most well-known of all Middle English poems, likely composed in the mid fourteenth century. It famously tells how the Green Knight appears mysteriously at King Arthur's court at Christmas to offer the court a game: that he and whoever so chooses should take turns decapitating one another. Scholarship now recognizes this as a motif called the Beheading Game.<sup>3</sup> In the early twentieth century, J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon take as commonplace that the motif is of Celtic descent.<sup>4</sup> But Tolkien and Gordon also take as 'evident' that the material upon which *Sir Gawain* is based must have passed through an Old French source.<sup>5</sup> Old French likewise influenced Old Norse literature through translation of romances into what are now labelled the *riddarasögur*, which in turn spurred the indigenous production of more such literature. Considering the likeness *Bárðar saga* displays to *Sir Gawain*, and given the mutual importance of Old French to their respective literary traditions, I find ample reason to question Skaptason and Pulsiano's Irish hypothesis.

To be clear, I am not saying that the scene in either *Bárðar saga* or *Sir Gawain* is not ultimately descended from an Irish model. Tolkien and Gordon accept this relation, and Elisabeth Brewer provides an impressive list of parallels and intertexts for *Sir Gawain* specifically, which convincingly demonstrate the Middle English poem's similarity to the Beheading Game motif in *Fled Bricrend, The Feast of Bricriu*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Bárðar saga*, ed. and trans. Jón Skaptason and Phillip Pulsiano (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984), xxiv.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Elisabeth Brewer, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: Sources and Analogues* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992)

<sup>4</sup> *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925: rpt. with corrections 1930), xii.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>6</sup> Brewer, *Sir Gawain: Sources and Analogues*, 19-23.

There are two Beheading Game sequences in *Fled Bricrend*, the first being part of the main work proper and featuring heroes who travel to the home of the beheader. The second is from a later section of *Fled Bricrend*, known separately as *Cennach ind Ruanada inso*, translated as either *The Champion's Covenant*<sup>7</sup> or *The Champion's Bargain*.<sup>8</sup> Cu Roi comes disguised as a hideous giant seeking men brave enough to enter a game with him. He wants to be beheaded one night, and then will come back to repay the strike the next night. Three champions in a row take up the challenge one night after the next, but then renege on the deal when the following night comes. Only Cu Chulainn is brave enough to see the deed through, and for his bravery Cu Roi strikes with the back of the axe rather than the blade. The parallel with *Sir Gawain* is strong enough to assume the poem's descent from the Irish source. That being said, Brewer also lists examples of the Beheading Game from French romances, especially *The Story of Carados*, known in a variety of forms from the Continuations of Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval*.<sup>9</sup> *The Story of Carados* is not particularly similar to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, involving a foolish newly-dubbed knight at King Arthur's court, who turns out to be the beheader's son. What is significant is that even taken alone<sup>10</sup> *The Story of Carados* demonstrates that the Beheading Game entered into French literature, so the appearance of the motif in later works does not automatically mean they come directly from Irish material.

Furthermore, if *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* are indeed related to one another, then the motif they share in common must be distinct and separable from the Beheading Game, since it does not feature in *Bárðar saga* at all. I thus suspect a far more complicated process of transmission for the motif in question other than a simple, direct borrowing from an Irish story like *Fled Bricrend*. And if the motif was not transmitted via Hiberno-Norse contacts, then the spread of the form into Old Norse speaks to a very different kind of cultural interaction, one worthy of investigation. I suspect this to be the case, as I take the emphasis which each text places on proper speech at court to represent the Francophone romance tradition. Admittedly, Skaptason and Pulsiano do not deny transmission through Old French. They simply do not mention it, one way or the other. This silence on the actual method by which the scene was propagated I see as representative of an older mode of scholarship only concerned with first instances. The last few decades have seen a rise in the prominence of translation studies, which I will discuss below, and this shifts emphasis to the whole history of a narrative's movement and refashioning, not just the 'original,' often implicitly better or even perfect version. I think this especially appropriate in the case at hand, because it seems likely that it was French cultural power which disseminated this story type across medieval Europe. I surmise the audiences who received this kind of literature conceived of it as Francophone, rather than Celtic, and this association is likely one of the factors which led to its popularity. All of which only brings me back with more emphasis than ever to the question raised above: How could a connection between *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* exist?

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>8</sup> Tolkien and Gordon, *Sir Gawain*, xii.

<sup>9</sup> Brewer, *Sir Gawain: Sources and Analogues*, 24.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 18-60. Brewer provides a number of other parallels for the Beheading Game in Old French: 'Gawain and the Haughty Maiden,' from *Perlesvaus*; 'Lancelot in the Waste Land,' from *Perlesvaus*; *The Girl with the Mule*; and *Hunbaut*. A number of these are also noted by Tolkien and Gordon in their introduction. Any one of them would prove the same point. I merely use *The Story of Carados* as an example of the kinds of alterations which make direct relation doubtful between all these texts and *Sir Gawain* specifically.

To date, however, Skaptason and Pulsiano's Irish hypothesis is the closest thing I have found to an explanation for a relation between the two works. The current project, then, is an attempt to better answer that question. In this pursuit I will avail myself of developments in translation studies and research on the *fornaldarsögur* genre to which *Bárðar saga* has been compared, as well newer research on the *riddarasögur*. These developments either had not occurred at the time Skaptason and Pulsiano published their edition, or were simply not widely known then to scholars of the *islendingasögur*. I will also examine scenes from a number of *fornaldarsögur* which I consider additional instances of the same pattern as found in *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain*. My hypothesis is that the analogous scenes in *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* are manifestations of a relatively stable literary motif, which for ease of discussion I here name the Courtly Stranger; and that this motif's diffusion in Old Norse is best understood as the result of Old French rather than Old Irish influence.

## **Review of Literature**

### Critical Inattention

This motif has been seemingly either unnoticed by scholarship to date, or simply deemed uninteresting. Skaptason and Pulsiano assert their observation as an independent discovery, referencing no prior scholarship which addresses the issue. The critical writings and related works which Skaptason and Pulsiano suggest for further reading reveal relatively little attention given to the saga,<sup>11</sup> with only one full-length study before Skaptason and Pulsiano's edition: A dissertation by Joseph Goetzen, *Ueber die Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, published in 1903, which Skaptason and Pulsiano summarize as 'informative, but dated.'<sup>12</sup> Most of the studies listed have tended to focus on paleography, place names, the relation of the saga to *Landnámabók*, and Christian themes. A definite pattern emerges that criticism has tended to avoid discussing the more fantastical material at the saga's end, including the section relevant to this study. More recent work by Ármann Jakobsson simply accepts the proposed link between *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* without question,<sup>13</sup> but also offers possible reasons why critics have so long neglected the saga's second half. Jakobsson writes that Sigurður Nordal understood the saga as unsatisfyingly split between contradictory impulses toward history, exemplified by the host of minor characters it draws from *Landnámabók*, and fantasy.<sup>14</sup> Jakobsson summarizes that the central scholarly debate on the saga was one initiated by Goetzen, addressing whether the work should be considered an original whole or actually two sagas, one about Bárðr and one about Gestr, which simply happen to always come together in the manuscript tradition. Goetzen believed the saga was once two. Skaptason and Pulsiano disagree, instead viewing the saga as an artistic whole. Jakobsson reports very little discussion of the saga one way or the other since Skaptason and Pulsiano's edition, with the notable exception of Þórhallur Vilmundarson, who edited the saga for the *Íslenzk fornrit* series.<sup>15</sup> Þórhallur concurs with Skaptason and

<sup>11</sup> Skaptason and Pulsiano, xxviii-xxix.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Ármann Jakobsson, 'History of the Trolls? *Bárðar saga* as an Historical Narrative,' in *Saga-Book XXV* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2001), 53-71.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 61.

Pulsiano, and therefore the debate seems settled. Yet in the process, the question of the saga's relation to *Sir Gawain* has been completely overlooked. Þórhallur does not mention the matter at all.<sup>16</sup>

Þórhallur does include a footnote to the text of the saga itself, at the point where Raknar appears to Olaf's court. This is written by the then-already-late Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, and it reads *Í fornaldarsögum eru ekki fátíðar allnákvæmar lýsingar manna, er birtast skyndilega í konungshöll og bera upp óvænt erindi*, 'In *fornaldarsögur* it is not at all uncommon to depict men who burst suddenly into the king's hall and introduce an unexpected errand.'<sup>17</sup> The note goes on to suggest comparison with chapters from four *fornaldarsögur*: *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, *Sörla saga sterka*, and *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*. The note takes this pattern completely for granted, expressing no curiosity about the source or implications of the analogues. Again, no reference is made to *Sir Gawain*. Interestingly, Skaptason and Pulsiano seem completely unaware of these parallels themselves. Thus stands the critical situation specifically relating to *Bárðar saga*. Turning to the wider world of Old Norse studies in general, when hunting for a motif the *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature* suggests itself as a useful starting place.<sup>18</sup> However, it contains no matches for what I call the Courtly Stranger. Another critical work which suggests itself is Gísli Sigurðsson's *Gaelic Influence in Iceland*.<sup>19</sup> Although I disagree with Skaptason and Pulsiano's Irish hypothesis, their argument is essentially ready-made for Gísli's survey, and was published four years before Gísli's own work. Gísli does discuss *Bárðar saga*, but oddly makes no mention of the Raknar scene at all. Rather, Gísli treats *Bárðar saga* simultaneously with *Eyrbyggja saga* in a single, short paragraph, summarizing that both 'show certain affinities with Gaelic material in their love for the supernatural.'<sup>20</sup> Gísli does mention *Bárðar saga* in other parts of his work. Gísli includes a section on the Irish motif of 'supernatural fosterage.' Bárð's father, Dumbur, has just such a fosterage in Dofrafjell, in Norway, at the beginning of the saga.<sup>21</sup> Yet Gísli merely mentions the saga in a footnote which reads, '*Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* is also of great interest with regard to supernatural fosterage.'<sup>22</sup> In yet another location, Gísli addresses the Beheading Game, but does not mention *Bárðar saga* at all.<sup>23</sup> Instead, Gísli reports a suggestion made by Einar Ólafur Sveinsson that the *Fled Bricrend* might be related to a poem called *Sveins rímur Múkssonar*. The *rímur* features 'a certain Grámann [who] arrives at court and invites those present to cut off his head, if he can in return, cut their heads off the following day!'<sup>24</sup> Back under the sole paragraph dedicated especially to *Bárðar saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga*, Gísli concludes, 'In the absence of a more detailed study of these sagas with regard to Gaelic influence, these general observations will have to suffice.' There is no mention of Skaptason and Pulsiano, let alone *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

<sup>16</sup> *Harðar saga*, ed. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska forritfélag, 1991), lxix-cix.

<sup>17</sup> Vilmundarson and Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 161.

<sup>18</sup> Inger M. Boberg, *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1966).

<sup>19</sup> Gísli Sigurðsson, *Gaelic Influence in Iceland* (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfa Menningarsjóðs, 1988).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 95. It appears Gísli is trying to assert some kind of Celtic cultural monopoly on the 'supernatural,' but I find this suggestion contestable.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

It appears, then, that *Bárðar saga*, and the Courtly Stranger motif, may be in a blind spot. Modern generic divisions perhaps contribute to the scholarly inattention given the subject. In this study, I will argue that the *fornaldarsögur* analogues listed by Vilhjálmsson, and several others he does not mention, are indeed related to *Bárðar saga* and constitute further instances of the Courtly Stranger motif. However, while all those parallels bear a distinct resemblance to one another and to *Bárðar saga*, *Bárðar saga* is by far the most elaborate of these scenes and the only one to suggest relatively clear relation with *Sir Gawain*. Herein may lay the problem. Throughout most of the twentieth century, both *fornaldarsögur* and especially the *riddarasögur* languished in a state of critical denigration. W. P. Ker's comment regarding the *riddarasögur* has become somewhat (in)famous, that they are 'among the dreariest things ever made by human fancy.'<sup>25</sup> Ker's sentiment was in line with the prevailing scholarly attitudes toward such fantastic Icelandic literature until relatively recently. Exceedingly unrealistic Icelandic literature was not considered worthy of serious study, and it is easy to see how this likely deterred curiosity about the analogues Vilhjálmsson noticed, as well as examination of the latter half of *Bárðar saga*. Only by comparison with each other does the motif of the Courtly Stranger become noticeable. Even were it detected, the prevailing attitudes at the time would have likely seen the subject simply labelled as derivative of French romances and therefore doubly worthless.

### New Developments

Times are changing now. Marianne Kalinke's *King Arthur, North-by-Northwest* paved the way for a change in the field which has re-evaluated the *riddarasögur* as important testaments to medieval cross-cultural contact between Scandinavia, the British Isles, and the Continent.<sup>26</sup> The *fornaldarsögur* have undergone a similar revitalization, aided largely by Torfi Tulinius' *The Matter of the North*.<sup>27</sup> Each of these renewals has also led to major projects at Scandinavian universities, namely the Translation, Transmission, and Transformation project at the University of Oslo from 2007 to 2010, which studied the *riddarasögur*, and Stories for All Time: The Icelandic *Fornaldarsögur* at the University of Copenhagen, which as the name implies, studied the *fornaldarsögur*. Associated with these projects have been two important series of publications, largely collected from symposia on the subjects and dedicated one each to the *fornaldarsögur*<sup>28</sup> and *riddarasögur*.<sup>29</sup> Alongside research into the *riddarasögur*, other translations and adaptations of Old French literature have received more scholarly attention, such as the *lais* of

<sup>25</sup> W.P. Ker, *Epic and Romance: Essays on Medieval Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1908), 282.

<sup>26</sup> Marianne Kalinke, *King Arthur, North-by-Northwest* (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels Boghandel, 1981).

<sup>27</sup> Torfi Tulinius, *The Matter of the North: The Rise of Literary Fiction in Thirteenth Century Iceland*, trans. Randi C. Eldevik (Viborg: Odense University Press, 2002). First published as *La Matière du Nord. Sagas légendaires et fiction dans l'Islande du XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 1995).

<sup>28</sup> *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi: Handlingar frå nett symposium i Uppsala 31.8-2.9 2001* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2003); *Fornaldarsagaerne, myter og virkelighed: studier i de oldislandske fornaldarsögur* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2009); *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development* (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012). Editors for the series are Annette Lassen, Agnete Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson.

<sup>29</sup> *Bibliotheca Nordica*, series ed. Odd Einar Haugen, Karl G. Johansson, and Jon Gunnar Jørgensen. Cf. especially Vol. 5, *Francia et Germania: Studies in Strengleikar and Piðreks saga af Bern*, ed. Karl G. Johanson and Rune Flaten (Oslo: Novus Forlag 2012), and *Riddarasögur: The Translation of European Court Culture in Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Karl G. Johansson and Else Mundal (Oslo: Novus Forlag, 2014).



Marie de France, which became the Old Norse *Strengleikar*.<sup>30</sup> However, while these formerly-marginalized genres are finally receiving much-needed academic attention, and while this reinvigoration operates with a tacit understanding of the interplay and porousness of the modern boundary between *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*, the studies have nevertheless still fallen mainly within the definitions as established by Carl Christian Rafn in his *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* between 1829 to 1830. Since the Courtly Stranger motif's most elaborate and easily-noticed example is contained within what is technically an *Íslendingasaga*, perhaps generic boundaries have contributed to it being overlooked by the new enthusiasm.

Yet the sea-change in scholarly attitudes toward *riddarasögur* especially has also led to greater incorporation of translation theories into Old Norse literary studies, which has laid the groundwork for my current project. Translation studies have been increasingly important in medieval studies generally since at least the early 1990s, but the roots go back somewhat farther to the growing attention to textual variation in medieval works. Paul Zumthor introduced the concept of *mouvance* in his 1972 *Essai de poétique médiévale* to describe textual mobility in many medieval manuscript traditions,<sup>31</sup> while Bernard Cerquiglini emphasized the role of *variance* in his own *Éloge de la variante* in 1989, which expanded the concept of textual mobility beyond the written word to include oral transmission.<sup>32</sup> This signaled at least a partial turn in the field away from traditional stemmatic editing as well as the 'best-text' model advocated by Joseph Bédier in 1928.<sup>33</sup>

This development paved the way for translation studies by legitimizing translations as yet another kind of variant, with independent value. This led to the incorporation of translation studies in the early 1990s, as I mentioned. This was especially important in studying the rise of vernacular literacy, a seminal early work of which is Rita Copeland's *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages*.<sup>34</sup> Copeland focuses mostly on medieval academic communities. She examines the ways in which translations of Latin texts which were meant to ease access to learned writing eventually replaced that Latin tradition with the vernacular ones. These ideas eventually found their way from the discussion of Latin literacy to enter the various fields of medieval vernacular literatures, and at last have been recently applied to Old Norse by Sif Rikharðsdóttir in her *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse*.<sup>35</sup> Sif's study is also a product of the increased interest in the *riddarasögur*, which she takes alongside *Strengleikar* as the subject of her work. Whereas many investigations of the *riddarasögur* simply begin with the Old Norse tradition as such and maintain a scope limited within the bounds of the field, Sif takes a comparative approach which highlights the material directly translated from Old French sources, how

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Ingvil Brügger Budal, 'Strengleikar og Lais: Høviske noveller i omsetjing frå gammalfransk til gammalnorsk' (doctoral dissertation, University of Bergen, 2009). Budal also has shorter works appearing in the *Bibliotheca Nordica* series, above, addressing the cultural role and impact of this material.

<sup>31</sup> Paul Zumthor, *Essai de poétique médiévale* (Paris: Seuil, 1972).

<sup>32</sup> Bernard Cerquiglini, *Éloge de la variante* (Paris: Cerf, 1989). Republished as *In Praise of the Variant*, trans. Betsy Wing (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

<sup>33</sup> Joseph Bédier, 'La Tradition manuscrite du *Lai de l'Ombre*: réflexions sur l'art d'éditer les anciens textes', in *Romania*, 54 (1928), 161-96, 321-56.

<sup>34</sup> Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>35</sup> Sif Rikharðsdóttir, *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse: The Movement of Texts in England, France and Scandinavia* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012).

those translations occurred, and what inferences can be made about the cultural relations between Old Norse speaking and Francophone medieval communities. This draws much closer to the study at hand, but Sif works with cases in which at least the source traditions, if not the source texts themselves, are explicit. Suzanne Marti's doctoral dissertation, 'Kingship, Chivalry and Religion in the Perceval Matter,' actually predates Sif's work by two years;<sup>36</sup> and while it similarly studies a case of explicit translation quite dissimilar from my own, Marti outlines a set of *translation strategies* which serve as analytical tools categorizing the kinds of alterations which translations make from their sources.

This, then, is the current situation. A variety of factors have left what I describe as the Courtly Stranger motif uncommented upon as such to date. However, over many decades scholars of medieval literature have changed many of their fundamental assumptions, which has led to the overall rise in the prominence of translation studies as well as the local increase in the prominence of the *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur* in Old Norse studies specifically. These two trends have lately been combined, especially in regard to the *riddarasögur*, with ever-increasing improvement and subtlety to the tools available to scholars. It is here that I situate my own project, to examine not the translation of a whole work but a single scene in order to outline a previously unacknowledged pattern in the sagas. Again, I hypothesize that this Courtly Stranger motif is not an isolated incident in *Bárðar saga*, but manifests also as a trope found in many *fornaldarsögur*; and that, while the Courtly Stranger does appear to stem ultimately from an Irish model, that it was French culture which spread the motif. I therefore claim the Courtly Stranger is better regarded as a case of medieval Scandinavian Francophilia. To quote Cerquiglini, 'The fact that one hand was the first is sometimes, undoubtedly, less significant than this constant rewriting of a work which belongs to whoever recasts it and gives it a new form.'<sup>37</sup>

## Overview

In the following three chapters, I will first outline my methodology, next consider the basis and implications of the relation between *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain*, then detail the Courtly Stranger as it appears in the *fornaldarsögur*, and afterward conclude with my findings. Proceeding from this introduction, in chapter two I will define the terminology which Marti adapts to Old Norse studies, outline complications arising from its application to my own project, and note the adaptations I make in response. In chapter three, I will examine the grounds for assuming *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* are actually related at all, and after reviewing the evidence, analyze what readings can be made of the texts given this insight. In chapter four, I will examine the other manifestations of the Courtly Stranger motif through the selected *fornaldarsögur*: *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, *Sörla saga sterka*, and *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*. To this list I add analogues which I have noticed in *Nornagests þáttr* and *Völsunga saga*. I will outline what features remain the same, which ones are at variance across the instances, and what implications can be drawn from this. Finally, I will provide a summary of the evidence and conclusions which can be made from the project as a whole. In addition, I include an appendix which contains the relevant excerpts from the selected texts for comparison.

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<sup>36</sup> Suzanne Marti, 'Kingship, Chivalry and Religion in the Perceval Matter: An Analysis of the Old Norse and Middle English Translations of Le Conte du Graal' (doctoral dissertation, University of Oslo, 2010).

<sup>37</sup> Cerquiglini, *In Praise of the Variant*, 57.

Throughout this project, I have left citations from the original languages as they appear in their respective editions, untranslated. I am aware expecting knowledge of both Middle English and Old Norse may not be ideal for all readers, but I have endeavored to make my explications of the texts thorough enough that any consequent difficulties are minor. I also observe the difference between work and text, the work being the story itself whereas its text is the actual physical writing which contains it. I also use the term 'Old Norse' throughout since the location where the Courtly Stranger was translated into the North is unknown. Old Norse therefore includes all possible dialects concerned with the transmission. Lastly, I clarify the manuscript traditions of the various texts where needed in the relevant sections, as well as explaining my choice of editions to base my readings on and how I have selected excerpts for this study.

## Chapter Two: Methodology

### Introduction

In this study I avail myself heavily of the work done by Suzanne Marti. In her dissertation, Marti analyzes the translation of the Perceval Matter as represented in three forms: the Old French *Le Conte du Graal*, the Old Norse *Parcevals saga*, and the Old English *Sir Perceval of Galles*. Marti's interest is in the alterations which occur between each of these manifestations of the story, and to aid her Marti draws upon terminology from the field of translation studies in general, not just those projects which have concerned medieval literature broadly or Old Norse literature specifically. This terminology is mostly taken from the theories of Gideon Toury<sup>38</sup> as well as Andrew Chesterman.<sup>39</sup> Toury provides Marti much of the foundation for her investigation, whereas Chesterman offers the palate of terminological tools by which Marti actually implements her work. These tools are called *translation strategies*, or 'procedures that concern the target text's relation to the source.'<sup>40</sup> Marti's approach lends itself both to cases of explicit translation, such as hers, and texts whose relations are less clear, such as concerns *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain*. Yet just as Marti has some issues adapting Chesterman's work to her own study, so do I adapting it to mine.

In this chapter I will present those elements of translation studies which Marti borrows from Toury and Chesterman and which in turn seem relevant to the current project. I will do this in two parts, theoretical foundations and practical strategies. In this I mimic Marti's own structure to a large degree. However, I will also address problems where they arise and discuss what solutions I have devised.

### Theoretical Foundations

#### Defining Translation

Marti writes, 'When discussing the field of translation, the need soon arises to delineate the crucial concept in this context: that of *translation*.'<sup>41</sup> She continues that 'the main problem with specifying what is "inherently" translational is that such a definition would entail an attempt of delineating an object which is "characterized by its very **variability**."<sup>42</sup> Marti then summarizes that Toury suggests a rather broad definition for translation, one that includes 'any text that can be labelled *assumed translation*.'<sup>43</sup> Marti gives Toury's own words on the subject as 'all utterances which are presented or regarded as [translations] within the target culture.'<sup>44</sup> This allows scholars to work in situations such as those common to medieval literature, in which material on either side of the translation situation might not be preserved, or even clearly identifiable. This is the situation in both

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<sup>38</sup> Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1995).

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Chesterman, *Memes of Translation: The Spread of Ideas in Translation Theory* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1997).

<sup>40</sup> Marti, 'Kingship, Chivalry and Religion,' 22.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies*, 31, in Marti, *Kingship, Chivalry and Religion*, 7. Emphasis original.

<sup>43</sup> Marti, 'Kingship, Chivalry and Religion,' 7.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

Marti's case and my own; but Marti's study can utilize works on both sides of the translation situation, from the Old French *Le Conte du Graal* and from the Old Norse *Parcevals saga*. The latter is an acknowledged, explicit translation of the former. Marti addresses that the actual Old French manuscript from which the first Norse translation was made is lost, as is that original Old Norse translation itself. But the extant Old French manuscripts which contain *Le Conte du Graal* are similar enough to one another, as are the Old Norse manuscripts containing *Parcevals saga* to each other, that Marti feels comfortable using the existing witnesses to stand in for the originals. I have no such luxury. Tolkien and Gordon make clear in their discussion of *Sir Gawain* that the story material is 'in some degree dependent on French romance,' but that this source is 'now lost.'<sup>45</sup> The very observation by Skaptason and Pulsiano regarding *Bárðar saga* itself necessitates the assumption of a translation at some stage. But this first Old Norse version of the work, too, is now lost. Therefore discussing the translation of this material at all requires employing this broad definition of translation.

Marti does acknowledge debate within the field of translation studies over the boundaries of what can and cannot be considered translation, but ultimately concludes that the stricter limits would render her study impossible.<sup>46</sup> Since it falls well beyond her scope to 'put forward yet another definition,' she merely accepts the parameters established by Toury.<sup>47</sup> For all of the same reasons, I follow her lead.

### Descriptive Translation Studies

Marti also emphasizes Toury's insistence on descriptive translation studies. Marti summarizes that 'instead of presenting rules according to which the appropriateness or value of translations can be judged, [Toury] stresses the importance of a descriptive side of Translation Studies.'<sup>48</sup> To regard a translation as inferior on the grounds of its difference from an original is not a particularly useful attitude in cases such as Marti's, or mine. Much more can be learned about the cultural relationship expressed through the act of translation by minimizing value judgements and merely observing what the similarities and dissimilarities between the works indicate.

### Source versus Target

Marti follows general conventions of translation studies in the use of several precise terms to clarify the relation of the objects being discussed. In several quotes above, the word 'target' appears. This is one part of a binary, *source* and *target*. The *source* is what the *target* is based upon; the *source* is translated, the *target* is the translation. Marti clarifies this dynamic as existing at multiple levels, from the *source language* and *target language* to the *source* and *target texts* and *cultures*.<sup>49</sup> The relation becomes complicated for medieval works because the manuscript preservation is so far from perfect. It is impossible to know for certain at what remove any given text of, in Marti's case, *Le Conte du Graal* is from the version which the implied translator used as the *source text*. Likewise, it is impossible to be sure how many degrees of separation there are between the extant versions of *Parcevals saga* and the

<sup>45</sup> Tolkien and Gordon, *Sir Gawain*, xiii.

<sup>46</sup> Marti, 'Kingship, Chivalry and Religion,' 14-15.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

original *target text* which that implied translator created. Again, the situation is made easier for Marti because, she says citing Keith Busby,<sup>50</sup> the preserved redactions of *Le Conte du Graal* show only ‘relatively small differences,’ which is common to the work of especially high-profile medieval authors such as Chrétien de Troyes.<sup>51</sup> Likewise, Marti finds there is little reason to doubt the fidelity of the preserved copies of *Parcevals saga*.<sup>52</sup> Thus the translation situation Marti investigates implies a definite source text and target text. Marti feels comfortable that the relevant preserved manuscripts resemble this first source and target enough to use those extant versions as proxies. Marti can speak of source texts even in the absence of any specific candidate manuscripts.

No such definite source and target texts present themselves in the case of the Courtly Stranger. No features of the actual texts can be surmised other than what the similarities between *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* imply. Tolkien and Gordon write that ‘what is common to *Sir Gawain* and [its] French analogues may be taken to have passed through the lost French original,’<sup>53</sup> but in truth there is no way to ascertain a single ‘original,’ or what its relation might have been to any other text which could in turn be connected to *Bárðar saga*. The degree of separation between the preserved texts of each work and the actual source and target texts is unknowable, and might have been complex. It is therefore potentially misleading to use such terms as *source* and *target text*, as this implies a simple, unidirectional binary. My solution is to refer instead to *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* as linked by a system of texts which constituted a *source tradition* and a *target tradition*. Each side of the translation situation thereby refers to an indefinite number of discrete texts, of which *Sir Gawain* and *Bárðar saga* are the only certain extant representatives.<sup>54</sup> Most often, I refer to a *common source tradition* to emphasize the continuity rather than variation between the works.

### Function

*Function* is a term which Toury himself inherited from previous translation theorists.<sup>55</sup> The *function* of a text is the role which it plays in the target culture. Paraphrasing Toury, Marti says *function* ‘should be considered a determining factor in the nature of [...] outcome’ of the translation.<sup>56</sup> Marti continues that ‘cultures have a tendency to avail themselves of translation in order to fill certain gaps,’ and thus ‘the starting point for translation is usually some kind of deficiency’ which at least a subsection of the target culture perceives and believes can be remedied by recourse to translation of works from a foreign culture.<sup>57</sup> How the target text is intended to fill that gap is its function. This can be stated very simply, such as ‘education,’ or more elaborately, such as ‘education in the ways of French

<sup>50</sup> Keith Busby, *Le Roman de Perceval ou Le Conte du Graal* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1993), in Marti, *Kingship, Chivalry and Religion*, 16.

<sup>51</sup> Marti, ‘Kingship, Chivalry and Religion,’ 16.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Tolkien and Gordon, *Sir Gawain*, xv.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Brewer, *Sir Gawain: Sources and Analogues*. I exclude all parallels to *Sir Gawain* in this study because determining whether they may participate and what positions they could have in this common source tradition between *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain*, if possible at all, is too large a task for the study at hand. I have therefore erred on the side of caution.

<sup>55</sup> Marti, ‘Kingship, Chivalry and Religion,’ 9.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 12.

customs for aristocratic and noble women in thirteenth century Norway.<sup>58</sup> In the case of the Courtly Stranger motif, this is always a single episode within a larger work. Its function can be analyzed in terms of its contribution to the unity of the single work in which it appears, or its function can be analyzed as a pattern across many works. In this study I engage in both methods. In chapter three, where I analyze *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* in detail, I consider the function of the motif to the individual work. In chapter four, I move more quickly through the motif's appearance in various *fornaldarsögur*, and there I analyze the function as a pattern.

In both cases, I will present the function after conducting my analysis with the *translation strategies*, listed below. The function of a work, or in this case motif, can be similar to a general literary interpretation of a work's meaning, and thus best stated after explication.

### Adaptation

*Adaptation* is not part of Marti's discussion. In this context, it is a technical term of my own devising. In Marti's project, there is no need to distinguish between adaptation versus translation on a large, text-to-text scale; or adaptation versus the variation which results from translation on a small, passage-to-passage scale. However, in the study at hand I must engage with two kinds of transmission: First, the translation of the Courtly Stranger motif into Old Norse, and second its diffusion throughout that literary sphere. I find this necessitates some change in methodological approach. Therefore, to the terminology Marti uses I add the distinction of *adaptation*. Both processes recreate a work, but I understand the division to reflect the implied audience and their familiarity with the work. Translation implies an audience different enough from the source culture as to have difficulty for one reason or another accessing the source text. They therefore need a target text to ease their access, whether by simply changing the language or altering content to more immediately understandable forms, or often both. Adaptation is rather the recreation of a work which includes, but does not necessitate, the possibility of the audience's pre-existing familiarity with the source. In this paradigm, the intended audience of the target text may well be nearly or even fully identical to the intended audience of the source text. The adaptation can replace the source texts as much as a translation does, but might intentionally modify a known and accessible work rather than introducing a previously inaccessible one. While this emphasizes a difference in the overall goals of an adaptation versus a translation, it allows for essentially the same methodological application of translations strategies.

### **Practical Strategies**

Now that the essential background terminology and assumptions have been outlined, I progress to the specific set of translation strategies which Marti borrows from Chesterman. Marti reports that Chesterman herself 'comes up with a rather elaborate inventory of 30 translation strategies.'<sup>59</sup> Marti whittles this list down to only those strategies which she herself finds useful, and I have repeated the process. Those strategies which Marti finds applicable, she uses unchanged. The relation between

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. Ingvil Brügger Budal, 'A wave of reading women: The purpose and function of the translated French courtly literature in thirteenth-century Norway,' in Johansson and Mundal, *Riddarasögur*, 129-154.

<sup>59</sup> Marti, 'Kingship, Chivalry and Religion,' 23.

*Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* is not as straightforward and the vast differences of the two Courtly Stranger episodes in length and format render for me some of the strategies useful, but difficult to implement in the form devised by Chesterman. I will outline what procedure each strategy entails and its relevance to my study, as well as any adaptations I might find necessary. I have listed the strategies alphabetically to assist with reference.

### Cultural Filtering

*Cultural filtering* is the process by which a target text handles material from a source text which may involve foreign or uncommon objects or concepts in the target culture. The unusual element may be made to 'conform to [target language] norms,'<sup>60</sup> or the translator may 'desire to emphasize or understate the exoticism of the source text.'<sup>61</sup> Marti says that the 'opposite procedure' would be 'to transfer such items directly or borrow them into the target language,'<sup>62</sup> in other words, not filtering them at all. Marti provides an example of a change between the source, *Le Conte du Graal*, and target, *Percevals saga*, involving venison pies, in which they are called *hleifa* in Old Norse.<sup>63</sup> Marti suggests that such food was unknown in the medieval North, which demonstrates that cultural filtering can be a small-scale affair.<sup>64</sup> In the study at hand, however, the most prominent example is the concept of courtliness, which is more abstract and relates directly to central themes in each work but in significantly different ways. Thus, the contrast between its function in *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* will require relatively lengthy discussion in the next chapter.

### Direct Correspondence: from Literal Translation and Paraphrase

The most dramatic change I wish to make to the translation strategies is to combine the terms *literal translation* and *paraphrase*.

Marti follows Chesterman's technical definition of *literal translation*, defined as 'maximally close' to the source language as is grammatically possible in the target language.<sup>65</sup> Marti observes that 'pure, word-for-word rendering of Old French poetry in Old Norse prose rarely seems possible, not least due to the restrictions imposed by syntax and style.'<sup>66</sup> Marti therefore echoes Chesterman's definition of *literal translation* as 'any target text message that renders every constituent of the source without noticeably altering the meaning of the passage in question.'<sup>67</sup>

Regarding *paraphrase*, Marti cites Chesterman that this strategy can produce a target text which 'can be described as loose, free, in some contexts even undertranslated.'<sup>68</sup> In Marti's words, the

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<sup>60</sup> Chesterman, *Memes of Translation*, 108, in Marti, *Kingship, Chivalry and Religion*, 28.

<sup>61</sup> Marti, 'Kingship, Chivalry and Religion,' 28.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Chesterman, *Memes of Translation*, 94, in Marti, *Kingship, Chivalry and Religion*, 24.

<sup>66</sup> Marti, 'Kingship, Chivalry and Religion,' 24.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Chesterman, *Memes of Translation*, 104, in Marti, *Kingship, Chivalry and Religion*, 27.



translation 'lays more emphasis on the pragmatic sense of an entire clause or sentence than on the translation of smaller semantic components.'<sup>69</sup>

The Courtly Stranger episode is significantly longer and more intricate in *Sir Gawain* than in *Bárðar saga*. In relation to each other, the Middle English verse is quite expansive and elaborative and the Old Norse terse and compact. Since *literal translation* and *paraphrase* both emphasize the essential meaning of a source passage, it can be difficult in this situation to differentiate between the strategies. There are also not enough examples to warrant discussing the two concepts independently. Additionally, the names of the strategies render them somewhat inappropriate for my analysis, as they imply one of the texts is the immediate source or target of the other. It is misleading to configure *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* in such a relationship. Therefore, I collapse *literal translation* and *paraphrase* into a single term, *direct correspondence*. This better reflects the existence of contrasts between the texts without implying the source-target relationship, and also better accounts for the dissimilarity in form between the two works.

### Emphasis Change

*Emphasis change* concerns the 'addition, reduction or alteration of the emphasis in a message' or 'a change in thematic focus from the source to the target text.'<sup>70</sup> Marti is interested in *emphasis change* foremost as a way to detect differences between the source and target cultures; but for my purposes, it is useful to note that similarity in a specific *emphasis* between two texts where such is perhaps not expected or required can serve as evidence of literary relation. If the *emphasis* seems superfluous to one work, but resembles the *emphasis* at an analogous point in another work, I take this as indication that one writer has borrowed from the form of the other.

### Hyponymy and Abstraction Change

*Hyponymy* consists of 'a shift between hyponym and superordinate.'<sup>71</sup> This involves the exchange of a specific word for a more general word, such as 'nightingale,' a hyponym, versus 'bird,' its superordinate. Marti says Chesterman proposes three possible modes this strategy can take: the first two being whether the source text uses a superordinate and the target text uses a hyponym, or vice versa. The third mode is that the source and target texts both use different hyponyms of the same superordinate. The example Marti provides is the 'substitution of the Old French elements *lance*, *escu*, and *hauberk* [...] with *skjöldr*, *hjálmi*, *brynju*, *spjóti*, and *sverði*,' which are all hyponyms of the superordinate 'equipment.'<sup>72</sup> Marti concludes, 'As this kind of modification may well have cultural implications, *hyponymy* is certainly worth considering in the context of this study.'<sup>73</sup>

In the Courtly Stranger motif, the elements of courtesy seem the apt for analysis through *hyponymy*, similar to *cultural filtering*, above. I agree with Marti that *hyponymy* 'may well' be culturally significant, and readers familiar with the work of either Marti or Chesterman may expect me to

<sup>69</sup> Marti, 'Kingship, Chivalry and Religion,' 27.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 26

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

incorporate *hyponymy*, too. This is why I wish to address here how *hyponymy* is actually not an ideal strategy for my examination. *Hyponymy* can function as a tool for *cultural filtering*, working at the linguistic and semantic levels. The speech acts, gestures, clothes, codes of behavior, and other tangible and intangible accoutrements of courtly culture are certainly candidates for this kind of alteration; but very few of these elements are actually explicitly mentioned in *Bárðar saga*. Furthermore, difference in length between *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* would provide an overabundance of words from Middle English for comparison. On the whole, the two works are simply difficult to compare holistically on such a small scale. I therefore leave aside *hyponymy* and utilize only *cultural filtering*.

For similar reasons as apply to *hyponymy*, I also address the strategy of *abstraction change* here. Marti herself acknowledges the similarity between these terms. Considering the compactness of *Bárðar saga* relative to *Sir Gawain*, *abstraction change* may initially suggest itself as an important strategy to incorporate, as well, as this strategy often manifests through condensation. I do not find that *Bárðar saga*'s brevity uniformly or necessarily correlates to more abstraction than *Sir Gawain*, however, and so I will leave out *abstraction change* as well.

### Information Change

*Information change* 'entails either the addition of new information to the source text, or the omission in the target text of information given in the source.'<sup>74</sup> In the case of an addition, it 'must be something that cannot be inferred from the source text but is included in the target text because the translator considers it to be relevant.'<sup>75</sup> Omission rather implies 'that the translator does not deem it to be significant.'<sup>76</sup> Marti summarizes that '*information change* can be a comparatively subtle intrusion from the part of the translator, and can therefore be a means of adapting the source text in accordance with a hidden agenda of sorts.'<sup>77</sup> In excerpts of works of such very different lengths as between *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain*, it can be difficult to tell what counts as intentional *information change*. I will focus on those elements which change the reading and interpretation of the Courtly Stranger scene, presuming these are by design.

### Scheme Change

*Scheme change* is alteration or preservation of the rhetorical devices of a source text by the target text. Marti says Chesterman conceives of 'devices like alliteration, metrical rhythm, repetition and parallelism' as the subject of *scheme change*, and that it can be used mostly in three modes.<sup>78</sup> First, the target text can try to preserve the rhetorical devices of the source text unchanged. Second, the target text can try to transform one rhetorical device into another one. A hypothetical example would be the recasting of Old French rhyming verse into an eddic or skaldic meter. Third, 'the scheme of the original is not simply transformed, but left out entirely in the target text.'<sup>79</sup> Leaving out a rhetorical device entirely

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

implies transitioning from a marked value, the distinctive rhetorical form, to an unmarked value, some default form. Prose suggests itself as this unmarked default, but Marti does not make clear if she considers it such. Marti writes, 'In the case of *Le Conte du Graal* and *Parcevals saga*, the rendering of poetry by means of prose is the most prominent scheme change,' which is ambiguous as to whether she considers this a use of the second or third mode.<sup>80</sup> If such is the case, I am uncertain how the third mode would be possible. I will therefore consider a shift from poetry to prose to constitute the third mode of *scheme shift*.

### **Application**

Finally, I will address the implementation of these theoretical tools. As I have stressed, for all the complications imposed by the circumstances of medieval translation and the preservation of the records thereof, Marti is dealing with a much more traditional and straightforward case of translation than I am. It therefore poses no problem for her to discuss the operation of these translation strategies in a conventional way. For her, the strategies describe quite possibly conscious, unidirectional alterations from the source text as part of the the construction of the target text, using the extant versions of the Perceval Matter to stand in for the source and target texts, respectively. Whatever the reality of the system of texts to which *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* belong, neither can be the source text for nor target text of the other. Indeed, considering the implied common source tradition in Old French, each is perhaps better understood as a target text in its own right. However, it could be misleading, for instance, to assume that *Bárðar saga* is responsible for the *scheme shift* from the presumably verse source tradition, when it is unclear if *Bárðar saga* is indeed the work which first translated the Courtly Stranger motif into Old Norse. Thus, in the absence of any other representatives of the common source tradition, I will compare *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* directly. I will attempt to avoid implicating a source-target relation between the two works. The translation strategies described above identify real differences between texts and therefore lend themselves to discussion of the observable contrasts between *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain*, even without assuming the immediate involvement of the binary relationship which the terms were intended to describe. That being said, where necessary I do assume *Sir Gawain* more closely resembles the common source tradition and can serve as a 'norm' against which to measure alterations found in *Bárðar saga*. *Sir Gawain* lends itself to this purpose as a verse Arthurian romance, from a culture much closer to that of Continental France where such courtly material originated. The terminology and principles underlying my study now having been discussed, I proceed to the analyses.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter Three: *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain*

### Introduction

So far I have introduced the grounds for my study and laid out my methodology. In this chapter I directly compare my two central texts, *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. My goal is to present arguments for considering these works as two points within a system of texts linked through translation, but afterward accounting for their differences relative to one another and how those variations affect the interpretation of the Courtly Stranger motif in each case. Since these two works comprise the central focus of my project, they deserve extra attention as to the stability of the text, and the extent of its relevant parts. I will first consider their manuscript traditions and the editions which I have selected as the bases for my readings. This process will also involve delimiting an excerpt from each work on which to base my analysis. After establishing my texts, I will proceed first through what parallels I find between the two works, with an eye toward how this evidence implies relation to a common source tradition. Next, I will discuss those features unique to each work, specifically thematic elements such as the depiction of courtly society and the role of the king. These latter themes are structurally present in each work, but the uses to which they are employed differ. Finally, I will summarize my findings and the implications for treating these works as products of a shared literary ancestry.

This structure presents an arc of analysis from the small scale and similar on one end to the large scale and the variant on the other. I formally divide this arc therefore into one section on parallels and a second section on variations, and within each provide subsections ordered by the relevant translation strategies. I will briefly revisit the nature of each strategy at the start of its respective subsection. In many cases, a translation strategy can be discussed in relation to a single theme common to both *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain*, although any given strategy can be used to treat the theme in a similar or different way in each work. In the foregoing chapter I described the differences between Marti's project and my own, and why some of the terms she presents are therefore not as appropriate in the current study as in hers. I clarified the modifications made to these strategies, but will summarize again where appropriate in this chapter, as well.

To restate the general translation situation quickly and progress from there, the relation between *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* is less certain than that between the Old French and Old Norse versions of the Parceval story which Marti studies. Whatever the link or system which connects *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain*, the two works vary significantly in their surface features. The differences are great enough that it is possible to ask if there is really any grounds for comparison at all; or if any seeming relation might all be the result of coincidence. Such matters can never be 'proven' with certainty. Every scholar of which I know who has touched on the subject accepts *Bárðar saga* as in some way indebted to foreign material. Still, it is hardly inconceivable that attractive but unexamined hypotheses might long persist in academic communities. The argument I foresee against my position is essentially that it could all be the result of happenstance, native traditions which only accidentally mimic one another. I take this counter position as relatively self-explanatory and thus do not feel any need to further elaborate upon it. I will rather proceed with my analysis under the assumption that *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* are part of a shared system of texts, and let the strength or weakness of my exposition and application of

translation theory determine for the reader if such grounds are solid, with only occasional extra attention given to features I consider especially salient arguments for my hypothesis.

### **Establishing the Text**

The manuscript traditions for *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* are both fortunately simple. Although *Bárðar saga* is attested in a large number of paper manuscripts, my purposes incline me to use the oldest attested version of the saga, as this will be nearest the Courtly Stranger's point of transmission into Old Norse. *Bárðar saga* was written 'in the first half of the fourteenth century, or possibly as early as the late thirteenth century,'<sup>81</sup> while the earliest evidence for the saga is from the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century.<sup>82</sup> There is thus a gap of likely at least fifty years and possibly as much as one hundred and fifty years between likely date of composition and the oldest known manuscripts. Luckily, the manuscripts which do include the Courtly Stranger motif are all highly consistent at the relevant point of the texts.<sup>83</sup> The variations are mainly orthographic and morphological, never amounting to more than the presence or absence of an adjective or two.<sup>84</sup> I know of two modern scholarly editions of *Bárðar saga*, both of which I have mentioned in my introduction: That by Jón Skaptason and Phillip Pulsiano, and the *Íslenzk fornrit* edition by Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson. The Skaptason and Pulsiano edition contains a facing-page translation. Each edition bases their chapter divisions on different manuscript evidence. The Courtly Stranger episode occurs in chapter XIV in the Skaptason and Pulsiano edition, and in chapter XVIII in the *Íslenzk fornrit*. The buildup for Raknar's appearance begins with the phrase *líðr nú svá framan til jóla ok atfangakveld fyrir jól*. This is split across a chapter divide in the *Íslenzk fornrit*, but not in Skaptason and Pulsiano's edition. Were I to reproduce the *Íslenzk fornrit* format in my own appendix it would be either inelegant or involve more explanatory notes. I therefore use Skaptason and Pulsiano's version for the basis of my reading.

The various chapter divisions are a minor point, but I feel it useful to consider for delimiting the excerpt which can be considered part of the Courtly Stranger motif. Rather than simply beginning with the entry of the Stranger, the episode is best considered to start by setting the scene for his arrival. The similarities between *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* which Skaptason and Pulsiano mention formally end with Raknar's taunt. However, in the aftermath of the Courtly Stranger's appearance proper, the way the saga and the poem depict their respective kings' actions varies considerably. This will prove important toward the end of this chapter. I therefore select from *Bárðar saga* the section running from *líðr nú svá*

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<sup>81</sup> Skaptason and Pulsiano, *Bárðar saga*, xiii.

<sup>82</sup> Skaptason and Pulsiano, *Bárðar saga*, xxiv; Vilmundarson and Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, lxi-lxiv. The manuscripts Skaptason and Pulsiano base their edition of *Bárðar saga* on are AM 564a, 4<sup>to</sup>; AM 489, 4<sup>to</sup>; AM 162h, fol.; AM 471, 4<sup>to</sup>; AM 551a, 4<sup>to</sup>; AM 158, fol.; and AM 486, 4<sup>to</sup>. Of these, Skaptason and Pulsiano say AM 564a, 4<sup>to</sup> may be from as early as the late fourteenth century, or as young as the early fifteenth. The *Íslenzk fornrit* edition bases their edition on three more manuscripts, Gl. kgl. sml. 1006, fol.; AM 491, 4<sup>to</sup>; and AM 165g, fol.; but makes no mention of AM471<sup>to</sup>.

<sup>83</sup> The manuscripts in question are AM 489, 4<sup>to</sup>; AM 158, fol.; AM 486, 4<sup>to</sup>; Gl. kgl. sml. 1006, fol.; AM 491, 4<sup>to</sup>; AM 165g, fol.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Vilmundarson and Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 160. The *Íslenzk fornrit* edition offers the more comprehensive list, including all the variations noted in Skaptason and Pulsiano's edition and several more.

*framan til jóla ok atfangakveld fyrir jól until dauðir váru allir varðhundar nema Vígi einn ok Snati, hundr Gests*, as is found in the appendix.

The manuscript and edition context for *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is even more straightforward. The poem is preserved in only one manuscript, MS. Nero A.x. The standard edition is that by Tolkien and Gordon, which I use as well. I select from *Sir Gawain* the segment which stretches from establishing the scene at the Christmas feast until Sir Gawain himself asks to take up the Green Knight's challenge, in total from lines 37 to 342. This excerpt does not contain the Courtly Stranger's departure, but serves as a convenient point of termination for the excerpt and contains enough of the king's actions to compare Arthur with Olaf Tryggvason in the respective works. These lines therefore seem the best analogue to the Courtly Stranger episode in *Bárðar saga* delimited above.

Now with the texts being established, I turn to the comparison itself.

## Parallels

This section is primarily support for my foundational assumption that the two works are indeed related through a system of texts. There are not so many new insights to be gained by simply enumerating the similarities, but it is important to thoroughly consider the evidence to reduce my operation on unexamined assumptions. The parallels between *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* fall into two categories, *direct correspondence* and *emphasis change*. I will present the relevant instances and then summarize what conclusions can be drawn from them once all the evidence is outlined.

### Direct Correspondence

As I explained in my methodology chapter, the translation strategies of *literal translation* and *paraphrase* are problematic for my project. The terms imply a direct, or at least unidirectional, relation between a single source text and single target text. The lost system of texts by which I suggest *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* to be related do not fit this model. That being said, there are similarities between the two works which would otherwise fall under the categories of *literal translation* and *paraphrase*. I have therefore grouped both these strategies together under a new heading of *direct correspondence* so that the terminology better reflects the translation situation as it has actually been preserved. I find four cases of *direct correspondence*: the setting, the two kings' cheerfulness, the entry of the Stranger, and the taunt.

The setting of both *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* is the simplest of their similarities. Both kings are famous and powerful, and both preside over a Christmas feast in their royal hall with all the court in attendance. This background is generic enough, but provides a common context for the other points of comparison.

In both works, the scene opens with a description of the court's mood, with special attention given to the king. In line 57, the *Gawain*-poet describes Arthur as *kyng hyzest mon of wylle*. Compare this to *Bárðar saga*'s *konungr var inn glaðasti*. The superlative construction is grammatically identical, and the semantic range of both is essentially 'the king was very happy.' This similarity comes out the stronger in the Old Norse through Skaptason and Pulsiano's translation, which renders the phrase 'in the best of

spirits.<sup>85</sup> Since both works establish the general mood of the festivities, the extra detail about the king is technically superfluous except to heighten the audience's attention on him, the importance of which will be discussed under the strategy of *function*. That the otherwise needless addition is all but identical between the two works is good evidence in favor of their relation.

The third case is the entry of the Stranger, consisting of three parts: the description of the Stranger, the path which the Stranger takes through the hall, and the Stranger's silence. In each case, when the Stranger enters the audience is first given a lengthy description of his otherworldly appearance. I will treat this in more depth under the strategy of *emphasis change*. After being fully described, the Stranger goes straight toward the high seat without saying anything. *Sir Gawain* reads

*Pis habel heldez hym in and þe halle entres,  
Driuande to þe heze dece, dut he no woþe,  
Haylsed he neuer one, bot hez he ouer loked.*<sup>86</sup>

*Bárðar saga's* corresponding line is *hann gengr snúðigt innar eptir höllinni ok at há sæti konungs; öngvan mann kveðr hann*. The word *snúðigt* is missing in four manuscripts<sup>87</sup> and reads *snúðugt* in one.<sup>88</sup> But otherwise the reading is consistent.

Fourth is the taunt. Again, Skaptason and Pulsiano have drawn attention to this feature regarding the similarity between the two works, but they present no detailed analysis. In *Sir Gawain*, the Green Knight offers the court his game and then says

*Now hyze, and let se tite  
Dar any herinne ozt say.*<sup>89</sup>

Likewise, once Raknar has made his own offer, he says *en sá* [that man who dares accept] *mun engi hér inni vera*. The correspondence is not quite so close between the two works here as in the preceding examples. The verb in question, *dar* in Middle English, indeed matches the expected cognate, *þorir*. The verb comes in an earlier clause in the Old Norse, however, so the syntax is changed but not the narrative content or logic. This would normally fall under the translation strategy of *paraphrase* rather than *literal translation*, because of the minor alteration; but in the case at hand it nevertheless still qualifies as *direct correspondence*. I read the Old Norse version as a more emphatic insult to the court, whereas the Green Knight comes asking for a manly game and his taunt could be read as playful baiting. This enters the realm of subjectivity, though, and so I will ultimately leave it as *direct correspondence*.

<sup>85</sup> Skaptason and Pulsiano, *Bárðar saga*, 95.

<sup>86</sup> Tolkien and Gordon, *Sir Gawain*, ll. 221-23.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Vilmundarson and Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 160. AM 486, 4<sup>to</sup>; AM 491, 4<sup>to</sup>; AM 165g, fol.; and Gl. kgl. sml. 1006, fol.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* This is AM 158 fol.

<sup>89</sup> Tolkien and Gordon, *Sir Gawain*, ll. 299-300.

Emphasis Change

I find *emphasis change* most manifest in regards to the descriptions of the Courtly Strangers. Said more accurately, I find the same emphasis on the same structural features between the two works, how the Strangers are described. I gauge this by the expansiveness of each description. Both Strangers are described immediately upon entry, before taking any other action, as discussed in the preceding subsection. The descriptions are lists of the Strangers' physical characteristics as well as their equipment. In *Sir Gawain*, the poet spends nearly one hundred lines describing the Green Knight and his gear.<sup>90</sup> *Bárðar saga* devotes six adjectives to Raknar's personal appearance, *mikill ok illiligr, skrámlétr ok skoteygr, svartskeggjaðr ok síðnefjaðr*, four of which alliterate. This may represent influence from a poetic source, as will be discussed under the strategy of *scheme shift* in the variations section. Regardless, Raknar's physical traits are followed by a list of five impressive objects Raknar has on his person: *Þessi maðr hafði hjálm á höfði ok var í hringabrynju ok gyrðr sverði. Gulligt men hafði hann á hálsi ok digran gullhring á hendi*. There is no empirical standard for what counts as an unusual amount of description in either sagas or verse romances, but I again trust in the reader's discernment that each case is notably lengthy.

This parallel might initially seem better classified under *direct correspondences*, above, especially since I conclude the emphasis is the same in each case. However, the actual content of the descriptions differs significantly. The Green Knight is, obviously, green. He carries an axe and a holly sprig, and aside from his unusual size and hue, and his fierce *rede yzen*,<sup>91</sup> the Green Knight is actually not ugly. Many of the nearly one hundred lines describing the Green Knight do so with a tone of praise. Those which finish the first stanza of the description read, in part,

*For of bak and of brest al were his bodi sturne,  
Both his wombe and his wast were worthily smale,  
And all his fetures folzande, in forme þat he hade,  
ful clene.<sup>92</sup>*

Neither the Green Knight's appearance nor his equipment matches those of Raknar. The only common feature between the two of them is their size, since Raknar is *mikill* and the Green Knight is

*On þe most on þe molde on mesure hyghe;  
Fro þe swyre to þe swange so sware and so þik,  
And his lynes and his lymes so longe and so grete,  
Half etayn in erde I hope þat he were.<sup>93</sup>*

Both Strangers seem unnatural, but Raknar is more clearly a typical Old Norse revenant, complete with overpowering stench.<sup>94</sup> The Green Knight is instead likened to a *fayryze*,<sup>95</sup> Otherworldly but otherwise

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., ll. 136-220.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., l. 304.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., ll. 143-46.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., ll. 137-40.



still fair and even courtly. The descriptions of the Strangers therefore are not cases of *direct correspondence*, but rather analogues to one another in *emphasis* on appearance. This parallelism is all the more noteworthy because of the structure of both is the same despite the content differing.

The one-to-one relation of so many features in such a short narration, and in the exact same order, convinces me of literary relation between the two works. I can hardly think one could hope for better such evidence from medieval sources, outside of an explicit case of translation such as that studied by Marti. There is nothing within either plot necessitating these correspondences: It strikes me more improbable that they would arise by accident than that the works are indebted to a common source tradition. Were my object merely to argue for that relation, I would consider these *direct correspondences* and likenesses in *emphasis* enough. These similarities merely provide the necessary groundwork before comparing the differences between *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain*, however, to which I will now proceed.

### Variations

That *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* are members of a shared system of texts is not as interesting to me as how each one interacts uniquely with that system, which will be my focus in this section on variations. Unfortunately, other members in that system are not preserved, leaving only these two texts for comparison to one another. Throughout my discussion of variations, I try to avoid assumptions and language positing either *Bárðar saga* or *Sir Gawain* as the source or target text, since as I have described, the system which must relate them is more complicated than what is allowed by a binary arrangement. That being said, I do assume *Sir Gawain* to be the ‘norm’ against which *Bárðar saga* is at variance. I do so because the common source tradition must have been transmitted through French language sources. In this regard, the Middle English language and culture which produced *Sir Gawain* is much closer to the source tradition than the Old Icelandic language and culture which produced *Bárðar saga*.

As the kinds of variance discussed in this section become less empirical and more thematic, the discussions become longer and at times going beyond the bounds of the Courtly Stranger episodes themselves. The themes in each instance are integrated into the whole, and thus analyzing them intelligently requires ranging wider through each work than just the excerpt outlined at the start of this chapter. Occasionally I also appeal to differences between the saga and romance traditions in rather specific but far-reaching ways. I must in such cases rely on the reader’s own familiarity with sagas and romances and their common tropes and themes, else I would stray too far beyond the bounds of the current study. Regardless, it is my goal to provide as well in each case enough information from *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* so that should the reader disagree with my broader assumptions, my suggestions might at least still be seen to hold valid for the two works in question.

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<sup>94</sup> Cf. Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 2001), 56-61; and Vilmundarson and Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 39-44. A foul odor is one of the defining characteristics of both the revenants Kárr and Sóti.

<sup>95</sup> Tolkien and Gordon, *Sir Gawain*, l. 240.

Scheme shift

*Scheme shift*, a change in the style or form of the work, seems as if it would be the most straightforward of all the translation strategies, and in many ways it is. *Bárðar saga* is prose while *Sir Gawain* is in verse. If the lost tradition was transmitted through romances anything like those of Chrétien de Troyes, as seems likely, it was most likely in verse as well. This would mean that only *Bárðar saga* reflects a scheme shift somewhere in its branch of the tradition. However, as touched on briefly regarding the adjectives describing Raknar, four of these alliterate, all on s and the first two specifically on the consonant cluster *sk*. These four are consecutive, after *mikill ok illigr*. Those first two adjectives are more generic than the rest, essentially amounting to ‘big and ugly.’ It is possible that the set of more specific adjectives which follow intentionally alliterate. Assuming the original Old French source tradition was in rhyming verse, whatever the original Old Norse target text was may have attempted to emulate this with a *scheme shift* to an alliterative meter. It is also possible that the original target text simply used an alliterative section of prose, like *Bárðar saga* if not actually being *Bárðar saga*, itself, to capture some of the style of the source text or tradition. Thus, overall the saga reflects the third mode of *scheme change* discussed in the methodology, from a rhetorically marked form to an unmarked form. The alliterative section may represent the second mode, from one rhetorically marked form to a different rhetorically marked form; but the evidence is too scant to make any firmer claims.

Abstraction Change

*Abstraction change* is easily noticeable between *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* because of their disparate lengths. *Sir Gawain* embraces embellishment and expansion, hallmarks of the French romances. *Bárðar saga* is typical of Old Norse prose in its brevity. Therefore it should not be surprising that the latter’s narration is the more abstract, having less narrative space for detail. That being said, not every reduction in detail equates to abstraction. To revisit briefly the description of the two Strangers, I have noted how unusually lengthy each is, given the norms for their genres. The description of the Green Knight is nonetheless many, many times longer than that of Raknar. However, the details ascribed to Raknar by the four alliterating adjectives are quite specific. Therefore while *Bárðar saga* might supply less information about Raknar, in this regard it is not necessarily more abstract.

Generally, though, the difference in lengths does correspond to a difference in abstraction. Dozens of lines describing the *rych reuel oryzt and rechles merpes*,<sup>96</sup> the *caroles*<sup>97</sup> and *daunsyng*<sup>98</sup> and *crakkyng of trumpes*,<sup>99</sup> are matched in *Bárðar saga* by just the two clauses, *váru menn glaðir ok kátir* and *er menn höfðu drukkit um stund*. *Sir Gawain*’s close attention to the court’s amazement, the Green Knight’s speech, the exchange between him and Arthur, and the length of the taunt, find their analogues in *Bárðar saga* only as *mönnum fannst mikit um sýn þessa. Engi maðr beiddi hann orða; ok er hann hafði staðit um stund fyrir konungi, mælti hann*. And once Raknar has finished speaking, *síðan gekk hann í burt*. This *abstraction change* is probably an inevitable result of not only the *scheme change* from verse to

<sup>96</sup> Tolkien and Gordon, *Sir Gawain*, l. 40.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 43.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 47.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 116

prose, but the transmission of the source tradition out of a culture which expected elaboration in literature to one which favored more succinct narration. I do not find the *abstraction change* itself very meaningful, but the content which differs in abstractness between the two works is largely that which depicts courtly culture. I will discuss this further under the strategy of *cultural filtering*, below.

*Information Change: Silence and Shame*

The key case of *information change* between *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* involves the silence of the Stranger and the court, and by extension the reason for which the court is shamed. A small difference here has a large effect on the overall interpretation of each work. In *Sir Gawain*, the Green Knight enters, silently approaches the high seat, asks for the leader, and then Arthur responds. The two go back and forth about what the Green Knight wants, a fight or a game, before the Green Knight tells the court what kind of game he really wants and delivers his taunt. At this point the court falls silent and fails to reply for so long that the Green Knight shames them. When the court is silent the first time, it is explicitly because they are stunned by the Green Knight's appearance. After the Green Knight initially speaks, asking for *þe gouenour of þis gyng*,<sup>100</sup> the poet says

*Ther watz loking on lenþe þe lude to beholde,  
For vch mon had meruayle quat hit mene myzt,  
þat a habel and a horse myzt such a hwe lach;*<sup>101</sup>

and further,

*Al studied þat þer stod, and stalked hym nerre  
Wyth al þe wonder of þe worlde what he worch schulde.  
For fele sellyez had þay sen, bot such neuer are;  
Forþi for fantoum and fayryze þe folk þere hit demed.*<sup>102</sup>

The poet makes clear that the Green Knight is something wholly new for the court, and the poet also personally intervenes to excuse the court's behavior, telling the audience

*As al were slypped vpon slepe so slaked hor lotez  
in hyze-  
I deme hit not al for doute,  
Bot sum for cortaysye-  
Bot let hym þat al schulde loute  
Cast vnto þat wyze.*<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., l. 225.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., ll. 232-34.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., ll. 237-40.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., ll. 244-49.

Perhaps the poet is being ironic here, protesting too much and thereby actually implicating the court as lacking fortitude for being so surprised by the Green Knight. But even if so, the Green Knight has not yet shamed the court. There is no corresponding narratorial intrusion in *Bárðar saga*, so whether the poet is casting doubt on Arthur's court or not, the only point of comparison with *Bárðar saga* is the judgement delivered by the Stranger himself. I will therefore leave aside the question of the poet's intention for his comment.

Arthur eventually speaks up, *rekenly hym reuerenced, for rad was he neuer*.<sup>104</sup> Though he misunderstands the Green Knight, it appears Arthur's admittedly slow courtesy staves off reproach from the Stranger at this point, likely because the king is nevertheless brave even if foolish. But once the Green Knight offers his *Crystemas gomen*,<sup>105</sup> for any who *dar stifly strike a strok for an oþer*,<sup>106</sup> then the fateful silence falls:

*If he hem stowned vpon fyrst, stiller were þanne  
Alle þe heredmen in halle, þe hyz and þe loze.*

It is after this the Green Knight demands *What, is þis Arþurez hous [...] þat al þe rous rennes of þurz ryalmes so mony?*<sup>107</sup> The Green Knight clarifies what that *rous* consists of: *sourquydrye, conquests, gryndellayk, greme, and grete words*.<sup>108</sup> The failure of the court is their failure to live up to their reputation for bravery, with some hint at the less warlike qualities of courtliness represented by *grete words* and *reuel* and *renoun*.<sup>109</sup> This is signified by their silence, but the problem is not the silence itself. The Green Knight makes a fair, if dangerous and unusual, appeal to the knights and they act as cowards.

Things are otherwise in *Bárðar saga*. Raknar enters and goes silently to the high seat, greeting no one along the way. This matches *Sir Gawain*. Unlike the Green Knight, though, Raknar does not ask for the leader of the court, and he does not make any offer for the court to either accept or deny. There is no conversation with Olaf. Rather, the hideous Stranger walks into the feast and neither speaks nor is spoken to, but *er hann hafði staðit um stund*, passes judgement on the court nonetheless. The saga writer says *mönnum fannst mikit um sýn þessa*, echoing the court's wonder as in *Sir Gawain*. But Olaf's court is only explicitly said to be surprised, not afraid. Raknar passes his judgment on the court because *mér hefir sízt nökkurr greiði boðinn verit af jafnmiklu stórmenni*. Raknar expects *greiði*, entertainment or accommodation, from men of such greatness, even though he does not actually ask for it and certainly gives none first or in return. The judgment seems more unfair than in *Sir Gawain*, as if Raknar knows beforehand what effect his horrible appearance will have. Raknar then attempts to maneuver himself into a position of moral, ethical, or social superiority by claiming he shall be *örvari*, more generous than the court has proven itself. Raknar makes the court an offer, which is what they failed to give to him. The failure of the court is therefore a failure of speech itself, rather than symbolizing some other lack as in *Sir*

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., l. 251.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., l. 283.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., l. 287.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., ll. 309-310.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., ll. 311-12

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., l. 313

*Gawain*. The court lacks *örr* (the root of *örvari*) speech, generous speech. This is a failure not of bravery, but of courtesy.

Thus, despite the surface similarities, the *information change* of the Stranger's interaction with the court and their subsequent silence and shame reveal that the two works pass judgement by wholly different measures. There is no implication that Olaf Tryggvason's court lacks bravery, as such a suggestion might be quite shocking to a saga audience. Rather, their lack is in the eloquence and grace of the Continental courts, which may well have seemed a more reasonable charge to the medieval Icelanders who received *Bárðar saga*. This brings my discussion to the translation strategy of *cultural filtering*.

### *Cultural Filtering: Courtliness*

*Cultural filtering* is the process by which a translation explains or adapts foreign concepts from the source culture in order to ease the target culture's understanding. As I have described in my methodology, in the current project this strategy involves analyzing less specific, concrete evidence than ones discussed so far. In the case at hand, the *culturally filtered* material is the concept of courtesy, which is only truly foreign to the medieval North. But, what courtliness *is* exactly can be difficult to pin down. Many academic careers can, have, and will be spent on this subject. Overview of medieval romance provides some insight<sup>110</sup> and the lately increased interest in *riddarasögur* has spurred a number of studies comparing chivalric ideals to those native in Scandinavia.<sup>111</sup> In the end, though, what constitutes courtliness remains an open question.<sup>112</sup> However, understanding *Bárðar saga's* interaction with the concept requires at least a semi-solid framework. Further, the mere fascination with the influence of courtly romances on the sagas testifies to that there must be a tangible difference between the two traditions.

This means the *cultural filtering* of courtesy can only really be discussed in terms of *Bárðar saga*. To recall what I have said at the outset of this section on variance, *Sir Gawain* is a product of Middle English and while the ideas of courtliness are first disseminated throughout England via French-speaking Anglo-Normans, the linguistic and social overlap of the French and English spheres was so great that, especially by the *Gawain*-poet's time, I think it inaccurate to say that courtesy was a foreign concept to any elite Englishman. While *Sir Gawain* does indeed hinge on subversion of courtly culture, this is more properly read as parody and critique from within the native culture rather than *cultural filtering* between a source and target culture.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>110</sup> Cf. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Johansson and Mundal, *Riddarasögur*.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Richard Kaeuper, 'The societal role of chivalry in romance: northwestern Europe,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, 97. Kaeuper begins with the similar question, 'What did medieval people mean when they used the word "chivalry"?' The article examines the 'two-way-traffic' between life and literature in regards to 'chivalry,' but in the end, exactly what courtesy is at its essence remains an open question.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Simon Gaunt, 'Romance and other genres,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, 55. Regarding the Old French *La Queste del Saint Graal* from the prose *Lancelot* cycle, Gaunt writes, 'If it contests the values of romance, the *Queste* does so from within the framework of romance.' *Sir Gawain* is therefore not unique in its deconstruction of romance from within.

I also anticipate this could be another source of contention over my hypothesis that *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* share descent from a common source tradition. Neither of the works concerns itself with one of the more clearly identifiable courtly themes, such as the kind of love treated by Chrétien de Troyes. Therefore it is impossible to point to any such telling thematic evidence. To again return to my methodology, I have discussed how the surface-level differences between *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* hinder attempts at linguistic or semantic comparison through a concept such as *hyponomy*. But even were the texts more similar, a linguistic or semantic approach might not be any more applicable. Despite its famously French origins, overall courtliness is not tied specifically to that language. There are indeed loanwords even in the sagas which clearly show a connection between the French language and courtesy, specifically that word itself. Marti discusses one such instance regarding *Parcevals saga* where Old French *cortois* is rendered into Old Norse as *kurteisasti*.<sup>114</sup> *Völsunga saga* offers a similar example, in which Sigurðr is described as *langt umfram aðra men at kurteisi*.<sup>115</sup> But other than the term *courtesy* itself, courtesy is not technical enough to be bound to specific terms in a specific language such as the way medieval theology is to Latin. It is therefore possible for courtly themes to be taken up in other languages without using any French loanwords, which is the case in *Bárðar saga*. Nor does the *Gawain*-poet appear to feel any particular need to use French loans when depicting the courtesy of King Arthur's court. Just to offer a partial list, the *Gawain*-poet uses such terms as *aventure*,<sup>116</sup> *cortaysye*,<sup>117</sup> *gay*,<sup>118</sup> *gentyle*,<sup>119</sup> alongside more etymologically Germanic words such as *dere*<sup>120</sup> and *worthily*,<sup>121</sup> and the almost-stereotypically-English *stif*.<sup>122</sup> If anything, the latter are actually more frequent than the former.

The point I am trying to make is that it is difficult to precisely determine what does and does not count as 'courtly,' and thus what is or is not being *culturally filtered*. As I illustrated at the outset of this study, the previous scholarship on what I am calling the Courtly Stranger motif identifies it only as Irish. My opposition to this classification is one of the central tenets of this project, and I recall again Tolkien and Gordon, who say of *Sir Gawain* that 'it is evident that the author of *Sir Gawain* was in some degree dependent on French romance; his insistence on the courtliness of his characters belongs to French tradition.'<sup>123</sup>

At such a late date as the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, Old Norse literature in general had already witnessed the translation of Chrétien's romances, and Old Icelandic literature specifically had seen those romances transmitted to the island and become the bases for the indigenous *riddarasögur*. Therefore, the ideas of courtliness should not be completely alien to the audience of *Bárðar saga*, nor should they be assumed unfamiliar with adaptations of French romances to saga

<sup>114</sup> Marti, 'Kingship, Chivalry, and Religion,' 24.

<sup>115</sup> Jónsson and Vilhjálmsson, *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda I*, 46.

<sup>116</sup> Tolkien and Gordon, *Sir Gawain*. Cf. *aventure*, l. 250; *aventurus*, l. 93, 95.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. Cf. *cortaysye*, l. 247, 263; *cortays*, l. 276.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. Cf. *gay*, l. 74, 167, 179; *gayn*, l. 178.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. Cf. *gentyle*, l. 42.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. Cf. *dere*, l. 47, 75, 92, 121, 193.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. Cf. *derworply*, l. 114; *worthily* l. 144; *worpyest*, l. 261; *worpyly*, l. 72.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. Cf. *stif*, l. 104, 107, 176, 294, 322, 332; *stifest*, l. 260; *stifly*, l. 287.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., xiii-xiv.

prose.<sup>124</sup> But this is not to imply the same level of familiarity with courtly ideals among Icelanders as among the *Gawain*-poet's English peers. Although *Bárðar saga* is not the first work to introduce courtliness into the sagas, it was nevertheless compiled relatively early in the history of that transmission. *Bárðar saga's* treatment of courtesy is still worthy of examination. I find the most interesting theme associated with the Courtly Stranger motif in *Bárðar saga* when read as an intertext of *Sir Gawain* is what I will label *exchange*.

To begin with a comparison to *Sir Gawain*, The Green Knight offers Arthur's court the Beheading Game. Among the ideas underlying this trope is an exchange of like for like, one blow for another given with generosity and equality. Perhaps this is what makes it a popular motif in courtly literature, given as well the tension which arises from recontextualizing these virtues into something deadly. I see the idea of *exchange* as encompassing both those subsidiary concepts of generosity and equality, that two people cement their relationship by reciprocal gifts of the same worth. I also understand this concept as different from traditional Norse gift giving. That custom is intended to enforce power hierarchies and is made of dual unidirectional flows: The king has material wealth and thus deals out the treasures, while his retainers accept them in return for a pledge of service in combat. The range of things acceptable for exchange is more open-ended in romances, as are the directions in which these exchanges might flow. Indeed, the rewards might even be immaterial. Whereas in Norse gift giving, an immaterial gift such as a pledge of fealty is only good insofar as it can lead to real actions, in romances knights might receive spiritual goods which can never be translated into physical goods or services, such as I shall demonstrate in the case of *Sir Gawain*, below. In literature if not life, romances treat exchange as more about at least pretending to erase hierarchies and giving the high and the low equal chances at magnanimity, though admittedly only within the ranks of the upper class. The two systems are structurally similar, but accomplish different ends.

The theme of exchange in the Beheading Game thereby reflects the balance between the cowardice which causes the court's shame and Gawain's bravery which subsequently redeems them. The theme is also amplified by the three days in which Gawain and Bertilak exchange winnings at the castle. Gawain's failure to uphold the final exchange in that series can be read as the knight's seminal failure. All the central characters in *Sir Gawain* attempt to uphold their part of the exchanges which run throughout the work.

Raknar, however, merely pays lip service to this idea. Since Olaf's court is shamed due to their lack of courtesy, in theory their redemption should come by a successful performance of courtesy, which is exactly what Gestr gives to Raknar. When the two finally meet in his barrow mound, *Gestr gekk at Raknari ok kvaddi hann virðuligri konungskveðju, en Raknarr hneigði honum á mót.*<sup>125</sup> I agree with Skaptason and Pulsiano, who translate this as Gestr 'walked over to Raknar and greeted him with the respect due to a king. Raknar bowed his acknowledgement.'<sup>126</sup> Raknar finally receives what he found lacking at Olaf's court, which in theory should erase their shame. But though the revenant initially seems

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<sup>124</sup> Cf. Stefka Eriksen, 'Arthurian ethics in thirteenth-century Old Norse literature and society,' in Johansson and Mundal, *Riddarasögur*, 175-98. Like the above referenced Kaeuper, Eriksen takes special interest in the intersection of life and literature, and in this case especially law. The article focuses on how Old Norse translations of Latin and Old French romances and *lais* could have interacted with medieval Scandinavian legal culture.

<sup>125</sup> Skaptason and Pulsiano, *Bárðar saga*, 106.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

to accept the hero's courtesy with grace, in truth he merely waits just a bit longer only to attack Gestr all the same. Raknar is a liar and an oathbreaker because he does not uphold his side of the exchange. Perhaps this gives credence to a reading that Raknar intended the whole quest as an elaborate trap from the beginning. This likely fulfills an audience expectation that the saga hero should have a climactic final battle with the revenant, but such an urge need not be in opposition to exploration of courtly themes. Rather, the writer of *Bárðar saga* uses Raknar's treachery as a means to transition into the exciting fight. Gestr seems content to let Raknar 'live,' so much as a revenant can be said to do so, as long as the exchange is upheld. This may be because Raknar is nonetheless a king, a theme I shall return to under the discussion of *function*. The saga audience was likely familiar with courtesy as elegant speech, but the reciprocal generosity of Gestr's *konungskveðja* also introduces the idea of exchange into *Bárðar saga*, which may not have been as widely understood. When Raknar goes back on his pledge by attacking Gestr, the saga writer is also able to *culturally filter* the punishment for breaking the customs of exchange into a form the audience would have been comfortably familiar with.

I consider reward as another part of the concept of exchange, the giving of a boon in return for performance of a service or task. I have just mentioned that in romances, characters might exchange intangibles as well as tangibles, such as the final rewards which Gawain wins from the Green Knight: humility and piety. *Sir Gawain* is perhaps more concerned with the spiritual than most romances, an idea I will address during my discussion on *function*, below.<sup>127</sup> But I would argue that romances are generally more concerned with intangible ideas. Courteous behavior is often an outward sign of inner worth, and the genre's system of thought is turned ultimately toward concepts such as love, whether worldly or divine. Hence, Gawain is not unique as a romance hero rewarded with immaterial goods.

The writer of *Bárðar saga* does not embrace this idea, though. Raknar offers solid treasures, *gripi þessa, sem ek hefi hér nú*, the precious jewelry and war gear which the revenant has upon his person. When Gestr arrives in the barrow mound, these are exactly the things he seeks to take from the revenant and bring back to King Olaf.<sup>128</sup> They do not seem to represent anything metaphysical. This, then, may represent the limit to which the writer was willing or able to filter the foreign idea.

To draw to a close on the subsection of *cultural filtering*, *Bárðar saga* appears to comprehend the underlying philosophies of the courtly tradition and weaves, for example, the idea of exchange into its narrative. That being said, the writer also blends the theme into traditional saga structures to deliver the expected climactic battle. Furthermore, *Bárðar saga* stops short of embracing purely spiritual rewards for its hero, opting instead for a more familiar set of jewels and war gear taken from a vanquished foe.

### **Function: Faith and Kingship**

Strictly speaking, *function* is not a translation strategy. It is the role which the target text is designed to fulfill in the target culture. The other translation strategies express a relation between the

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<sup>127</sup> Cf. Gaunt, 'Romance and other genres,' 55. Gaunt discusses *La Queste del Saint Graal* as an attempt to 'reorientate romance away from secular towards spiritual concerns.' *Sir Gawain* is not alone then in its spurning of the worldly for the spiritual, but such an interest can indeed be seen as a later, alternative development for romances rather than a default theme.

<sup>128</sup> Skaptason and Pulsiano, *Bárðar saga*, 106.



source and target, but the function can operate independently, since it is similar to the overall interpretation of a text. That being said, I find that *Bárðar saga's* function becomes clearer when considered in relation to *Sir Gawain*, especially in regards to two themes: faith and kingship.

### Faith

Gawain's single failure enables him to learn the lessons of humility and piety, constituting the spiritual rewards which I have mentioned under *cultural filtering*. These are specifically Christian values, and Gawain's reward of insight is more in keeping with Christian morality than the equally spiritual but yet worldly love which a writer such as, for example, Chrétien de Troyes focuses on in *The Knight of the Cart*. As I have touched on before, romance as a system is generally disposed toward philosophical questions and lessons. *Sir Gawain* accomplishes this especially by eschewing the supernatural, aside from the Green Knight himself, in favor of Gawain's more realistic internal struggles. In the end, his quest is revealed to have been a religious one all along. The story can be read as a trial of faith, accented with the extraordinary but otherwise comprised of challenges such as sexual temptation and dishonesty for self-preservation. These are struggles which the audience of the work can relate to in their real lives.

Gestr's rewards are material rather than spiritual, and the quest he goes on is more outlandish and classically adventuresome. Religion is still just as important to it, though, as it is to Gawain's journey. Both stories can be read as trials of faith, but the role which religion plays ultimately differs significantly. Gawain is tested both as an individual and as a representative for an institution. When Gawain receives the supposedly magical sash which will save his life, he is obliged to exchange this with Bertilak. His failure to do so because of fear and doubt, and the resulting dishonesty toward Bertilak, is a personal matter. But as the greatest of King Arthur's knights, he serves as a synecdoche for the whole court, itself a synecdoche for the entire concept of courtliness. In this regard, the *function* of *Sir Gawain* is to ask if the culture of courtliness is compatible with Christianity. Gawain finds a personal solution to the problem, through humility and piety. But when he returns to Camelot and tells his tale,

*þe kyng comfotez þe knyzt, and alle þe court als  
Lazen loud þerat, and luflyly acorden  
þat lords and ladis þat longed to þe Table,  
Vche burne of þe broþerhede, a bauderyk schulde haue,  
A bende abelef hym aboute of a bryzt grene,  
For þat, for sake of þat segge, in swete to were.<sup>129</sup>*

Neither the king nor the court understands the lessons of the journey, and they try to appropriate the rewards without having undergone the challenges. If King Arthur's court is the best in the world at courtesy and this is all they can do, then the answer is no: The institution of courtliness on a large scale is not compatible with Christianity. Focused as it might pretend to be on the spiritual, courtliness really amounts to *daunsyng* and *talkyng noble*. A *function* of *Sir Gawain* is therefore to use faith as a metric to critique the secular tradition of courtesy. This seems in keeping with the themes of the other poems

<sup>129</sup> Tolkien and Gordon, *Sir Gawain*, ll. 2513-18.

assumed to have been authored by the *Gawain*-poet, such as *Pearl*. The idea is in keeping with the general medieval idea of the fallibility of the laws of man and the perfect laws of God.

This goes far beyond the bounds of the Courtly Stranger motif proper, but that trope is what sets the plot of the whole story in motion. Gawain's bravery redeems the court's shame on one level, but the root cause which led them into disgrace is the corrupting influence of secular courtesy. Therefore Gawain's return is still a narrative response to the issues raised by the Courtly Stranger. The episode's resolution is bound up with the narrative as a whole, and so comprehending the ultimate purpose of the motif requires looking so far as the end of the work.

*Bárðar saga* is not as subtle. Though the dangers which Gestr faces ultimately come from spiritual conflict, they manifest in very physical ways. Gestr and his men are repeatedly saved on their journey only by Jósteinn the priest. Jósteinn defeats Odin in disguise and a diabolical bull, as well as the sorcery of Raknar once the group reaches the barrow mound itself.<sup>130</sup> However, the first two of these victories are accomplished quite physically. In both cases, Jósteinn uses his crucifix as a weapon to bludgeon the demons into submission. Once the adventurers reach Raknar's barrow mound itself, they can only enter after Jósteinn's faith has defeated Raknar's sorcery; and Jósteinn performs the feat again when Raknar bewilders all the men waiting for Gestr outside the barrow.<sup>131</sup> These are struggles between the devil and his forces of evil and God himself, represented by the ever-victorious Jósteinn. For the most part, Gestr is left as a spectator, though Gestr does unsuccessfully try to fight the demonic bull before Jósteinn arrives.<sup>132</sup> This inadequacy foreshadows the final battle with Raknar, when Gestr must become an active agent in the fight against evil and cannot rely on Jósteinn. When Gestr realizes he cannot overcome the revenant and his army of the dead alone, he first calls on his father, the titular *landvættir* Bárðr. But the heathen spirit *orkaði hann öngu*. Thereafter Gestr pledges to take the faith of King Olaf, and the monarch appears in a flash of light which overpowers Raknar and gives Gestr the victory.

The tension in *Bárðar saga* is not a question of personal or even cultural worthiness, but a story about the triumph of Christianity over heathenism. This is not an unusual theme in the sagas. The trials of faith are combative rather than introspective. But the *function* of faith in *Bárðar saga* as a whole is more complicated. Bárðr is a *landvættir* who flees the Conversion of Norway. He fails to integrate peacefully with men in Iceland but nevertheless becomes a helpful guardian nature spirit. As such, he is implicitly excluded from ever becoming Christian, yet he often behaves heroically. His son finds himself witness to a battle between the old ways of heathendom, his father's ways; and the new, clearly better and more effective ways of Christianity. Gestr can only save himself essentially through a Christian prayer; but in the end, when Gestr has just been baptized, Bárðr appears to his son in a dream. The *landvættir* accuses Gestr of treachery and gouges out his eyes, killing him. The saga therefore ends ambiguously, and its *function* appears to question how Icelandic culture can reconcile its Christian faith with a culture so deeply rooted in heathenism.

I have now ranged far afield from the Courtly Stranger in *Bárðar saga*, too, but it is necessary to talk about the pervading theme of faith because it is anchored into the Courtly Stranger episode itself. The theme does not exist there alone, however. It is comingled with a new theme which only enters the saga with the appearance of Olaf Tryggvason: kingship.

<sup>130</sup> Skaptason and Pulsiano, *Bárðar saga*, 98, 100, 104, and 110.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 104, 110.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

Kingship

The Courtly Stranger episode in *Bárðar saga* is essentially a contest between kings, the heathen revenant Raknar and the Christian evangelist, Olaf Tryggvason. It is easy to see this only as a contest between Christianity and heathenism, but *Bárðar saga* resists this simplicity. I have already discussed the courtesy which Gestr shows to Raknar in his barrow mound, and noted Skaptason and Pulsiano's translation of the word *konungskveðja* as 'respect due to a king.' *Bárðar saga* posits Raknar as in many ways equal to Olaf, and actually the enemy of the king himself rather than Gestr. Although it is Gestr who undergoes the quest, the hero is operating at Olaf's behalf to bring Olaf the treasures. Gestr is only able to achieve his quest in the end by Olaf's saint-like intercession. Olaf commands Gestr to take Jósteynn the priest, without whom the quest would have failed many times over. In all these ways, it is as much King Olaf who is fighting against King Raknar as Gestr and Jósteynn.

This subtle juxtaposition of power operates within the Courtly Stranger episode as well, or rather in its resolution. When Raknar departs, *varð illr þefr í höllinni; varð öllum at þessu mikill ótti*. This confusion foreshadows that into which Raknar throws the men on the barrow mound by his sorcery, though the word used there is *ærdust* rather than *ótti*.<sup>133</sup> The effect is the same, however: Raknar sows chaos in his wake. Another form this takes is a horrid reek, because of which *lágu margir menn sem hálf dauðir ok í óviti*, and *dauðir váru allir varðhundar nema Vígi einn ok Snati, hundr Gestr*. This is a supernatural disruption of order, the order of men in the court and even God's order of nature by killing the animals and inflicting sickness. Against this is set the power of King Olaf, and it is victorious. Against the confusion, Olaf *bað menn sitja kyrra, þar til sem þefr sjá þyrri, ok gerðu menn svá sem konungr bauð*. Those who *lágu [...] sem hálf dauðir ok í óviti* are cured when *konungr kom sjálfr til ok less yfir þeim*, the implication being that he reads scripture. Olaf is the guarantor and enforcer of God's right order against the supernatural and destructive chaos of Raknar's magic. But it is his position as king which allows him to do this.<sup>134</sup> The saga could have introduced Jósteynn at this juncture, yet does not. The focus is purely on King Olaf's saint-like powers.

The Courtly Stranger episode binds together the ideals of courtliness and faith. The king rules over a court which together are reputed to be the highest form of secular culture, while at the same time the king himself is an agent of God and granted holy powers. *Bárðar saga* portrays the king as the supreme force of worldly and spiritual order. Whereas the Courtly Stranger in *Sir Gawain* depicts a weak king, corrupted by an effete secular courtliness, the *function* of the Courtly Stranger in *Bárðar saga* is to glorify the monarchy. This interpretation is strengthened by the context in which the saga was produced: In the late thirteenth century to early fourteenth century, Iceland was still relatively newly come under monarchical rule. Whereas many *íslendingasögur* begin with a story of Iceland's settlers as brave men seeking freedom from tyrannical rule in Norway, *Bárðar saga* offers a counter-example nearly beatifying the Norwegian monarch. Rather than an indictment of courtly culture such as is found in *Sir Gawain*, one of the *functions* of *Bárðar saga* seems to be arguing strongly for adopting the Continental courtly traditions, but wedded with Christian monarchy.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Kaeuper, 'The societal role of chivalry in romance,' 110. Kaeuper writes, 'Despite their active leadership in war beyond the borders, kings were regarded within their realms as the guarantors of the peace on earth desired by God.'

Although I have read both the themes of faith and kingship in *Bárðar saga* against the same themes in *Sir Gawain*, I consider these cases of differing *function* rather than *cultural filtering*. Christianity did introduce a new model of kingship into the North, and Old Norse literature is on the whole more mindful of its pre-Christian cultural heritage than most other medieval European literature. Yet neither Christian faith or monarchy were new concepts imported with romances to the North. Rather, I see the essential structures and concepts of romance traditions such as the Courtly Stranger motif serving as new tools to address questions of faith and kingship traditional to medieval Scandinavian culture.<sup>135</sup>

## **Summary**

At the beginning of this chapter, I stated my goal as presenting arguments for considering *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as members within a common system of texts linked through translation. I have now outlined their similarities and their variations from one another. On the small scale, there are more points of direct correspondence and parallels than seem likely to have arisen from random coincidence. In addition to the general structural analogues noted by Skaptason and Pulsiano, details such as the nearly identical phrasing of *kyng hyzest mon of wylle* and *konungr var inn glaðasti*, as well as the length and pattern of description of each Stranger, indicate that both *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* must in many ways have high fidelity to texts in a common source tradition. Yet each is an independent work and alters the inherited material as needed to fit their respective final goals. In the end, neither *Bárðar saga* nor *Sir Gawain* completely reflect the ideals of courtesy as found in the earliest French traditions, such as exemplified by the works of Chrétien de Troyes. *Sir Gawain* is concerned that traditional, secular courtliness leads to decadence and effeteness, and the poem therefore parodies the classical models to challenge the genre from the inside. *Bárðar saga* rather uses the framework of the Courtly Stranger to grapple with issues like the relatively new role of the Norwegian monarchy in Icelandic life and the continuing perceived tensions between Iceland's Christian present and heathen past.

What is clear is that while the narrative model upon which both these stories are built did indeed originally begin in Ireland, neither one of the works appears to engage with themes which are stereotypically Celtic. The fact is that Celtic material eventually became naturalized into the Francophone literary tradition, and the themes which emerged are products of Francophone culture. It is this heritage which has left a traceable impression on the Courtly Stranger motif. It is unlikely that the medieval audiences conceptualized these two works as Celtic in origin. Rather, they were most likely understood within the framework of the French romance tradition. Though the Celtic origins of the motif should not be forgotten, they are not nearly as relevant as the Francophone influence by which the literary material was actually transmitted.

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<sup>135</sup> Cf. Eriksen, 'Arthurian ethics in thirteenth-century Old Norse.' Eriksen does not address themes such as faith or kingship, but does provide a case study of how the translated *riddarasögur* affected Norwegian legal discourse around, for example, marriage, as a result of new courtly models for contemplating love.

## Chapter Four: The Courtly Stranger in Old Norse

### Introduction

In the foregoing chapter I discussed the grounds for viewing both *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as cases of translation stemming from a common source tradition. I discussed not only the evidence for this hypothesis as such, but also endeavored to express what new meaningful readings can be made from this point of departure. In this chapter I hope to satisfactorily explain how *Bárðar saga* is not an isolated case, but merely one instance in the diffusion of the Courtly Stranger motif. I hope this highlights which features are stable and which vary; and thereby to set *Bárðar saga* in a larger context testifying to the uses Old Norse writers found of this motif and the modes by which it was further naturalized.

Whereas in the previous chapter I discussed *Bárðar saga* in relation to *Sir Gawain*, here I will discuss a number of other works in relation to *Bárðar saga*. These are drawn from the traditionally recognized boundaries of the *fornaldarsögur*. I draw my texts from the Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson edition of *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*.<sup>136</sup> The excerpts are found in the appendix and have been selected by similar means as those taken from *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain*. While I treated *Bárðar saga* as a case of translation, I consider the works in this chapter as instances of diffusion through adaptation. I have discussed in my methodology how the two processes are similar, and any one of the sagas in this chapter can be as fruitfully analyzed in as great of depth as I have attempted with *Bárðar saga* in chapter three. However, with so many works to consider, such thoroughness would be in danger of swelling this study unnecessarily. I will therefore move much more swiftly through the works in this chapter than the previous, considering patterns of the Courtly Stranger across works rather than how it is integrated with the aesthetic whole of each saga. Rather than organization by translation strategy, I organize by the works themselves in regard to their similarity or dissimilarity to each other as well as to *Bárðar saga*.

As I have delineated in my introduction, the works in question are *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, *Sörla saga sterka*, *Völsunga saga*, and *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, and *Nornagests þáttr*. What these share is that the Courtly Stranger nearly always appears at the opening of a new narrative sequence, and often near the start of the saga as a whole. It is a story structure used for beginnings, and when this structure is paired with the repeated formulaic opening, variations on *þat var einn dag*, the motif unfolds almost like the introduction to a fairy-tale. That being said, there are further divisions which present themselves, comprising branches of the Courtly Stranger motif. The chapter will be organized around discussion of these branches. First I will treat those sagas which are unified by the theme of a bridal quest and a foreign Stranger from another land. These I call the Stranger as Bridal Thief, which include *Sörla saga sterka* and *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*. Next I will examine the sagas in which the Stranger turns out to be the Hero in Disguise, which is also the name I give to this group. It consists of *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* and *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*. These four sagas fall into groups of two each, forming the main branches of the Courtly Stranger motif which in turn share essentially parallel usage of the word *borð*, which I will discuss as a summary to these main branches. Of the remaining works, *Völsunga*

<sup>136</sup> Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda I-III* (Reykjavík: Bókaútgafan Forni, 1943-44).

*saga* does not clearly fall into any other category, but has certain key similarities with *Bárðar saga* itself that might suggest a third primary branch of the Courtly Stranger tradition, The Stranger and the Silent Court. Finally, I will analyze *Nornagests þáttr*, which I consider not actually an example of the Courtly Stranger, but as a representative of another motif which I call the Ancient Wanderer. However, *Nornagests þáttr* has so many parallels to *Bárðar saga* that I consider the two related and that this relation may have influenced the formation of the Courtly Stranger motif as a whole. Before beginning with the works themselves, though, I wish to address the complicated matter of chronology and literary influence.

### **Chronology and Literary Influence**

I have mentioned that any of the works in this section can be compared to *Bárðar saga*, or any other of instance of the Courtly Stranger, and fruitfully analyzed as an adaptation using many of the tools from translation studies. This can only be done accurately, however, by avoiding the matters of chronology and literary influence. The dates of composition for the works involved are simply too vague. I have explained that current scholarly consensus places the writing of *Bárðar saga* between c. 1275-1325. This is largely the same time period as assumed for the composition for the *fornaldarsögur* as a whole. In the introduction to the first volume of *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, Guðni Jónsson writes

*Handrit þeirra flestra eru ung að tiltölu, frá því um 1400 eða yngri. En vafalaust hófst ritun þeirra löngu fyrr. Er ekki ósennilegt, að sama máli gegni um fornaldarsögurnar sem um Íslendingasögurnar, að handrit þeirra, þau er varðveitt hafa, séu a. m. k. 50-100 árum yngri en frumrit þeirra. [...] Þegar alls er gætt, mun mega segja með nokkurri vissu, að engin fornaldarsaga hafi verið rituð fyrir miðja 13. öld, hinar elztu á síðara helmingi þeirrar aldar, en flestar á 14. öld og þó heldur fyrr en seinna á öldinni.<sup>137</sup>*

‘Most of the manuscripts are relatively young, since 1400 or younger. But doubtless their writing began long before. It is not unlikely that the same case applies to the *fornaldarsögur* as to the *Íslendingasögur*, that the manuscripts which have been preserved are at least 50-100 years younger than their originals. [...] When all is accounted for, one can say with some certainty that no *fornaldarsaga* was written before the mid-thirteenth century, the oldest in the latter half of the century, but most in the fourteenth century and rather sooner than later in the century.’

Taken collectively, then, the *fornaldarsögur* were likely written between c. 1250-1350, which completely encompasses the likely time of *Bárðar saga*’s own creation. The result is the makings of a quagmire: Given not only the uncertainty of all the dates involved but also the sheer number of manuscripts for so many different works, it is neither efficient nor likely possible to sort out an intertextual chronology in effort to determine which may have served as the basis for which. Even were such a chronology complete, while I find sufficient evidence to conclude some relation between the

<sup>137</sup> Jónsson and Vilhjálmsson, *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda I*, ix.

works, it is either insufficient or too confused to reasonably argue which is the ‘source’ versus ‘target’ text. Such a hypothesis would also presume perfect preservation of the manuscript tradition, which is not at all the case. Finally, were all these other considerations somehow resolved, there is no way to know how far removed the first preserved instance of the Courtly Stranger is from the tradition’s point of transmission into Old Norse. Therefore I will avoid considering these works together in terms of which may have come first or have influenced which other. Rather, I will think in terms of closeness. Even a surface level reading of the selections will reveal that none are more similar to *Sir Gawain* than *Bárðar saga* itself. This places *Bárðar saga* closest to a representative of the motif outside the saga corpus. I therefore take this to mean that *Bárðar saga* is, of all the instances in the sagas, also the most representative of the source tradition generally. I will therefore use *Bárðar saga* as the ‘norm’ against which to measure closeness or distance of the other works from the source tradition.

### **The Stranger as Bridal Thief**

Stranger as Bridal Thief is found in *Sörla saga sterka* and *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*. In both cases, the Courtly Stranger motif becomes the start of a bridal quest. But the normal order of events is changed, and rather than the hero seeking out his betrothed, the Strangers are foreign outsiders likened to monsters and trying to steal the princess away. In *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* the Stranger is a prince *af Indíalandi*, who the narrator says *var líkari jötni en menskum manni*. In *Sörla saga sterka*, the Stranger is more complicated. Twelve men appear in the hall shared by two kings, and nothing is said about their personal appearance. But these are merely messengers for two brothers *af Morlandi*. The narrator gives no opinion about the brothers at this juncture, but one of the kings himself rather proclaims them to be *tröll* and *berserkir*. It is this implied inhumanity which separates the Stranger as Bridal Thief from a work such as *Hervarar saga*. Angantýr and his brothers are evil berserkers, but they are never likened to trolls. Hjálmar speaks most ill of them in the saga, and all he calls them is *berserkjunum, þeim er illt eitt hafa gjört*.<sup>138</sup> The brothers are essentially the protagonists through the saga’s brisk introduction. This shows that berserkers trying to steal a princess do not necessarily have to be likened to trolls or such in the sagas, which makes the choice to do so in both *Sörla saga* and *Þorsteins saga* all the more significant.

There are also differences in the Courtly Stranger motif between *Sörla saga* and *Þorsteins saga*. Again, Stranger brothers are not described in the episode itself in *Sörla saga*, but the Stranger in *Þorsteins saga* is described not only as *líkari jötni en mennskum manni*, but also *meiri ok illiligri en menn hefði fyrr sét*. The adjective *illiligri* is one of the exact same used of Raknar in *Bárðar saga*, and does not appear in any of the other texts here included. The Stranger is larger than normal men, which is also true of Raknar. Furthermore, this Stranger carries a *fleinn tvíoddaðr*, which is reminiscent of the *klafakerling* or *klafastafr* which Bárðr Snæfellsáss himself is said to have carried in *Bárðar saga*.<sup>139</sup> Neither is independently significant, but taken together and in conjunction with the narrative context, *Þorsteins saga* can be considered quite close in relation to *Bárðar saga* itself. *Sörla saga* lacks any such clear examples, but interestingly whereas there are no traces of courtliness in *Þorsteins saga*, the messengers in *Sörla saga* *kvöddu konung snjöllu máli svá mælandi*. Here the sense is that the messengers try to win with fair words what they know could never be had, the princess, were the brothers to show their faces,

<sup>138</sup> *Saga Heiðreks konungs ins vitra*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1960), 4.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Skaptason and Pulsiano, *Bárðar saga*, 44-46, 52.

which the king would find hideous. But the implication is that the king is right about the brothers and that the messengers are trying to trick the king into a grave error. This is of course very different and much less emphatic than the exchange of courtesy which Raknar expects from King Olaf's court, but nonetheless *Sörla saga* introduces the theme of proper behavior towards a king; as well as the dangers to a king and his kingdom from those who would use that system of courtesy to deceive.

Indeed, it appears both sagas in this branch of the Courtly Stranger tradition use the motif to explore ideas of kingship, which is reminiscent of the motif's function from *Bárðar saga*. In *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, the king quails and takes no firm action, and none of his men respect him enough to risk themselves in defense of him or his realm. In *Sörla saga*, the kings leap up and shout at the would-be deceivers and promise to meet them on the field of battle, a promise which they fulfill to their honor if not their victory. *Sörla saga* also seems to reject the *snjöllu máli* of the messengers in favor of the bold heroism of the two kings. Such elegant speech recalls the ideals of courtesy, which *Sörla saga* seems to cast critically into opposition with heroism. Conversely, the king's reaction in *Þorsteins saga* is reminiscent of the impotent kings from French romances. In both cases, these small vignettes are not tremendously important to the plot overall. But though neither small episode is essential to interpreting the respective saga as whole, they nevertheless make statements about kingship. Regardless of this element, though, the sagas in the Stranger as Bridal Thief branch display an array of internal evidence placing them in relation to not only each other, but also *Bárðar saga*.

### **The Stranger as Hero in Disguise**

The Stranger as Hero in Disguise is found in *Bósa saga* and *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*. *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* stands out because it actually contains two Courtly Stranger episodes, and both times the Strangers turn out to be disguised heroes. The first is more elaborate. In this scene, Göngu-Hrólf himself is the Stranger. He comes not to a king, but to an earl. This difference is superficial, however, as the structural elements all play out the same. The Stranger is *bæði digr ok hár*, his size emphasized just like Raknar. Stranger's equipment is not described as elaborately as in *Bárðar saga*, mentioning only that Hrólf has *loðkápu síðri ok mikit spjót*. But the scene is briefer as a whole. Perhaps each element should be given extra emphasis, then. Perhaps the spear could be interpreted as a connection with Bárðr, like the two-pointed spear of the Stranger in *Þorsteins saga*. But spears are such common weapons in Old Norse literature that without some other distinctive feature, such as being two-pointed, this becomes a questionable analogue at best. Other parallels are more fruitful. Like the messengers in *Sörla saga*, the Stranger in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* shows courtesy to the earl, when *hann gekk fyrir jarl ok kvaddi hann virðuliga*. The most noteworthy evidence of all, though, is the brief phrase *allir þeir, er inni váru, undruðust mikilleik hans*, which is like the phrase *mönnum fannst mikit um sýn þessa* in *Bárðar saga*. To return to translation strategies, this qualifies as *direct correspondence*. The verbs and objects differ somewhat on a surface level, but the semantic content as well as the syntax is essentially the same. This also indicates close relationship with *Bárðar saga*.

The second Courtly Stranger episode in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* is even briefer. As in *Sörla saga*, here the Stranger is split apart into two brothers, though with no messengers intervening. They are *miklir ok þrekligir*, big like Hrólf and like Raknar. Their equipment is not as elaborate and impressive as in most cases, though. Rather, the brothers are *litt búnir at vápnum ok klæðum*. The brothers *kvöddu* the earl,



but there is no adjective such as *virðuliga* to imply courtesy. It's hard to know how much to read into this brevity. On the one hand, perhaps the omission of certain details is meant consciously, and the scene should be read in contrast to the earlier one to heighten the comparison between Hrólfr and the new-come brothers. This tension could heighten the sense of uncertainty as to whether the brothers are good or evil, a tension which is released later in the saga when the brothers help Hrólfr and prove themselves as heroes. Or perhaps the scene is meant to be read just the same as Hrólfr's entry earlier, and details are merely elided to avoid redundancy. In this case, the brevity of the second episode is really insignificant. One might look to the response of the king to these Strangers to judge how the audience is cued to read the passage, but even that is ambiguous. When the Strangers *kvöddu hann*, again without qualifiers for good or bad, the earl *tók vel kveðju þeira*. But when they tell the earl their names, he says *illt var þá til góðra nafna [...] er svá röskvir menn skyldu svá heita*. This can easily simply be a comment on their poverty; but it could also be a commentary on their lack of courtesy in greeting the king, depending how the omission of any adjective around *kvöddu* is interpreted. Unfortunately, I do not see any final solution to the problem.

A similar issue presents itself in *Bósa saga*, the second work featuring the Stranger as Hero in Disguise. This is a comedic and parodic text, but in such tight narration, it can be difficult to tell if the saga writer is intentionally incorporating the motif or not. The scene occurs in a hall at a wedding feast. The potential Stranger in this case is the titular Herrauðr, come to rescue his betrothed from marriage to a rival king. Like the other Strangers, Herrauðr is bigger than ordinary men, *mikill vexti*. He has *rauðum skarlatskyrtli ok silfrbelti um sik ok gullhlað um enni*, making him impressively clad like Raknar and, again in *Völsunga saga*, Odin. But unlike any other Strangers, Herrauðr is *fríðr sýnum*, fair to behold. Surveying the other Strangers, Raknar and the Bridal Thief Strangers are all ugly and unnatural foes. Göngu-Hrólfr is a Hero in Disguise, like Herrauðr, and while Hrólfr is not actively described as handsome within the Courtly Stranger episode, like Herrauðr is, he is also spared any sinister characterization in his appearance. The two brothers in the second instance of the Courtly Stranger also prove themselves to be heroes, but not at first. There is ambiguity about their character, and so too about the description of their equipment. The brothers seem poor, and the earl makes some kind of negative comment about them; but no definite moral judgment is made clear. Therefore it seems the minor detail of how a Stranger is described, both in terms of his person and his possessions, is a critical cue which could attune the audience's interpretation and expectations of the Stranger in any given scene.

Herrauðr's behavior is also substantially different from the other Strangers, for while Herrauðr does proceed straight for the king, as Raknar emphatically does, once Herrauðr reaches the monarch he *reiðir þá upp hnefann ok dregr svá snögg um nasir konungi, at ór honum hrutu þrjár tennrnar, en blóð stökk ór nösum hans ok munnni, en hann fell sjálfr í öngvit*. This is nearly as opposite to courtly behavior as one could imagine. Therein lies the problem, because it could well be a parody on the expected form of the Courtly Stranger motif, or it could simply be a comedic passage bearing accidental similarity to the tradition. The episode in *Bósa saga* is also unusual for not coming at the start of a narrative sequence, but rather in the middle of the rescue mission. That being said, it does initiate a comedic chase scene, so there is some level of induction to a new story arc at work. Further, the instance is clearly a kind of bridal quest, which in turn makes it similar to the Stranger as Bridal Thief. In the end, I find the sudden appearance of an unknown man into the royal hall who is larger and stronger than others and bearing extraordinary equipment, who immediately proceeds to the king and in doing so initiates a new narrative

sequence, ultimately covers enough points of similarity to warrant being considered an intentional employment of the Courtly Stranger pattern. But it is the most distant and dissimilar episode from *Bárðar saga*, or any other given instance of the motif, of which I know. *Bósa saga* also appears to be a deconstruction of the motif from the inside, which makes its relationship to the tradition at large similar to that of *Sir Gawain* and romance. *Bósa saga* is notably less moralizing, though.

### **The King at *Borð***

I have now examined the four texts in two groups which I consider the main branches of the Courtly Stranger motif in Old Norse. There is one small but conspicuous detail which I find that links a number of these works together with one another. In three of these four, the Stranger comes when the king is at *drykkjuborð*. In the case of *Þorsteins saga*, the word is simply *borð*. But the consistency of its usage is conspicuous, especially in light of its gratuity. The Stranger could simply appear one day, or at the king's hall, or so forth. For the king to be at *drykkjuborð* is to imply that the king is presiding over the court, and so *drykkjuborð* in these cases becomes a metonymy for that function. This recalls Olaf Tryggvason sitting in state with his court gathered around when the Stranger comes in. It should be noted, however, that the word does not appear in the Courtly Stranger episode in *Bárðar saga*. This element is perhaps best taken as an indication of mutual relation between these branches of the Courtly Stranger tradition, without regard to *Bárðar saga* directly. In this the complications of chronology and literary influence which I discussed above become clear. The various works point to their sources not just in one direction, but multiple simultaneously. The connection through the single word *borð* emphasizes the many-branching nature of a *net* in the textual network.

### **The Stranger and the Silent Court: *Völsunga saga***

*Völsunga saga* does not at first seem to fit into a larger pattern such as the Stranger as Bridal Thief or the Stranger as Hero in Disguise. The Stranger in this case is none other than Odin himself, who interrupts the wedding feast of King Siggeir and Signý, Völsung's daughter. The god is never specifically named, but the disguise should be paper-thin for the saga's audience at least, because the Stranger is *eldiligr ok einsýnn*, old and one-eyed, with *heflu flekkötta yfir sér*, a spotted, hooded cloak. These are among the archetypal features of the god, especially being one-eyed. But the form of the description is similar to that of Raknar. In addition to those uniquely Odinic qualities, the Stranger is *hár mjök*, very tall, and clad in *háttar búning*, with *knýtt línbrókum at beini* and a soon-to-be legendary *sverð* in hand. The Stranger does not go right to the king, but he does proceed to the most prominent location in the hall, the extraordinary tree Barnstokk. Most importantly, *öllum mönnum* there assembled *fellust kveðjur við þenna mann*. This reaction closely recalls the court's silence which is so central to the scene in *Bárðar saga*. Furthermore, the phrase is here gratuitous, in the same ways as the single word *drykkjuborð*, discussed above. In *Bárðar saga*, the court's failure to properly react to the Stranger is perhaps the single-most important plot point of the Courtly Stranger episode. Here, at best it merely establishes the mood. The clause is superfluous in *Völsunga saga*, which I take in conjunction with the other similarities as evidence of very close relation to the Courtly Stranger motif as demonstrated in *Bárðar saga*. Since the episode also does not fall into any of the other branches described above, but is the only one to

contain a reference to silence, perhaps *Völsunga saga* should be seen as the closest work to *Bárðar saga* of all. In this case, *Völsunga saga* might well constitute another primary branch of the Courtly Stranger tradition. If accurate, a central feature of this branch would be preserving the theme of the court's silence in the presence of the Stranger. I say 'preserving' because the centrality of that theme to both *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain* strongly imply that the common source tradition outside Old Norse also hinged on this occurrence.

Stylistically, one of the unique features in *Völsunga saga*'s Courtly Stranger episode is the neutrality of the Stranger's appearance. If anything, the Stranger's description here skews intentionally toward the mysterious; especially since despite the Stranger's *háttar búning*, which includes especial focus on his *knýtt línbrókum*, he nevertheless goes *berfættr*. In the hitherto discussed examples, the Stranger was either described as hideous, which indicated villainy; or neutrally or even positively, if the Stranger was actually a Hero in Disguise. But here Odin is certainly not a hero. Yet neither is he a clear villain, as in so many *fornaldarsögur*. In *Bárðar saga*, for example, Odin also makes an appearance as one of the spiritual dangers which the priest Jósteinn defeats with a whack from his crucifix. The Odin of *Völsunga saga* is instead ambiguous, as reflected by the lack of positive or negative qualifiers in his dramatic entry to the hall. Perhaps it is worth observing as well that while this is not Odin's first appearance in the saga, it is his first appearance among mortal men. The scene can therefore be read as setting the tone for the god throughout the rest of the work, foreshadowing his capricious ways.

### **Nornagests þáttr: The Ancient Wanderer**

Finally, I come to the complicated case of *Nornagests þáttr*. At the outset, I wish to clarify that, assuming the Courtly Stranger is indeed a discernable motif within Old Norse, *Nornagests þáttr* in all likelihood should not be considered part of it. In abstract, *Nornagests þáttr* presents itself as a good candidate: A mysterious wanderer, Nornagestr, comes to Olaf Tryggvason's court, and he even *kvaddi* the king *sæmiliga*, which recalls the messengers for the Stranger brothers in *Sörla saga* or *Hrólfr in Göngu-Hrólfs saga*. The wanderer is also *meiri en flestir menn aðrir* and *sterkligr* than most people, possessing the same unusual size common to Courtly Strangers. But Nornagestr is not particularly otherworldly. Otherworldly things happen around him, such as the elf appearing in the night. But the wanderer is subject to rather than the agent of this unusual activity. No one at the court is provoked to any particularly noteworthy reaction. There is no mention of any kind of *borð*, either, but then again the same is true for *Bárðar saga*. Nonetheless, the scene is unique in that it drags out over an unspecified but implicitly long period of time, days, weeks, or months. Every other instance of the Courtly Stranger happens quickly. Like the Stranger as Hero in Disguise, Nornagestr turns out to have a secret, but he does not really prove himself to be a hero, now or at any other time in his past, despite having been witness to them. What elements of the Courtly Stranger are to be found in *Nornagests þáttr* are far too scattered throughout the text, whereas the other works bind these features tightly together. *Nornagests þáttr* does not seem to fit the pattern of the Courtly Stranger motif.

Yet *Nornagests þáttr* does bear a striking relation to *Bárðar saga* in particular. The opening of the *þáttr* and the Courtly Stranger section of the saga are nearly identical. *Nornagests þáttr* begins *svá er sagt, at á einum tíma, þá er Óláfr konungr Tryggvason sat í Þrándheimi, þar svá til, at einn maðr kom til hans*, and also later the jump to *litlu fyrir jól kom* which begins the main part of the story. In *Bárðar saga*,

these are matched by the phrases *líðr nú svá framan til jóla, ok atfangakveld fyrir jól sat konungr í há sæti sínu*. It needs be borne in mind that in this case in *Bárðar saga*, too, King Olaf is either in Trondheim, the city itself, or Trøndelag, the area: The sense is indistinguishable from that in *Nornagests þáttr*. Even more strikingly similar is the fact that both stories concern the same king and a visitor named Gestr. In each, at a Christmas feast in *Þrándheimr*, a Gestr comes into King Olaf's court. In each case, the supernatural quickly appears afoot, and only Olaf has the God-given power to restore the natural, Christian order of the world in the face of heathen sorcery, whether Raknar's magic or Nornagests curse. I have already discussed this aspect of *Bárðar saga* in the preceding chapter; but in *Nornagests þáttr*, Olaf suggests Nornagestr light his candle and receive last rights, thereby releasing him from his unending heathen life into the peaceful grace of Christian death and afterlife. Even before this, it is Olaf who has the vision of the elf which makes him first suspect Nornagestr's unusual nature and Olaf who arbitrates the debate over the fairest gold, which in turn draws out Nornagestr's story.

Olaf conducts Nornagestr into Christianity, and *Bárðar saga* parallels this when Olaf insists Gestr Bárðsson be prime-signed. The tension between the newness of Christianity and the traditions of heathendom is a central theme of *Bárðar saga*, which is also true of the shorter *Nornagests þáttr*. And though *Bárðar saga* is generally considered to have derived its later barrow-breaking scene from *Harðar saga*, which also features a candle with power over the dead,<sup>140</sup> *Nornagests þáttr* also prominently features a supernatural candle. In *Bárðar saga*, while the employment of the candle in the barrow-mound might derive from *Harðar saga*, the candle is introduced to the saga by Olaf, and I think it safe to read that its powers derive from his holiness. This seems likely to be related to *Nornagests þáttr*, where King Olaf orders Nornagestr to use the candle to end the heathen spell.

Even Gestr and Olaf's dogs in *Bárðar saga* indicate a connection. When Raknar leaves and the court sees that *dauðir váru allir varðhundar nema Vígi einn ok Snati, hundr Gestis*, the saga singles out the exceptional Vígi, without any explanation of where this dog comes from or its significance. Snati, on the other hand, is an animal character only ever found in *Bárðar saga*, and whom the audience has already encountered repeatedly in the tales of Gestr's various earlier adventures. Yet this presumably more familiar dog is the one which the saga writer believes merits an explanation, via the apposite *hundr Gestis*. Though Vígi makes no appearance in *Nornagests þáttr*, the manuscript context of the story must be kept in mind. Though *Nornagests þáttr* is often presented within the corpus of the *fornaldarsögur*, this is an illusion of modern scholarship. In the three medieval manuscripts which preserve the *þáttr*, in two it is embedded within *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*.<sup>141</sup> The content of Nornagestr's tales and songs mirrors the content of the *fornaldarsögur*, and one of the three manuscripts which contains the work is a collection of *fornaldarsögur*.<sup>142</sup> But it was apparently heavily associated with and often considered part of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*. In that way, too, it is unlike the other Courtly Stranger works presented in this chapter, which more clearly fall within the bounds of modern genre classifications, whatever the actual medieval justifications for it may be.

<sup>140</sup> Vilmundarson and Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 40-41.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Guðni Jónsson, *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda I*, xvii. 'Norna-Gests þáttr virðist vera saminn upp úr Völsunga sögu. Hann er í þremur skinnhandritum, *Flateyjarbók* (frá því um 1390), *Gl. kgl. saml.* 2845, 4<sup>to</sup> (um 1400), og *AM* 62, fol. (frá 15. öld).'

<sup>142</sup> Namely, *Gl. kgl. saml.* 2845, 4<sup>to</sup>.

Furthermore, other than the word *sæmiliga*, there is no connection to or dwelling on the theme of courtesy at all in *Nornagests þáttr*. Though it does not appear in every other Courtly Stranger episode, either, they all at least show relation to texts which do. Admittedly *Nornagests þáttr* does show a relation to *Bárðar saga*, in which the theme of courtliness is the most developed of all the selected works. But the parallels it displays are not what would be expected from the Courtly Stranger motif.

This might raise the question why I include *Nornagests þáttr* at all. I find its inclusion warranted on the one hand for thoroughness, because it is so similar to *Bárðar saga* specifically that it might leap to mind as another case. It is therefore important to acknowledge the matter and lay out my arguments against counting the *þáttr* as part of the motif's tradition. Further, providing a sample which approaches but does not ultimately meet my parameters highlights those boundaries. Demonstrating the wider range of narrative options available to saga writers makes the similarities in the other works all the more conspicuous, which I hope strengthens my claims. But finally I wish to include *Nornagests þáttr* because it so strongly suggests some kind of relation to the Courtly Stranger scene in *Bárðar saga*, or perhaps more appropriately, the Olaf scene, that *Nornagests þáttr* offers itself as another useful intertext for the saga.

*Nornagests þáttr* does indeed present itself as an instance of a specific motif, but not the Courtly Stranger. This is a case of what I term the Ancient Wanderer: An impossibly old man comes to a king's court to tell his tales and sing his songs. It is also attested in *Tóka þáttr Tókasonar*, in which the titular Tóki even comes to another Olaf, in that case the Saint King Olaf. The motif also manifests in Old English, in poems like *Widsiþ* and *Deor*. To explore these more thoroughly would fall well outside the scope of the project at hand, but suffice it to say the trope had been known for a long time in the Germanic world by the time *Nornagests þáttr* was compiled. That its own closest parallel, *Tóka þáttr*, was also associated with another Olaf indicates a pattern. In *Heimskringla*, Snorri collects a number of tales about Olaf Tryggvason, specifically his battles with the forces of heathendom.<sup>143</sup> Among them is an account of an old man who came to King Olaf one night and kept him up all night with his stories.<sup>144</sup> This turns out to be Odin, who is trying to trick Olaf somehow. How exactly the god plans to do this is not made clear, but in the end Olaf triumphs over the god. This is therefore a short vignette about an mysterious old man who comes to Olaf's court with a host of stories to tell. The parallels with *Tóka þáttr* and *Nornagests þáttr* are easily detected, and it forms part of the context into which *Nornagests þáttr* is inserted in *Flateyjarbók*.

The similarities between *Nornagests þáttr* and *Bárðar saga* which I have presented above are strong evidence that either the two works are indebted to a common tradition, or that one is based off the other. I am personally inclined to think that *Bárðar saga* is based off *Nornagests þáttr*, that the saga writer combined a motif traditional to Norse literature with a more newly introduced French model to create his own work. Regardless of the actual, unknowable arrangement, however, when read against

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Snorri Sturluson, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, in *Heimskringla I*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritfélag, 1941), 328. Snorri writes regarding Olaf's evangelical missions across Norway that *í frásögn er fært, er troll ok illar véttir glettusk við men hans ok stundum við hann sjálfan. En vér viljum heldr rita um þá atburði, er Ólafr konungr kristnaði Nóreg eða önnur þau lönd, er hann kom kristni á*. The implication is that there were many stories in circulation at the time regarding Olaf Tryggvason. However many of them Snorri did or did not know, he has exercised an editorial policy to select for inclusion in *Heimskringla* only those which conform to Snorri's goal for the saga, glorifying Olaf as an evangelical king.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 312-314.

*Nornagests þáttr*, the function which I posited for *Bárðar saga* in the last chapter regarding kingship is emphasized all the more. There, I interpreted the Courtly Stranger motif in *Bárðar saga* as advancing the cause of monarchy. When examined alongside *Nornagests þáttr*, *Bárðar saga* is not an isolated entity, but part of a larger tradition which seems to have focused on one or both of the Christian Olafs as archetypes for kingship. Their virtues were explored and demonstrated through stories which pitted them against various heathen evils, and at least one apparently persistent subgenre of this kind of literature was accomplished by the king's interactions with an Ancient Wanderer. If *Bárðar saga* is not the earliest case of the Courtly Stranger but merely the oldest surviving member of a tradition, then the Courtly Stranger motif may have already had some traction among Icelandic audiences. Perhaps *Bárðar saga* sought to intentionally blend the old and the new literary forms of the Ancient Wanderer and the Courtly Stranger to deepen the audience's engagement with the story. Perhaps the resolution of two narrative structures woven together would have given the double resolution extra charge or cultural weight. One way or another, the comparison between the *þáttr* and the saga add to our modern understanding of both.

### **Summary**

In conclusion, the Courtly Stranger is not an isolated instance in Old Norse, a feature only borrowed from Francophone literature once by *Bárðar saga*. Regardless of its original source of transmission, it went on to a much broader life within the literary corpus. Some of the selections I have suggested are more speculative than others: *Bósa saga* in particular is a border case. Others such as *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* do not show engagement with ideas of courtesy at all. Perhaps these developments are the result of naturalization in Old Norse literature. Maybe once the motif had spread through enough *foraldarsögur*, saga writers no longer felt the Courtly Stranger's foreign origins and had less impulse to explore courtly themes. But a number of examples, namely *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, *Völsunga saga*, and the aforementioned *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, bear too great a similarity to *Bárðar saga* to easily discount their relationship. These sagas lend credence to the hypothesis that the motif was in general literary circulation, which perhaps in turn can lend the benefit of the doubt to the border cases, those listed here or others which might emerge in the future.

## Chapter Five: Conclusion

To summarize, *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* have been noted since at least Skaptason and Pulsiano's edition to bear remarkable similarities in their respective scenes about a mysterious visitor at court. Previous scholarship took either no especial notice or interest in this matter. Though parallels in other texts were unknowingly observed, no effort was made to study these as part of a larger pattern in the literature, what I have called the Courtly Stranger motif. Subsequent changes in the assumptions and interests of Old Norse scholars, and the introduction of concepts derived from translation studies, have now provided a context and a methodology for this investigation to take place. Using the critical tools of *translation strategies*, I have examined the underlying assumption of any relationship at all between *Bárðar saga* and *Sir Gawain*. After surveying the evidence, I am convinced that these are members of a system of texts linked through translation. However, whereas Skaptason and Pulsiano identify the story as ultimately of Irish decent, the traces of the works' connection which provoked their initial comment and have enabled this study at all, largely manifest through the works' respective engagements with the idea of courtesy. Although the basic pattern of the motif is traceable back to Irish stories, the literary evidence indicates that it was French culture which inspired the Courtly Stranger episode in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and also spread the form into the North. Indeed, the alterations which each text makes to the ideals of courtesy emphasize their engagement with the institution, either to modify it for a culture already familiar with the concept, such as in *Sir Gawain*; or to help spread the idea in a culture where Continental-style courtesy was still relatively new, as in *Bárðar saga*. The *Gawain*-poet tries to subvert the framework of courtesy from within as arguments for the flaws of worldliness and the virtue of Christian spirituality. *Bárðar saga* rather uses courtesy to glorify the institution of Christian kingship when Iceland had but relatively recently come under rule by the king of Norway. The respective writers show a command of the material which allows them to transform the subject to suit their individual wills. Regardless of this independence, though, the Francophone ideas are fully integrated into the narrative structure of each work. The Courtly Stranger motif is therefore better understood as the product of Franco-Norse rather than Hiberno-Norse exchange.

Furthermore, I have investigated the analogues to the Courtly Stranger motif found across a number of *foraldarsögur*, and I am here also convinced that the works in question contain the motif. The case in *Bárðar saga* is thus not unique in Old Norse. Various writers use the motif for various purposes. Not every case involves courtesy, but the motif's very structure obliges saga writers to explore ideas such as kingship or fear of the foreign. Perhaps this is enough to account for its legacy, to indicate the cultural dialogues in which the motif participated. But outside those elements tied to the mechanics of the motif, the disparate instances of the Courtly Stranger do not present a single, unified concept which they address. Perhaps in time the motif was no longer conceived of as especially foreign and subsequent writers adhered less rigidly to the themes of their models.

One general statement which can be made, however, is that this is a case study which can be added to the larger conversation on medieval Scandinavian Francophilia. I hope it provides new examples of the ways in which foreign material not only entered the Old Norse literary tradition, but continued long after translation to exert influence on it through the processes of diffusion and translation.

## **Appendix: Source Texts**

### ***Sir Gawain and the Green Knight***

This excerpt constitutes lines 37 to 342 on pages 2 to 10 of the Tolkien and Gordon edition.

Pis kyng lay at Camylot vpon Krystmasse  
 With mony luflych lorde, ledez of þe best,  
 Rekenly of þe Rounde Table alle þo rich breþer,  
 With ryche reuel oryzt and rechles merþes.  
 þer tournayed tulkes by tymeȝ ful mony,  
 Justed ful jolilé þise gentyle knyȝtes,  
 Syþen kayred to þe court caroles to make.  
 For þer þe fest watȝ ilyche ful fifteen dayes,  
 With alle þe mete and þe mirþe þat men couþe avyse;  
 Such glaum ande gle glorious to here,  
 Dere dyn vpon day, daunsyng on nyȝtes,  
 Al watȝ hap vpon heȝe in halleȝ and chambreg  
 With lordez and ladies, as leuest him þoȝt.  
 With alle þe wele of þe worlde þay woned þer samen,  
 þe most kyd knyȝteȝ vnder Krystes seluen,  
 And þe louelokkest ladies þat euer lif haden,  
 And he þe comlokest kyng þat þe court haldes;  
 For al watȝ þis fayre folk in her first age,  
     on sille,  
     þe hapnest vnder heuen,  
     Kyng hyȝest mon of wylle;  
     Hit were now gret nye to neuen  
     So hardy a here on hille.

Wyle Nw ȝer watȝ so ȝep þat hit watȝ nwe cummen,  
 þat day double on þe dece watȝ þe douth serued,  
 For þe kyng watȝ cummen with knyȝtes into þe halle,  
 þe chauntré of þe chapel cheued to an ende.  
 Loude crye watȝ þer kest of clerkeȝ and oþer,  
 Nowel nayted onewe, neuened ful ofte;  
 And syþen riche forth runnen to reche hondeselle,  
 ȝeȝed ȝeres-ȝiftes on hiȝ, ȝelde him bi hond,  
 Debated busyly aboute þo giftes;  
 Ladies laȝed ful loude, þoȝ þay lost haden,  
 And he þat wan watȝ not wrothe, þat may ȝe wel trawe.  
 Alle þis mirþe þay maden to þe mete tyme;  
 When þay had waschen worþyly þay wenten to sete,



Þe best burne ay abof, as hit best semed,  
 Whene Guenore, ful gay, grayþed in þe myddes,  
 Dressed on þe dere des, dubbed al aboute,  
 Smal sendal bisides, a selure hir ouer  
 Of tryed tolouse, of tars tapites innoghe,  
 Þat were enbrawdred and beten wyth þe best gemmes  
 Þat myzt be preued of prys wyth penyes to bye,  
                   in daye.

Þe comlokest to discrye  
 Þer glent with yzen gray,  
 A semloker þat euer he syze  
 Soth mozt no mon say.

Bot Arthure wolde not ete til al were serued,  
 He wat3 so joly of his joyfnes, and sumquat childgered:  
 His lif liked hym lyzt, he louied þe lasse  
 Auþer to longe lye or to longe sitte,  
 So bisied him his zonge blod and his brayn wyldre.  
 And also an oþer maner meued him eke  
 Þat he þur3 nobelay had nomen, he wolde neuer ete  
 Vpon such a dere day, er hym deuised were  
 Of sum auenturus þyng an vncouþe tale,  
 Of sum mayn meruayle, þat he myzt trawe,  
 Of alderes, of armes, of, of oþer auenturus,  
 Oþer sum segg hym biso3t of sum siker knyzt  
 To joyne wyth hym in iustyng, in jopardé to lay,  
 Lede lif for lyf, leue vchon oþer,  
 As fortune wolde fulsun hom, þe fayrer to haue.  
 Þis wat3 kynges countenaunce where he in court were,  
 At vch farand fest among his fre meny  
                   in halle.

Þerfore of face so fere  
 He stiztle3 stif in stalle,  
 Ful 3ep in þat Nw 3ere  
 Much mirthe he mas with alle.

Thus þer stondes in stale þe stif kyng hisseluen,  
 Talkkande bifore þe hyze table of trifles ful hende.  
 There gode Gawan wat3 grayþed Gwenore bisyde,  
 And Agrauayn a la dure mayn on þat oþer syde sites,  
 Boþe þe kynges sistersunes and ful siker kniztes;  
 Bischoþ Bawdewyn abof bigine3 þe table,

And Ywan, Vryn son, ette with hymselfe.  
 Þise were dȳt on þe des and derworþly serued,  
 And siþen mony siker segge at þe sidbordeȳ.  
 Þen þe first cors come with crakkyng of trumpes,  
 Nwe nakryn noyse with þe noble pipes,  
 Wylde werbles and wyȳt wakned lote,  
 Þat mony hert ful hiȳe hef at her towches.  
 Dayntés dryuen þerwyth of ful dere metes,  
 Foyoun of þe fresche, and on so fele disches  
 Þat pine to fynde þe place þe peple biforne  
 For to sette þe sylueren þat sere sewes halden  
 on clothe.

Iche lede as he loued hymselfe  
 þer light withouten loþe;  
 Ay two had disches twelue,  
 Good ber and bryȳt wyn boþe.

Now wyl I of hor seruisse say yow no more,  
 For vch wyȳe may wel wit no wont þat þer were.  
 An oþer noyse ful newe neȳed biliue,  
 Þat þe lude myȳt haf leue liflode to cach;  
 For vneþe watȳ þe noyse not a whyle sesed,  
 And þe first cource in þe court kyndely serued,  
 þer hales in at þe halle dor an aghlich mayster,  
 On þe most on þe molde on mesure hyghe;  
 Fro þe swyre to þe swange so sware and so þik,  
 And his lyndes and his lymes so longe and so grete,  
 Half etayn in erde I hope þat he were  
 Bot mon most I algate mynn hym to bene,  
 And þat þe myriest in his muckel þat myȳt ride;  
 For of bak and of brest al were his bodi sturne,  
 Both his wombe and his wast were worthily smale,  
 And alle his fetures folȳande, in forme þat he hade,  
 ful clene;

For wonder of his hwe men hade,  
 Set in his semblaunt sene;  
 He ferde as freke were fade,  
 And oueral enker grene.

Ande al grayped in grene þis gome and his wedes:  
 A strayt cote ful streȳt, þat stek on his sides,  
 A mere mantile abof, mensked withinne

With pelure pured apert, þe pane ful clene  
 With blyþe blaunner ful bryzt, and his hode boþe,  
 þat watz lazt fro his lokkez and layde on his schulderes;  
 Heme wel-haled hose of þat same grene,  
 þat spenet on his sparlyr, and clene spures vnder  
 Of bryzt golde, vpon silk bordes barred ful ryche,  
 And scholes vnder schankes þere þe schalk rides;  
 And alle his vesture uerayly watz clene verdure,  
 Boþe þe barres of his belt and oþer blyþe stones,  
 þat were richely rayled in his aray clene  
 Aboutte hymself and his sadel, vpon silk werkez,  
 þat were to tor for to telle of tryfles þe halue  
 þat were enbrauded abof, wyth bryddes and flyzes,  
 With gay gaudi of grene, þe golde ay inmyddes.  
 þe pendauntes of his paytture, þe proude cropure,  
 His molaynes, and alle þe metal anamayled was þenne,  
 þe steropes þat he stod on stayned of þe same,  
 And his arsounz al after and his aþel sturtes,  
 þat euer glemered and glent al of grene stones;  
 þe fole þat he ferkkes on fyn of þat ilke,  
                   sertayn,  
           A grene hors gret and þikke,  
           A stede ful stif to strayne,  
           In brawdren brydel quick-  
           To þe gome he watz ful gayn.

Wel gay watz þis gome gered in grene,  
 And þe here of his hed of his hors swete.  
 Fayre fannand fax vmbefoldes his schulderes;  
 A much berd as a busk ouer his brest henges,  
 þat wyth his hizlich here þat of his hed reches  
 Watz euesed al vmbetorne abof his elbowes,  
 þat half his armes þer-vnder were walched in þe wyse  
 Of a kyngez capados þat closes his swyre;  
 þe mane of þat mayn hors much to hit lyke,  
 Wel cresped and cemmed, wyth knottes ful mony  
 Folden in wyth fildore aboute þe fayre grene  
 Ay a herle of þe here, an oþer of golde;  
 þe tayl and his toppyng twynnen of a sute,  
 And bounden boþe wyth a bande of a bryzt grene,  
 Dubbed wyth ful dere stonez, as þe dok lasted,  
 Syþen þrawn wyth a þwong a þwarle knot alofte,

þer mony bellez ful bryzt of brende golde rungen.  
 Such a fole vpon folde, ne freke þat hym rydes,  
 Wat3 neuer sene in þat sale wyth syzt er þat tyme,  
 with y3e.

He loked as layt so lyzt,  
 So sayd al þat hym sy3e;  
 Hit semed as no mon myzt  
 Vnder his dyntte3 dry3e.

Wheþer hade he no helme ne hawbergh nauþer,  
 Ne no pysan ne no plate þat pented to armes,  
 Ne no schafte ne no schelde to schwue no to smyte,  
 Bot in his on honed he hade a holyn bobbe,  
 þat is grattest in grene when greue3 ar bare,  
 And an ax in his oper, a hoge and vnmete,  
 A spetos sparþe to expoun in spelle, quoso myzt.  
 þe hede of an eln3erde þe large lenkþe hade,  
 þe grayn al of grene stele and of golde hewen,  
 þe bit burnyst bryzt, wyth a brode egge  
 As wel schapen to schere as scharp rasores.  
 þe stele of a stif staf þe sturne hit bi grypte,  
 þat wat3 wounden wyth yrn to þe wandez ende,  
 And al bigrauen with grene in gracios werkes;  
 A lace lapped aboute, þat looked at þe hede,  
 And so after þe halme halched ful ofte,  
 Wyth tryed tasselez þerto tacched innoghe  
 On botoun3 of þe bryzt grene brayden ful ryche.  
 þis haþel heldez hym in and þe halle entres,  
 Driuande to þe he3e dece, dut he no woþe,  
 Haylsed he neuer one, bot he3 he ouer loked.  
 þe fyrst word þat he warp, 'Wher is', he sayd,  
 'þe gouernour of þis gyng? Gladly I wolde  
 Se þat segg in syzt, and with hymself speke  
 raysoun.'

To kny3te3 he kest his y3e,  
 And reled hym vp and down;  
 He stemmed, and con studie  
 Quo walt þer most renoun.

Ther wat3 lokyng on lenþe þe lude to beholde,  
 For vch mon had meruayle quat hit mene myzt,  
 þat a haþel and a horse myzt such a hwe lach,

As growe grene as þe gres and grener hit semed,  
 Þen grene aumayl on golde glowande bryzter.  
 Al studied þat þer stod, and stalked hym nerre  
 Wyth al þe wonder of þe worlde what he worth schulde.  
 For fele sellyez had þay sen, bot such neuer are;  
 Forþi for fantoum and fayryze þe folk þere hit demed.  
 Þefore to answare wat3 ar3e mony apel freke,  
 And al stouned at his steuen and stonstil seten  
 In a swoghe sylence þur3 þe sale riche;  
 As al were slypped vpon slepe so slaked hor lotez  
                   in hyze-  
           I deme hit not al for doute,  
           Bot sum for cortaysye-  
           Bot let hym þat al schulde loute  
           Cast vnto þat wyze.

Þenn Arþour bifore þe hiz dece þat auenture byholdez,  
 And rekenly hym reuerenced, for rad was he neuer,  
 And sayde, 'Wyze, welcum iwys to þis place,  
 Þe hede of þis ostel Arthour I hat;  
 Li3t luflych adoun and lenge, I þe praye,  
 And quat-so þy wylle is we schal wyt after.'  
 'Nay, as help me,' quop þ hapel, 'he þat on hyze syttes,  
 To wone any quyle in þis won, hit wat3 not myn ernde;  
 Bot for þe los of þe, lede, is lyft vp so hyze,  
 And þy bur3 and þy burnes best ar holden,  
 Stifest vnder stel-gere on stedes to ryde,  
 Þe wyztest and þe worþyest of þe worldes kynde,  
 Preue for to play wyth in oþer pure laykez,  
 And here is kydde cortaysye, as I haf herd carp,  
 And þat hat3 wayned my hider, iwylis, at þis tyme.  
 3e may be seker bi þis braunch þat I bere here  
 þat I passe as in pes, and no plyzt seche;  
 For had I founded in fere in fezytyng wyse,  
 I haue a hauberghe at home and a helme boþe,  
 A schelde and a scharp spere, schinande bryzt,  
 Ande oþer weppenes to welde, I wene wel, als;  
 Bot for I wolde no were, my wedez ar softer.  
 Bot if þou be so bold as alle burnez tellen,  
 Þou wyl grant me godly þe gomen þat I ask  
                   bi ryzt.'  
 Arthour con answare,

And sayd, 'Sir cortays knyzt,  
 If þou craue batayl bare,  
 Here faylez þou not to fyzt.'

'Nay, frayst I no fyzt, in faith I þe telle,  
 Hit arn aboute on þis bench bot berdlez chylder.  
 If I were hasped in armes on a heze stede,  
 Here is no mon me to mach, for myztez so wayke.  
 Forþy I craue in þis court a Crystemas gomen,  
 For hit is 3ol and Nwe 3er, and here ar 3ep mony:  
 If any so hardy in þis hous holdez hymselfen,  
 Be so bolde in his blod, brayn in hys hede,  
 þat dar stifly strike a strok for an oþer,  
 I schal gif hym of my gyft þys giserne ryche,  
 þis ax, þat is heué innogh, to hondele as hym lykys,  
 And I schal bide þe fyrst bur as bare as I sitte.  
 If any freke be so felle to fonde þat I telle,  
 Lepe lyztly me to, and lach þis weppen,  
 I quit-clayme hit for euer, kepe hit as his auen,  
 And I schal stonde hym a strok, stif on þis flet;  
 Ellez þou wyl dizt me þe dom to dele hym an oþer  
                   barlay,  
 And zet gif hym respite,  
 A twelmonyth and a day;  
 Now hyze, and let se tite  
 Dar any herinne ozt say.'

If he hem stowned vpon fyrst, stiller were þanne  
 Alle þe heredmen in halle, þe hyz and þe loze.  
 þe renk on his rouncé hym ruced in his sadel,  
 And runischly his rede yzen he reled aboute,  
 Bende his bresed brze, blycande grene,  
 Wayued his berde for to wayte quo-so wolde ryse.  
 When non wolde kepe hym with carp he cozed ful hyze,  
 Ande rimed hym ful richly, and ryzt hym to speke:  
 'What, is þis Arþurez hous,' quop þe hapel þenne,  
 'þat al þe rous rennes of þurz ryalmes so mony?  
 Where is now your sourquydrye and your conquestes,  
 Your gryndellayk and your greme, and your grete words?  
 Now is þe reuel and þe renoun of þe Rounde Table  
 Ouerwalt wyth a worde of on wyzes speche,  
 For al dares for drede withoute dynt schewed!'

Wyth þis he lazes so loude þat þe lorde greued;  
 Þe blod schot for scham into his schyre face  
                   and lere;  
       He wex as wroth as wynde,  
       So did alle þat þer were.  
       Þe kyng as kene by kynde  
       Þen stod þat stif mon nere,

Ande sayde, ‘Hapel, by heuen, þyn askyng is nys,  
 And as þou foly hatz frayst, fynde þe behoues.  
 I know no gome þat is gast of þy grete words;  
 Gif me now þy geserne, vpon Godez halue,  
 And I schal bayþen þy bone þat þou boden habbes.’  
 Lyztly lepez he hym to, and lazt at his honed.  
 Þen feersly þat oþer freke vpon fote lyztis.  
 Now hatz Arthure his axe, and þe halme grypez,  
 And sturnely sturez hit aboute, þat stryke wyth hit þozt.  
 Þe stif mon hym bifore stod vpon hyzt,  
 Herre þen ani in þe hous by þe hede and more.  
 Wyth sturne schere þer he stod and stroked his berde,  
 And wyth a countenaunce dryze he droz down his cote,  
 No more mate ne dismayd for hys mayn dintez  
 Þen any burne vpon bench hade brozt hym to drynk  
                   of wyne.  
       Gawan, þat sate bi þe queen,  
       To þe kyng he can enclyne,  
       ‘I beseche now with sazez sene  
       Þis melly mot by myne.’

### **Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss**

This excerpt is found on pages 94 to 96 of the Skaptason and Pulsiano edition.

‘Líðr nú svá framan til jóla, ok atfangakveld fyrir jól sat konungr [Óláfr Tryggvason] í háseti sínu ok öll hirðin, hverr í sínu rúmi; váru menn glaðir ok kátir, því at kongungr var inn glaðasti. Ok er menn höfðu drukkit um stund, gekk maðr inn í höllina; hann var mikill ok illiligr, skrámleitr ok skoteygr, svartskeggjaðr ok síðnefjaðr. Þessi maðr hafði hjálm á höfði ok var í hringabrynju ok gyrðr sverði. Gulligt men hafði hann á hálsi ok digran gullhring á hendi; hann gengr snúðigt innar eptir höllinni ok at háseti konungs; öngvan mann kveðr hann. Mönnum fannst mikit um sýn þessa. Engi maðr beiddi hann orða; ok er hann hafði staðit um stund fyrir konungi, mælti hann: “Hér hefi ek svá komit, at mér hefir sízt nökkurr greiði boðinn verit af jafnmiklu stórmenni; skal ek vera því örvari, at ek skal bjóða til eignar gripi þessa, sem ek hefi hér nú, þeim manni, sem pá þorir at sækja til mín, en sá mun engi hér inni vera.” Síðan gekk hann í burt, ok varð illr þefr í höllinni; varð öllum at þessu mikill ótti. Konungr bað menn sitja kyrra, þar til

sem þefr sjá þyrri, ok gerðu menn svá sem konungr bauð. En er skoðat var, lágu margir menn sem hálfdauðir ok í óviti, þar til er konungr kom sjálf til ok less yfir þeim. Dauðir váru allir varðhundur nema Vígi einn ok Snati, hundr Gests.’

### **Bósa saga ok Herrauds**

This excerpt is found on pages 490 to 491 of the Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson of *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda II*.

‘Þat berr nú til nýlundu, at þá þeir léku sem glaðast í höllunni, at maðr gekk inn í höllina. Sá var mikill vexti ok fríðr sýnum. Hann var í rauðum skarlatskyrtli ok silfrbelti um sik ok gullhlað um enni. Hann var slyppr ok fór leikandi sem aðrir, þar til er hann kom fyrir konung. Hann reiðir þá upp hnefann ok dregr svá snöggt um nasir konungi, at ór honum hrutu þrjár tennrnar, en blóð stökk ór nösnum hans ok munn, en hann fell sjálf í öngvit. Sigurðr sér nú þetta. Hann kastar nú hörpunni upp í sængina, en rak báða hnefana í millum herða kvámumanninum, en hann sneri undan, en Sigurðr eptir honum ok þeir Siggeirr ok allir aðrir, en sumir styrmdu yfir konunginum. Smiðr tók í hönd brúðinni ok leiddi hana upp í sængina ok læsti hana innan í maga hörpunnar, en þeir drógu hana út um glugginn, sem úti váru, ok svá Smiðr með, ok flýttu sér til skips ok gengu síðan út á þat. Þá var sá þar kominn, er konunginn hafði slegit. Sigurðr gekk ok út á skipit, er hann kom at, en Siggeirr eptir honum með brugðit sverð. Sigurðr snýr þá aprt í móti honum ok hratt honum á kaf; urðu hans menn at draga hann á land verr en dauðan. En Smiðr hjó landfestina, ok drógu menn segl upp ok gerðu bæði at sigla ok róa ok létu ganga út á haf slíkt er mátti. Hrærekr hljóp til skips ok margir menn aðrir með honum, en er skipum var fram hrundit, fell þar inn kolblár sjór, ok urðu þeir at landi at leggja ok urðu at hafa sitt hugarmót svá búit, váru ok allir menn verr en ráðlaussir af drykkjuskap. Konungr raknar nú við ok var þó lítils máttar, ok leituðu menn við at næra hann, en hann var mjök máttdegin. Snerist nú veizlan í sút ok sorg. En þá konungr hresstist, gerðu þeir ráð sín, ok kom þeim þat saman at slíta eigi fjölmenninu ok búast sem skjótast at fara eptir þeim fóstbræðrum.’

### **Göngu-Hrólfs saga**

The excerpt from chapter 7 is found on pages 376 to 377 of the Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson of *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda II*. The excerpt from chapter 9 is found on page 379 of the same edition and volume.

#### **Chapter 7**

‘Svá er sagt einn dag, at þat bar við í Jótlandi, er Þorgnýr sat yfir drykkjuborðum, at upp lukust hallardyr ok maðr gekk inn í höllina. Hann var bæði digr ok hár. Hann var í loðkápu síðri ok mikit spjót í hendi. Allir þeir, er inni váru, undruðust mikilleik hans. Hann gekk fyrir jarl ok kvaddi han virðuliga. Jarl tók kveðju hans ok spurði, hvat manna hann væri. Hann segir: „Hrólfr heiti ek, en Sturlaugr heitir faðir minn, er ræðir fyrir Hringaríki. Em ek hér kominn, at ek vil kanna yðra siðu, því at mér er sagt, at þú sért höfðingi mikill.“ Jarl segir: „Gerla kenni ek ætt þína ok kynferði, ok vil ek gjarna, at þú sért velkominn í mínu ríki, ok þigg allt þat, er þú vilt beiða, en oss stendr at veita, eða hversu marga menn vilið þér yðr láta þjóna dagliga?“ Hrólfr segir: „Átta tigur manna eru á skipi mínu, en þeir skulu mér fylgja, ok nóg hefi



ek skotsilfr at leggja fyrir oss. Vil ek fá kastala nokkurn skammt frá yðr at halda þar í mína menn ok hafa landvörn fyrir yðr, ef þér vilið.“ Jarl segir: „Þökk er mér í þinni hérkvámu, ok skulu allir hlutir í þínu valdi, er þín sæmd er þá meiri en áðr.“ Hrólfr þakkaði jarli orð sín. Gekk hann síðan til sinna manna. Fekk jarl þeim kastala til forráða. Sat Hrólfr í kastalanum um kyrrt ok helt vel sína menn, en löngum fór hann í hernað ok varði kappsamliga ríki jarls. Vingott var með þeim Stefni ok Hrólfi. Björn ráðgjafi var ok inn kærasti við Hrólfr. Leið nú svá fram um hríð, at ekki bar til tíðenda.’

### Chapter 9

‘Þat bar til tíðenda einn dag sem optar, at tveir menn ókunnir gengu inn í höllina. Þeir váru miklir ok þrekligr, en lítt búnir at vápnum ok klæðum. Þeir gengu fyrir jarl ok kvöddu hann. Hann tók vel kveðju þeira ok spurði þá at nafni. Inn stærri maðrinn sagði: „Vit erum bræðr. Ek heiti Hrafn, en bróðir minn Krákr, ok erum vit flæmskir at ætt.“ „Illt var þá til góðra nafna,“ sagði jarl, „er svá röskvir menn skyldu svá heita.“ Hrafn mælti: „Hér vildum vit þiggja vetrvist í vetr, því at okkr er sagt, at þú sért vel til þeira manna, er langt eru at komnir.“ Jarl segir þá skyldu vera velkomna ok skipaði þeim sæti utan frá öndvegismanni á miðjan bekk. Þeir váru þar í góðu yfirlæti af jarli. Ekki áttu þeir marga gleði eða skemmtan við aðra menn.

### Nornagests þáttur

This excerpt is found on pages 167 to 170 of the Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson of *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda I*.

‘Svá er sagt, at á einum tíma, þá er Óláfr konungr Tryggvason sat í Þrándheimi, bar svá til, at einn maðr kom til hans at áliðnum degi ok kvaddi hann sæmiliga. Konungr tók honum vel ok spurði, hvern hann væri, en hann sagðist Gestr heita. Konungr svarar: „Gestr muntu hér vera, hversu sem þú heitir.“ Gestr svarar: „Satt segi ek til nafns míns, herra, en gjarna vilda ek at yðr gisting þiggja, ef kostur væri.“ Konungr sagði honum þat til reiðu vera. [...]

Ok á þeiri sömu nótt vakti Óláfr Tryggvason í sæng sinni ok las bænir sínar, en aðrir menn allir sváfu í því herbergi. Þá þótti konungi einn álfr eða andi nokkurr koma inn í húsit ok þó at luktum dyrum öllum. Hann kom fyrir rekkju hvers manns, er þar svaf, ok at lyktum kom hann til sængr eins manns, er þar lá utarlaga. Þá mælti álfrinn ok nam staðar: „Furðu sterkr láss er hér fyrir tómu húsi, ok er konungr eigi jafnvíss um slíkt sem aðrir láta, er hann sé allra manna spakastr, er hann sefr nú svá fast.“ Eptir þat hverfir sá á brott at luktum dyrum.

En snemma um morgininn eptir sendi konungr skósvein sinn at verða víss, hvern þessa sæng hafði byggt um nóttina; prófaðist svá, at þar hafði legit gestrinn. Konungr lét kalla hann fyrir sik ok spurði, hvers son hann væri. En hann svarar: „Þórðr hét faðir minn ok var kallaðr þingbítur, danskr at kyni. Hann bjó á þeim bæ í Danmörk, er Græningr heitir.“ „Þrifligr maðr ertu,“ segir konungr. Gestr sjá var djarfr í orðum ok meiri en flestir menn aðrir, sterkligr ok nokkut hniginn í efra aldr. Hann biðr konung at dveljast þá lengr með hirðinni. [...] Nú er þat at segja, at Gestr dvaldist með konungi. Er honum skipat utar frá gestum. Hann var siðsamr maðr ok látaðr vel. Var hann ok þokkasamr af flestum mönnum ok virðist vel.

Litlu fyrir jól kom Ulfr heim inn rauði ok sveit manna með honum. Hann hafði verit um sumarit í konungs erendum. [...] Heldr konungr nú jól sín ríkuliga ok sitr í Þrándheimi. En inn átta dag jóla gefr Úlfr inn rauði hringinn Hnituð Óláfi konungi. Konungr þakkar honum gjöfina ok alla sína trúlynda þjónustu, er

hann hefði jafnan veitt honum. Ferr þessi hringr víða um herbergi, þar er menn drukku inni, því at þá váru eigi hallir smíðaðar í þann tíma í Noregi. Sýnir nú hverr öðrum, ok þykkjast menn eigi sét hafa jafngott gull sem í hringnum var. Ok at lyktum kemr hann á gestabekk ok svá fyrir Gest inn ókunna.’

### **Sörla saga sterka**

This excerpt is found on pages 202 to 203 of the Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson of *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda III*.

‘Nú viku sögunni til Haralds konungs Valdimarssonar, er stýrði tveim hlutum Noregs á móts við Erling konung, sem fyrr er um getit, at einn dag, sem hann sat við drykkjuborð, gengu tólf menn í höllina ok kvöddu konung snjöllu máli svá mælandi: „Tveir bræðr eru hér komnir við land þitt utan allt af Morlandi með tólf þúsundir manna vaskra til stríðs. Annarr þeira bræðra heitir Garðarr, en annarr Tófi. Vill nú Garðarr festa dóttur þína, Steinvöru, ok er þat allra manna mál, at aldri fái hún vaskara mann. Gef þú, herra konungr, skjótt svar til ræðu minnar,“ sagði sá, sem fram bar erendin. Konungr svarar: „Fyrr skal hverr maðr hér í Noregi dauðr at velli hníga en ek gefi svá leiðu tröllo ok mögnuðum berserk dóttur mína, ok seg þú þeim bræðrum, at ek muni koma til móts við þá strax at morgni með allan min stríðsafla.“

Sendimenn gengu nú til tjalda ok kunngerðu þeim bræðrum sín erendislok. En Haraldr konungr lét herboð uppskera ok bað hvern mann koma til móts við sik, er skildi kynni at valda. Fekk konungr vel fjórar þúsundir stríðsmanna.’

### **Völsunga saga**

This excerpt is found on page 7 of the Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson of *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda I*.

Nú er þess við getið, at þá er menn sátu við eldana um kveldit, at maðr einn gekk inn í höllina. Sá maðr er mönnum ókunnr at sýn. Sjá maðr hefir þess háttar búning, at hann hefir heklú flekkótta yfir sér. Sá maðr var berfættr ok hafði knýtt línbrókum at beini. Sá maðr hafði sverð í hendi ok gengr at barnstokkinum ok hött síðan á höfði. Hann var hár mjök ok eldiligr ok einsýnn. Hann bregðr sverðinu ok stingr því í stokkinn, svá at sverðit sökkr at hjöltum upp. Öllum mönnum fellust kveðjur við þenna mann. Þá tekr hann til orða ok mælti: „Sá, er þessu sverði bregðr ór stokkinum, þá skal sá þat þiggja at mér at gjöf, ok skal hann þat sjálfr sanna, at aldri bar hann betra sverð sér í hendi en þetta er.“ Eptir þetta gengr sjá inn gamli maðr út ór höllinni, ok veit engi, hverr hann er eða hvert hann gengr.

**Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar**

This excerpt is found on pages 187 to 188 of the Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson of *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda II*.

Fjall eitt var at baki konungs atsetunni. Þat var svá hátt, at þar lágu engir manna vegir yfir. Þat var einn dag, at ofan af fjallinu gekk einn maðr, ef mann skyldi kalla. Hann var meiri ok illiligri en menn hefði fyrr sét. Hann var líkari jötni en mennskum manni. Hann hafði í hendi flein tvíoddaðan. Þetta var þann tíma, er konungr sat yfir borðum. Þessi raumr gekk at hallardyrum ok beiddist inn at ganga, en dyraverðir synjuðu. Sjá lagði til þeira fleininum, ok sinn oddrinn kom fyrir bjóst hvárum ok svá út um bakit, ok hóf þá báða yfur höfuð sér ok kastar þeim báðum langt á völlinn dauðum, gekk inn síðan ok fyrir háseti konungs ok mælti: „Með því, Hringr konungr, at ek hefi virt þik svá mikils, at ek hefi sótt yðr heim, þá þykki mér skylt, at þér gerið mitt erendi.“ Konungr spyr, hvat þat væri eða hvat hann hét. Hann svarar: „Ek heiti Hárekr járnhauss. Er ek sonr Kols konungs kroppinbaks af Indíalandi, en erendi mitt er þat, at ek vil, at þér gefið í mitt vald dóttur yðra, land ok þegna. Munu þat ok flestir kalla, at betr sé standanda ríkit, at ek stýri en þú afgangill ok mannskaparlaus. En með því at þér þykkir nokkur mótgerð í því at láta ríkit, þá skal ek þat veita þér í móti at ganga at eiga dóttur þína, Húnvöru, en ef þér líkar þá eigi, þá mun ek drepa þik, en eiga ríkit ok hafa Húnvöru fyrir frillu.“

Konungi þótti nú at höndum kominn vandi mikill, því at allt fólk varð hryggt við tal þeira. Konungr mælti þá: „Mér þykkir ráð, at vit vitum, hverju hún vill svara.“ Hárekr kvað sér þat vel líka. Var þá sent eptir Húnvöru, ok þetta var borit upp fyrir henni. Hún mælti: „Vel lízt mér á þenna mann, en verða þykki mér mega, at mér verðr hann stórr í skapsmunum, en fullkosta er mér í honum í allan máta, en þó vil ek at því spyrja, hvárt ekki skal til undanlausnar.“ „Eigi skal þat,“ segir Hárekr, „ef konungr vill ganga á hólmi við mik at þriggja náttu fresti eða fá mann fyrir sik, þá skal sá ráða öllum hlutum, er annan fellir á hólmi.“ „Víst mun þat,“ segir Húnvör, „at sá mun engi fást, at þik sigri í einvígi, en þó mun ek því játa.“ Hárekr snýr síðan út, en Húnvör fór til skemmu ok grét sárt.

Konungr spurði eptir sína menn, hvárt engi vildi vinna þat til ráðahags við dóttur sína at berjast við Hárek. En þótt ráðit þætti gott, vildi engi til vinna, því at öllum þótti viss dauðinn. Töluðu þat ok margir, at þetta væri henni makligt, svá mörgum sem hún hefði frá vísat, ok mundi nú lægjast metnaðr hennar, ef hún skyldi eiga Hárek.’

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