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Patterns of Nationalist Discourse in the Early Reception of the  
Icelandic Sagas in Britain

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2019

## Table of Contents

Introduction: Tales of Many Nations .....	5
1. Nationalism and Translation: Preliminary Definitions .....	9
1.1. On Nationalism – or, <i>Hvað er þjóð?</i> .....	10
1.2. On Translation .....	15
2. Context: Old Norse in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries .....	22
2.1. Wider European Reception of Old Norse .....	32
2.1.1. The Germanic Aspect: Vergleichende Philologie .....	33
2.1.2. Scandinavian Context: <i>Sjálfstæðisbaráttan</i> , or the Struggle for Independence .....	39
2.2. Summary; or, <i>Gunnlaugs saga</i> in English .....	50
3. Narrating the North: Blackwell's <i>Northern Antiquities</i> .....	54
3.1. Editorial Intent .....	60
3.2. Presentation: Emerging Themes .....	72
3.3. The Application of Idea(l)s .....	75
3.4. Blackwell's Saga Extracts .....	79
4. From Shetland to Snæfellsnes: Exploring <i>Eyrbyggja saga</i> .....	89
4.1. Iceland First Seen: Eddas to Sagas .....	92
4.2. Walter Scott's Saga .....	100
4.3. Romance and Beyond: Constructions of Northern History after Scott .....	112
4.3.1. The Pirate .....	112
4.3.2. The Historians .....	121
4.3.3. The Adventurer .....	137
5. Sognefjord, Sweden, and Sleswig-Holsten: <i>Friðþjófs saga</i> and Nationalist Conflict .....	143
5.1. The Great and Powerful North .....	155
5.2. George Stephens's 1839 translation .....	165
5.3. What's in a Name? German, Germanic, Germanification .....	174
5.4. Old Norse and the Schleswig-Holstein Question .....	184
5.4.1. Norse Texts as National Propaganda: Models of Language-based Land-claims. ....	186
5.5. Conclusion: a Siegesallee for Sognefjord .....	204
6. Persistent Nationalisms: Conclusions and Reflections .....	208
Bibliography .....	213
Manuscripts .....	213
Primary Texts .....	213
Secondary Texts .....	237

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Bishop Percy writes in *Northern Antiquities* that while truth is universal, mistakes are widely variable (footnote 286, below). Any ‘truth’ found in this thesis is down to the much-appreciated input of numerous colleagues; the variable mistakes are all my own. I would like to offer my gratitude to all the staff working at the various archives and libraries used for this thesis: particularly those at the Bill Bryson Library, Palace Green Special Collections, and Ushaw College, Durham; the library of the Nord-Europa Institut, Humboldt Universität, Berlin; and the Landsbókasafn Íslands, Reykjavík. I would like to thank Kathryn Lowe of Glasgow University for improving and putting up with my dreadful Old Norse. Thank you to Christina Lee and John Shafer of Nottingham University for pointing me towards Durham and firing my enthusiasm for medievalism. Thank you to my colleague, Dr Alex Wilson, for countless proof-reading favours and for being a steadfast friend. Thank you to Dr David Ashurst for repeatedly going above and beyond the requirements of a doctoral supervisor, and for introducing me to some of the most interesting texts I have had the pleasure to study.

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## Introduction: Tales of Many Nations

The initial British translations of the *Íslendingasögur* in the mid-nineteenth century emerged alongside pervasive notions from the field of comparative philology concerning the national relevance and ownership of historical texts. These notions were commonplace in nineteenth-century scholarship. As Charles Burkhardt expressed it in his *Fairy Tales and Legends of Many Nations*, ‘It is a well accepted and understood maxim that the character of a nation may be learned from its popular songs and ballads, that the minds, the habits, and the morals of a people may be guided by its song-writers.’<sup>1</sup> A nation was defined by its texts. Burkhardt’s title may have unwittingly struck another truism: comparative philology prided itself on its all-encompassing subject matter; it studied tales of numerous nations, yet it was also used by nationalist scholars for whom the ownership of texts was hotly debated. These were tales many nations wanted to claim. Saga translation in Britain began in earnest while comparative philology and its associated national interests were in their prime. Yet although the relationship between these phenomena has been examined in detail, there has been little scholarly consensus on the reality, extent, or direction of any influence between them. Additionally, there has been an alarming lack of contextual awareness regarding these early translations; George Webbe Dasent, whose publications stood unrivalled for almost a century and were praised far beyond that, was an outspoken anti-semitic, polygenist, and supporter of slavery. This thesis attempts to rectify these two points by providing an analysis of the seminal works which anticipated and informed this late nineteenth-century reception, and thus provide a political and ideological context for the more famous Victorian translations.<sup>2</sup>

The *Íslendingasögur*, or as they are more commonly known in English the Icelandic Family Sagas, are a collection of some forty tales in Old Norse detailing the lives of farmers, warriors, lawyers, and poets of the settlement and conversion ages in Iceland, from the latter half of the ninth century until Iceland fell under the control of the Norwegian crown in the middle of the thirteenth century. There are two key features of *Íslendingasögur* which are worth noting in relation to nationalism. The first important point is that although composed and committed to vellum in Iceland, the sagas preserve a history of almost the entirety of northern Europe, alongside relating narratives of exploits in North America and Greenland, settlements

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<sup>1</sup> Charles B. Burkhardt, *Fairy Tales and Legends of Many Nations*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1850), p. vii.

<sup>2</sup> While this work is a self-contained study, it is complemented by a corresponding study (already written) into the “golden age” of saga translation in Victorian Britain.

on the rivers of Russia and the coasts of Eastern Europe, and journeys to the Mediterranean and Constantinople. Secondly, considering the fact that for the duration of the period this thesis will be referring to the manuscripts for these sagas were held in the libraries of Denmark, Sweden, and Britain, it should not be difficult to believe that there was considerable debate over whose national literature the *Íslendingasögur* actually were. As with Burkhardt's folk tales, Old Norse sagas were considered 'tales of many nations', the national-historical record of numerous peoples.

In the nineteenth century, Britain was one of the countries with invested interest in studying the sagas for potential information regarding national history, and several of the chief extracts from saga literature derive from this period of scholarly activity. (It is a fairly well-attested fact that the English concept of the 'Viking' as we know it today is a creation emerging from initial studies of Old Norse literature undertaken in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.) Early English translations took a largely inaccessible body of literature and presented it to an eager public. The subsequent literary adoption of everything 'Viking' was catalogued and examined in detail in 2000 by Andrew Wawn in his comprehensive book *The Vikings and the Victorians* – a work which has arguably done more than any other to establish the reception of Old Norse literature in the nineteenth century as a worthy object of study.<sup>3</sup> Among other things, Wawn successfully demonstrated the wide range of causes, political and social, in which Old Norse literature could be employed by nineteenth-century writers.<sup>4</sup>

In the years following Wawn's publication, the reception of Old Norse has proven an attractive and productive field of study, with a number of highly valuable works adding to previous scholarship.<sup>5</sup> One particularly problematic question addressed in these works has been the extent to which the reception of Old Norse literature in the nineteenth century can usefully

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Wawn, *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the Old Norse in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, revised edn (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> The options available to nineteenth-century writers and historians were hinted at by Wawn in his introduction: 'The ubiquity of the term 'Viking' masks a wide variety of constructions of Vikingism: the old northmen are variously buccaneering, triumphalist, defiant, confused, disillusioned, unbiddable, disciplined, elaborately pagan, austere, pious, relentlessly jolly, or self-destructively sybaritic. They are merchant adventurers, mercenary soldiers, pioneering colonists, pitiless raiders, self-sufficient farmers, cutting-edge naval technologists, primitive democrats, psychopathic berserks, ardent lovers and complicated poets' Wawn (2002), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> See in particular Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Norse Muse in Britain, 1750-1820* (Trieste: Edizioni Parnaso, 1998); Heather O'Donoghue, *English Poetry and Old Norse Myth: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Judy Quinn and Adele Cipolla (eds.), *Studies in the Transmission and Reception of Old Norse Literature: The Hyperborean Muse in European Culture* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers n. v., 2016); and Jón Karl Helgason, *Echoes of Valhalla: The Afterlife of the Eddas and Sagas*, trans. by Jane Victoria Appleton (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2017). Of older works on the reception of Old Norse, Jöran Mjöberg's two-volume *Drömmen om sagatiden* (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1967-68) also needs to be mentioned here.

be studied in relation to political developments both contemporary and successive. The same period in which the very first translations of sagas were appearing in English was also one of widespread nationalist ideology, both within the fields of politics and academia. From England to Denmark, Germany to Norway, concepts derived from comparative philology, ethnic-nationalism, and social-Darwinism regarding the inequality of races and distinction of said ‘races’ on linguistic grounds were supported by many of the period’s writers and academics.<sup>6</sup> This substantial and varied collection of often interrelated fields inevitably shaped the way in which the sagas and British notions of northern ancestry came to be conceived. The extent to which this was so is less easy to evaluate.

The purpose of this research is to attempt to demonstrate the extent and effect of nationalist ideology in the early reception and preliminary translations of Old Norse-Icelandic sagas into English.<sup>7</sup> The thesis posits that numerous underlying motives for readership, translation, and publication have fundamentally influenced the academic and public reception of the sagas from the Georgian period through to the present day. The study will primarily limit itself to early nineteenth-century Britain, although with excursions to the continent where relevant. After providing a contextual depiction of nationalist interests behind the reception of Old Norse, the thesis will examine three key works. Firstly, it considers the influence of and contextual philosophies behind J. A. Blackwell’s revised edition of *Northern Antiquities*, and in particular its depiction of Old Norse literature as key to understanding British ancestry. The thesis then reviews the lasting impact of Walter Scott’s *Eyrbyggja saga* ‘Abstract’, and the extent to which this partial translation characterised subsequent attitudes to nationality. Finally, the thesis examines the wide nationalist implications of the European interest in *Friðþjófs saga*,

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<sup>6</sup> It will be useful to state at the start of this work that ‘race’ as a term applied to humans is considered misleading or politically-charged by many scientists. The notion of a “pure” race has no basis in genetics. What humanity does exhibit is evidence of geographical variation, but this is quite a separate concept from that of a sub-species. Equally problematic is the term ‘nation’. In using these words, the writer does so with regards to a common cultural understanding of what they are supposed to entail, not in any effort to legitimise them as concepts. See Neil Macmaster, *Racism in Europe: 1870-2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001); Robert Wald Sussman, *The Myth of Race: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); and for a scientific analysis Rene J. Herrera, Ralph Garcia-Bertrand, and Francisco M. Salzano, *Genomes, Evolution, and Culture: Past, Present, and Future of Humankind* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), pp. 62-64. The reason for the theory’s popularity was aptly summarised by Ralph Waldo Emerson: ‘Men hear gladly of the power of blood or race. Everybody likes to know that his advantages cannot be attributed to air, soil, sea, or to local wealth, as mines and quarries, nor to laws and traditions, nor to fortune, but to superior brain, as it makes the claim more personal to him’ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *English Traits* (London: G. Routledge & Co., 1856), p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> The thesis limits itself largely to British (particularly English and Scottish) reception of the Old Norse sagas. The narrative of North America’s interaction with saga literature, the translation of that literature, and accompanying patterns in nationalist thought has been explored by numerous scholars. See in particular Geraldine Barnes, *Viking America: The First Millennium* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), pp. 37-144.



and the nature of the scholarship of George Stephens, its first English translator. The grounds for choosing this time period should hopefully be clear by the end of the thesis, but, in short, it includes the first full translation of a saga from Old Norse into English and precedes the monumental works of George Webbe Dasent and the partnership between William Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon, three scholars whose input heralded the start of a period of saga translation on a previously-unimagined scale. The works of reception of the chosen Old Norse texts were all influential, in their own right and for different reasons, on the development of saga translation.

## 1. Nationalism and Translation: Preliminary Definitions

In a 1965 article, Susie Tucker discussed the relationship between the reception of Old Norse literature in the eighteenth century and the development of contemporary trends in social and philosophical debate; ‘We have long recognised,’ writes Tucker, ‘that an introduction to Norse mythology, legend and poetry, was one of the springs of the Romantic movement and a study of the northern languages one of the foundations of comparative philology.’<sup>8</sup> Tucker’s statement of apparent tacit knowledge is intriguing in that it presupposes not only an influence, but a direction of influence between several potentially unrelated phenomena. The process of translating Old Norse literature and its subsequent distribution in northern Europe, she argues, was a catalyst for both era-defining artistic and sociological movements. The importance Tucker affords her discipline is not easy to defend, and nor is her assumption as universally-held as she implies. In co-editing her 2012 work *Germania Remembered*, Christina Lee describes a different approach, noticing a tendency of nineteenth-century German readers to equate Old Norse saga literature with traditional ‘German’ literature, a tendency, ‘assisted by two related developments: the rise of philology as an academic discipline, which included the study of medieval literature, and the historical developments of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which saw the emergence of a new nationalism.’<sup>9</sup> The two opinions demonstrate the difficulty of drawing direct lines of influence between these various occurrences; in any given case study of medieval reception it is unclear whether the translation of Old Norse literature promoted new concepts, or if its study and distribution was a product of that discussion. The reception scholar is beset by seemingly unanswerable “chicken and egg” dilemmas: which phenomenon influenced the other? To what extent are they interdependent? To what extent are they merely concurrent?<sup>10</sup>

In order to construct a useful picture of the political and social complexities of saga reception in the Georgian and Victorian periods it is necessary to briefly define the key terms of our argument. The remainder of this chapter will therefore occupy itself with addressing the

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<sup>8</sup> Susie I. Tucker, ‘Scandinavia for the Eighteenth-Century Common Reader’, *Saga Book*, 16 (1965), 233-47, at p. 233.

<sup>9</sup> Christina Lee, ‘A Useful Great-Grandmother: Edda Receptions in Post-Medieval Germany’, in *Germania Remembered 1500-2009: Commemorating and Inventing a Germanic Past*, ed. by Christina Lee and Nicola McLelland (Tempe, Arizona: ACMRS, 2012), 99-119, at p. 99.

<sup>10</sup> When Allen French, writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, pointed to the classic *Íslendingasögur* translations as being ‘the chief Icelandic sagas which have been translated, and the most interesting of them’, he unintentionally touched on this problem: were the sagas translated because they were interesting, or were they interesting because they were translated? Allen French, *Heroes of Iceland; Adapted from Dasent’s Translation of “The Story of Burnt Njal”, the Great Icelandic Saga* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1905), p. xxxiv.

concepts of ‘nation’ and ‘translation’, before moving on in the next chapter to provide a concise overview of the position of Old Norse saga translation in Britain up to the end of the eighteenth century.

### 1.1. On Nationalism – or, *Hvað er þjóð?*

What is a nation?<sup>11</sup> The question has been troubling scholars of nationalism for as long as they are willing to allow that their subject has existed. Evidently, or at least etymologically, it is linked to the equally-disputed concept of nationalism. The Icelandic historian Jón Jónsson Aðils (1869-1920), writing in 1910, argued that this nationalism entailed both a vision of the country and of the nation: ‘People love both unconsciously and instinctively, by a deep and mysterious impulse, which originates in a rigid natural law, in a basic nature that is common to all.’<sup>12</sup> This explanation describes quite fittingly the self-imagined image of Romantic Nationalism as displayed in Icelandic poetry in the mid-nineteenth century, but it is not a model many modern scholars would endorse. One of the foremost Icelandic scholars of nationalism of recent years, Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, comments that Jón Aðils’s model problematically ‘moves nationalism beyond the historical or sociological analysis into the realm of social psychology.’<sup>13</sup> Guðmundur suggests that this way of looking at nationalism derives from nationalism’s own discourse; one must look elsewhere for a just assessment of nationalist thought: ‘A nation has no inherent rights,’ he warns, ‘and it has, in fact, no definite,

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<sup>11</sup> Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, ‘Hvað gerir Íslendinga að þjóð? Nokkrar hugleiðingar um uppruna og eðli þjóðernis’, *Skírnir*, 170 (Spring 1996), 7-31, at p. 11. The Icelandic terms regarding ideas of nationalism do not translate perfectly into English (as is common in translation) but key concepts of *föðurlandaást*, *þjóðernishyggja*, and *þjóðernisvitund* can be usefully translated as ‘patriotism’, ‘nationalism’, and ‘national consciousness.’ The Icelandic word *þjóð* can signify both ‘nation’ and ‘people’, alongside a wealth of other variations (consider the words *þjóðerni* ‘nationality’, *þjóðhöfðingi* ‘head of state’, and *þjóðfáni* ‘the Icelandic flag’). As Dominique Schnapper has argued, ‘A definition of the nation is in itself already an implicit theory of the nation’ – which is as much as to say that the discipline and a subjective reaction to the ideology of nationalism are frequently inseparable. Dominique Schnapper, *Community of Citizens: On the Modern Idea of Nationality* (New Brunswick, N.J. and London: Transaction Publishers, 1998), p. 15. Attempts to define the nation are in part widely divergent because they are attempts at a scientific definition of an unscientific idea; the multiple portraits of nationalism are constantly redrawn by academics because their subject matter simply will not sit still.

<sup>12</sup> Jón Jónsson Aðils, *Dagrenning* (Reykjavík: Sigurður Kristjánsson, 1910), p. 10; cited in Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, ‘Social Distinctions and National Unity: On Politics of Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Iceland’, *History of European Ideas*, 21/6 (1995), 763-79, at p. 763. Jón Aðils was an adherent to the principles of nationalism as outlined by Johann Gottlieb Fichte, as well as to the writings of John Locke; see Sigríður Matthíasdóttir, ‘Réttlæting þjóðernis: Samanburður á alþýðufyrirlestrum Jóns Aðils og hugmyndum Johanns Gottlieb Fichte’, *Skírnir*, 169 (Spring 1995), 36-64, at pp. 39-48.

<sup>13</sup> Guðmundur Hálfðanarson (1995), p. 763.

predetermined borders.’<sup>14</sup> Instead, Guðmundur himself views nationalism as ‘a social organisation, based on historical and cultural premises, used either to make new claims for social authority or to preserve old power structures and social processes.’<sup>15</sup>

Guðmundur’s notions of nations derive chiefly from the influential mid-twentieth-century scholarship of Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson.<sup>16</sup> On the latter’s concept of the nation as an ‘imagined community’ Guðmundur explains: ‘That is, nations are “imagined communities,” often originating in the thoughts of an elite, which will never be more than isolated ideas unless they find resonance in the interests (however perceived) of the potential nation.’<sup>17</sup> Anderson’s infamous concept has come to dominate scholarly discussion of nationalism, but one should not fall into the common trap of misreading his work as suggesting that nations are either fictional, in that they simply do not exist, or that they are solely the product of the aristocracy and the educated social elite. Anderson’s term ‘imagined communities’ in fact referred to the fact that nations are (normally) such vast entities that they can only ever come into existence and maintain their current state through a collective act of imagination on the part of those living within them. Elsewhere in his work, Anderson stipulates that history points to the necessity of often very specific historical prerequisites in order for nations to be formed; they cannot be considered mere constructs of the mind.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, Anthony Smith argues that to emerge and endure nations require ‘usable pasts’ as foundations; nationalism is supported by a ‘finite number of competing histories.’<sup>19</sup> Smith writes:

The concept of a nation [...] cannot be sustained without a suitable past and a believable future, and this requires a community’s history and destiny to be formed out of whole cloth. In order to create a convincing representation of the ‘nation’, a worthy and distinctive past must be rediscovered and appropriated. Only then can a nation aspire to a glorious destiny.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Guðmundur Hálfðanarson (1995), p. 763.

<sup>15</sup> Guðmundur Hálfðanarson (1995), p. 764.

<sup>16</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1987) [original 1965]; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Verso, 1991).

<sup>17</sup> Guðmundur Hálfðanarson (1995), p. 794.

<sup>18</sup> Miroslav Hroch, for one, takes issue with misreadings of Anderson’s theory. Miroslav Hroch, *European Nations: Explaining Their Formation*, trans. by Karolina Graham (London and New York: Verso, 2015), p. 12. For Hroch’s own views on the formation of nations see Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>19</sup> Anthony D. Smith, ‘The ‘Golden Age’ and National Renewal,’ in *Myths and Nationhood*, ed. by Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpflin (London: C. Hurst & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., 1997), 36-59, at p. 37; Anthony D. Smith, *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Hannover: University Press of New England, 2000), p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Smith (1997), p. 36.

The features of a state-less people, as presented to readers of the Old Norse settlement narrative of Iceland, are traditionally seen as being a combination of linguistic, ethnic, and cultural factors.<sup>21</sup> In the nineteenth century itself such elements were suggested as the building blocks of the nation; John Stuart Mill, in chapter sixteen of his 1861 *Considerations of Representative Government*, had named ‘political antecedents; the possession of a national history, and consequent community of recollections; collective pride and humiliation, pleasure and regret, connected with the same incidents in the past,’ as the foremost sources for feelings of national identity.<sup>22</sup>

In the 1990s, Eric Hobsbawn urgently dismissed such a model of the nation as both implausible and potentially dangerous; the latter point violently demonstrated by a series of targeted campaigns of violence in the twentieth century, from the concentration camps of the Third Reich to the back-streets of Kigali. As Hobsbawn argued, the model of the biological nation was problematic on numerous grounds, both factually and morally:

The ideal of such a state is represented by an ethnically, culturally, and linguistically homogenous population. We now know that this standing invitation to “ethnic cleansing” is dangerous and completely unrealistic. [...] Moreover, it would have surprised the founders of the original nation-states. For them, the unity of the nation was *political* and not socio-anthropological. [...] That is, one group of people who agree to live under a set of rules “irrespective of culture, language, and ethnic composition.”<sup>23</sup>

What one can draw from this short, potted history is that the form of nation imagined of saga-age Iceland by the nineteenth-century British writer (although largely that of the former model, and chiefly that of ethnic and linguistic unity) was not necessarily relatable to the model shared by his or her colleagues or countrymen. There were numerous possible dynamics on offer.

Even so, a notable shared feature of nineteenth-century concepts of the nation was the supposedly inherent connection between language and ethnicity – or ‘race’, a term which became increasingly popular as the century progressed.<sup>24</sup> As will become apparent, the two were considered inseparable by many (although not all) adherents of comparative philology. It

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<sup>21</sup> Eric Hobsbawn, ‘Language, Culture, and National Identity’, *Social Research*, 63/4 (1996), 1065-80, at p. 1066.

<sup>22</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Three Essays: On Liberty; Representative Government; The Subjection of Women*, ed. by Richard Wollheim (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 380.

<sup>23</sup> Hobsbawn (1996), p. 1066.

<sup>24</sup> The term ‘ethnicity’ did not gain popular usage until the 1950s, but the central features of the concept are clearly demonstrated in numerous works of the nineteenth century; see Göran Rystad, ‘Ethnicity and American Foreign Policy’, *Scandia*, 53/2 (1987), 215-33, at p. 215. Hobsbawn comments: ‘The concept of a single, exclusive, and unchanging ethnic or cultural or other identity is a dangerous piece of brainwashing. Human mental identities are not like shoes, of which we can only wear one pair at a time. We are all multi-dimensional beings’, Hobsbawn (1996), p. 1067. On race and language in nineteenth-century literature see J. A. V. Chapple, *Science and Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 125-30.

should suffice for this introduction to say that the notion that a nation is defined by its language can be disproven by numerous historical examples.<sup>25</sup> The scientific label of comparative philology, and its easy answers regarding nations, languages, and territory, did little to aid the residents in areas with mixed-linguistic, cross-border, or even merely cosmopolitan communities. Nineteenth-century concepts of the nation being directly tied to a language almost always ran into problems (even in cases as unique as Iceland's).<sup>26</sup> In short, the 'nation' discussed by the numerous writers quoted in this thesis is at best an unresolved, unknown entity of uncertain parameters, and quite possibly less definite than that.<sup>27</sup>

Nationalism, being essentially a political and cultural tendency favouring the concept of the nation, is considerably easier to define; Ernest Gellner defines nationalism as 'a theory of political legitimacy which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones.'<sup>28</sup> Gellner additionally points out that nationalism is best characterised by its weakness rather than its strength; for every successful nationalist movement in the world there are ten unsuccessful movements.<sup>29</sup> (From a historical perspective there was therefore no certainty in the nineteenth century that Iceland or Norway would ever attain independence, or that Britain would maintain its existing formation.)<sup>30</sup> For the purpose of this thesis, nationalism will be

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<sup>25</sup> See Hobsbawm (1996), p. 1068. Hooghe writes, 'Nationalists' understanding of the nation-state is narrow: the modern state has to be culturally homogenous, entailing in most cases a single standard language. But many countries have had to deal with a variety of vernaculars. State and nation (in the sense of a community) coincide neatly almost nowhere', Liesbet Hooghe, 'Nationalist Movements and Social Factors: A Theoretical Perspective', in *The Social Origins of Nationalist Movements: The Contemporary West European Experience*, ed. by John Coakley (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1992), 21-44, at p. 31.

<sup>26</sup> 'To have a language, as distinct from a dialect or "jargon," you needed to be classified as a nation or nationality. The minimum formula could work in areas of solid settlement by one language group, and local or even regional government could be substantially conducted in what was called the "language of common use" (*Umgangssprache*), but it raised big problems in areas of mixed settlement and in most cities', Hobsbawm (1996), p. 1070.

<sup>27</sup> 'Unlike such ideologies as socialism and economic liberalism, nationalist ideology is not universalisable except in a trivial sense. Nationalists might subscribe to the general principle that all nations should be self-governing; but the concept of 'nation' is so unclear and agreement as to who constitute the members of a particular nation is so elusive that the principle itself is almost meaningless', John Coakley, 'The Social Origins of Nationalist Movements and Explorations of Nationalism: A Review', in *The Social Origins of Nationalist Movements: The Contemporary West European Experience*, ed. by John Coakley (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1992), 1-20, at p. 16. The scholar Birgir Hermannsson notes several problems with the study of nationalism in his work *Understanding Nationalism: Studies in Icelandic Nationalism, 1800-2000* (Stockholm: Department of Political Science, Stockholm University, 2005), pp. 16-17 and 69-80.

<sup>28</sup> Gellner (1987), p. 1. Even so, Birgir Hermannsson notes that outside academia 'the word nationalism as used in everyday discourse is marked by its confusion of meaning and a lack of clarity, which makes it an easy victim of political propaganda. The word becomes a weapon in the political debate, mostly – given its history – to discredit one's opponents', Birgir Hermannsson (2005), p. 71.

<sup>29</sup> Gellner (1987), p. 45.

<sup>30</sup> As Jóhann Páll Árnason writes, 'Path dependence should not be mistaken for pre-programming. Icelandic history might – at several successive junctures – have taken roads other than those that in the end led to the building of a nation-state; the enduring significance of the medieval sources consisted in pointing to possibilities that would otherwise have been much less easy to envisage', Jóhann Páll Árnason, 'Icelandic Anomalies', *Thesis Eleven*, 77 (May 2004), 103-20, at p. 105.

more broadly defined as any discourse which prioritises one group of people over another via the concept of the ‘nation’ or otherwise seeks to promote notions of the inequality and autonomy of such ‘nations.’<sup>31</sup> Clearly, on whatever side of the political spectrum one sits, this process could be seen as for good or ill; the many nationalisms on display in this thesis display a broad array of political stances, and these different models are often based on incompatible beliefs.<sup>32</sup>

As a final point, before moving on to the subject of translation theory, one should consider the image of the nation or of nationalism offered by the sagas themselves. In the sagas, Iceland is provided with its own origin myth, a romanticised narrative in which it becomes a safe haven for democratically-inclined Norwegians and Britons.<sup>33</sup> This origin myth follows the basic premise that the early settlers were political migrants, electing or forced to leave their homes in Norway due to the imposition of a new and tyrannical monarchy. Iceland functions jointly in the sagas as a geographical destination for these independent outcasts and as a symbolic Eden, an example of anti-monarchic defiance, surviving against all odds at the edge of the known world. The initial settlers are depicted by the sagas as honourable men and women who are in possession of strong feelings of cultural identity but nevertheless are forced to leave their former homeland on principle. Such is the dilemma of Þórðr of *Þórðar saga hreðu*: “*Ekki hafða ek ætlat at flýja óðul mínæ en með því at margir göfgir men hafa sér þetta látit nægja Ísland, þá má vera, at slíkt nökkut liggi fyrir.*”<sup>34</sup> That said, it should not be assumed that saga

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<sup>31</sup> See Smith, who defines nationalism more specifically as ‘an ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity, and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential “nation”’, Smith (2000), p. 3. Aside from the authors mentioned, for further discussion of nationalism see Lloyd Kramer, ‘Historical Narratives and the Meaning of Nationalism’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 58/3 (July 1997), 525-45; and Terry Eagleton, ‘Nationalism: Irony and Commitment’, in *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, ed. by Seamus Deane, 5th printing (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 23-39.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Ignatieff discusses the variability of nationalisms in his work, distinguishing between the ‘civic’ and the ‘ethnic’, or as Smith puts it the ‘benign’ or the ‘aggressive/exclusive’; Smith sees this as an overly simplistic dichotomy, and it will hopefully become evident through the evidence presented in this thesis that instances of both forms can easily be found in one work. See Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into New Nationalisms* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993); and Smith (2000), pp. 16 and 77.

<sup>33</sup> Gunnar Karlsson points to both *Landnámabók* and *Egils saga* as instances of the persistent exodus narrative which depicts freedom-loving Norwegians escaping an oppressive state, a narrative frequently provided as grounds for Iceland’s unique political set-up; see Gunnar Karlsson, ‘Was Iceland the Galapagos of Germanic Political Culture?’, *Gripla*, 20 (2009), 77-91, at pp. 79-81. Gunnar does not claim that Iceland did not have a unique political system, but argues that its formation was largely due to the geographical distance from monarchies, rather than some individual way of thinking of the settlers. See also Kirsten Hastrup, ‘Defining a Society: The Icelandic Free State Between Two Worlds’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 56/3 (Summer 1984), 235-55 (particularly p. 240); Pernille Hermann, ‘Concepts of Memory and Approaches to the Past in Medieval Icelandic Literature’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 81/3 (Fall 2009), 287-308; and Marion Lerner, *Landnahme-Mythos, kulturelles Gedächtnis und nationale Identität: Isländische Reisevereine im frühen 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag GmbH, 2010).

<sup>34</sup> “I did not intend to flee my home but since many noble people have decided that Iceland is sufficient, it may be that something similar lies before me.” *Þórðar saga Hreðu*, in *Kjalnesinga saga, Íslensk fornrit XIV*, ed. by

compilers were merely propagating nationalist sentiment. In the self-same saga, the narrator presents an apparent criticism of the literary trope of Iceland as the ‘home of the free.’ When Skeggi advises Ásbjörn Þorsteinsson not to court Sigrid Þórhildsdóttir, whose brothers are considered particularly violent men, Ásbjörn plays the part of the injured nationalist: *Ásbjörn svarar: “Þat hafða ek ætlat at vera sjálfráði fyrir hverjum manni hér í landi.” Skeggi segir: “Þat ferr sem reynist, hvárt þú ert þar einhlítr, áðr þér skilið, ef þú leitar nökkut á þá frammar en þeim líkar.”*<sup>35</sup> As Skeggi artfully notes, personal autonomy should be accompanied by a corresponding degree of common sense. The origin myth of Iceland was thus already present in the material from which nineteenth-century translators drew, but it was accompanied by a tradition of scepticism and periodic re-evaluation often overlooked in later works of reception.

## 1.2. On Translation

In addition to the contested concepts of nationalism, this thesis also seeks to consider the equally-debated subject of translation.<sup>36</sup> On first glance, translation might seem to be an intrinsically internationalist practice, opening up the literature of one language to another, and thereby promoting a deeper cross-cultural understanding. In reality, it is a process of comparison, of normative traits and otherness, and is often concerned with modifying or solidifying a preconceived national image in opposition to that provided by the source language.<sup>37</sup> Edith Grossman, in the introduction to her 2010 book *Why Translation Matters*,

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Jóhannes Halldórsson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1959), 161-226, at ch. 2, p. 168; trans. my own. See also Katrina C. Attwood, in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders* [hereafter *TCSOI*], ed. by. Viðar Hreinsson *et al.*, 5 vols (Reykjavík: Leifur Eiríksson, 1997), vol. 3, ch. 2, p. 364.

<sup>35</sup> ‘Ásbjörn replied: “I thought I would have independant judgement here in this country.” Skeggi said: “We will see if you are content with your independence, after you have left, if you try anything against their liking”’, *Þorðar saga Hreðu* (1959), ch. 3, p. 177. See also Attwood (1997), in *TCSOI*, vol. 3, ch. 3, p. 368. The notion of the actions or fortunes of the inhabitants of Iceland being tied to the fortunes of the land is one that comes up in several sagas, for example in *Njáls saga*, where Hrútr ascribes his poor mood to Iceland’s poor fertility. As George Dasent would translate it in his 1861 *Burnt Njal*, ‘Ill goes it with those who are born on a barren land’ - Hrútr is homesick for Iceland, although one could not necessarily infer that from his statement; George Webbe Dasent (trans.), *The Story of Burnt Njal, or Life in Iceland at the End of the Tenth Century*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1861), vol. I, ch. 6, p. 18.

<sup>36</sup> From a theoretical standpoint there are several scholars whose work on Translation Studies has influenced this thesis. For a general summary of scholarship on Translation Studies see Mona Baker, ‘The Changing Landscape of Translation and Interpreting Studies’, in *A Companion to Translation Studies*, ed. by Sandra Bermann and Catherine Porter (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2014), 15-27; on aspects of translation in the nineteenth century see Annmarie Drury, *Translation as Transformation in Victorian Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>37</sup> One might also consider translation as a process of confusing an already ambivalent set of terms (‘race’, ‘nation’). Christine Bolt, in her 1971 work *Victorian Attitudes to Race*, points to the semiotic variability both then and now: ‘Although Victorians agreed upon the importance of racial theories and conflicts, there was a vagueness as to the exact meaning of the word ‘race’ which brought [...] a dangerous confusion between



speaks positively of the important role of translation in developing a ‘national image’ within the framework of ‘nations.’<sup>38</sup> The model matches scholarly concepts of nationalism; as Guðmundur Hálfðanarson writes:

Nationalist politics are always conducted in a bipolar space. This is an essential part of its logic, as the unity of one nation is only sustained as long as its members perceive their existence in opposition to others – where, preferably, one nation or group of nations stand out as the arch enemy, or the main source of all corruption. [...] Nationalism is, therefore, politics of difference for the sake of sameness.<sup>39</sup>

As Robert Cook, translator of *Njáls saga* into English, writes, ‘translation is, to varying degrees, an exchange between different cultures;’ yet translation can also be more akin to an exercise in reconnaissance or a stand-off.<sup>40</sup> Translating the works of other cultures provides points of reference for one’s own culture; how that information is used is (at least partially) up to the readers. The literature of one’s neighbours, allies, cousins, or enemies can act as a comparative benchmark for one’s own works.

In the work of early saga translators, this cross-cultural comparison often materialises in race-based assertions of British superiority. Nineteenth-century translators with a mind to promoting northern literature (in their own editions or otherwise) were keen to emphasise that all that was great and good about the British Empire and its colonial territories was a product of a genetic amalgamation of Scandinavian physiology and psychology.<sup>41</sup> Publishers too were aware that the hereditary argument sold books, and were equally keen to promote ideas of northern solidarity.<sup>42</sup> Historians saw the concept of an England revitalised by northern immigrants as provocative promotion for their own work:

Nineteenth-century translators in particular were very conscious that Norwegian and Danish invaders had raided and settled in Britain during the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries, and many, including such prominent figures as Samuel Laing, George Webbe

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biological and cultural concepts’, Christine Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 206. Transferring these concepts to another language (particularly one in the heat of colonial discourse) naturally encouraged diverging understandings.

<sup>38</sup> Edith Grossman, *Why Translation Matters* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 3-33.

<sup>39</sup> Guðmundur Hálfðanarson (1995), pp. 770-71.

<sup>40</sup> Robert Cook, ‘On Translating Sagas’, *Gripla*, xiii, ed. by Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson, Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, and Sverrir Tómasson (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 2002), 108-45, at p. 109.

<sup>41</sup> The concept of the ‘genes’ was not denoted as such until 1905, but the notion of the inheritance of specific traits had already been grasped by Gregor Mendel (1822–1884) and the implicit outcomes of such a system (if not the exact workings) were employed in Darwin’s theories of evolution.

<sup>42</sup> ‘Even if translators may not themselves be especially nationalistic, publishers with an eye to existing sales have been very ready to emphasise the relevance of the text being presented to the national history of the readers’, John Kennedy, *Translating the Sagas: Two Hundred Years of Challenge and Response* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers n.v., 2007), p. 12.

Dasent, and Rasmus B. Anderson, believed that what was fine in the culture of modern Britain and the United States was essentially a legacy of this Scandinavian infusion into the genetic stock of the British Isles, and the revitalisation of Anglo-Saxon England with the concepts and institutions brought by the invaders.<sup>43</sup>

Saga translations provided a natural context for contemporary debate on genuine scientific advances in the understanding of inheritance of shared traits; yet alongside this research, others advocated the supposed scientific merit of such ideas as racial hierarchy, weakening bloodlines, and the degradation of nations through the process of immigration – topics which still find a popular audience in British culture to this day.<sup>44</sup> As an academic practice, the contextualisation of translated sagas as evidence for ethnological study survived into the twentieth century. Kennedy notes that economic-sociologist Thorsten Veblen could happily introduce his 1925 *Laxdæla saga* translation as ‘an ethnological document of a high order [...] of prime significance for any understanding of that peculiar phase of culture that makes up its setting.’<sup>45</sup> That the sagas were first and foremost of interest for their ethnological significance is a remnant from nineteenth-century scholarship, translation practice, and subsequent works of literary reception.

Much as with concepts of nationalism, the principles of translation theory underwent significant reassessment in the nineteenth century as scholars such as Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) outlined new vocabulary for its study. In his influential 1813 lecture *Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens*, Schleiermacher demonstrated the potential influence that a translation could have in either normalising or othering the source text in order to signify cross-cultural relations.<sup>46</sup> Just as ‘no translation is an independent and organic product’, so too no translator in the course of the nineteenth century went entirely unaffected by Schleiermacher’s theory, which quickly gained popularity, and continues to influence the

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<sup>43</sup> Kennedy (2007), p. 13. This sentiment survived until the end of the century and beyond. Edmund Gosse, writing in 1890, viewed Old Norse literature as evidence of ‘undiluted native, Northern stock, from which we sprang’, Sir Edmund William Gosse, *Northern Studies* (London: Walter Scott, 1890), p. viii.

<sup>44</sup> On the notion of the ‘degeneration or degradation of races,’ see Macmaster (2001), pp. 33-34, and Jessica Howell, *Exploring Victorian Travel Literature: Disease, Race, and Climate* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 37. Intriguingly it was not just immigration that nationalists viewed as problematic for the British constitution, but emigration too; losing young gentlemen to foreign countries was seen as a weakening of the British race: ‘These were the nightmares of empire’, Anne M. Windholz, ‘An Emigrant and a Gentleman: Imperial Masculinity, British Magazines, and the Colony that Got Away’, *Victorian Studies*, 42/4 (1999), 631-58, at p. 647.

<sup>45</sup> Thorstein Veblen (trans.), *The Laxdæla Saga, Translated from the Icelandic* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1925), p. vi; cited Kennedy (2007), p. 17. Veblen had initially tried to publish his translation in William Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon’s ‘Saga Library’ series, sending them a complete draft in 1890, but was rather shortly told by Eiríkur that they already had a translation, see Lbs. 2181b 4to.

<sup>46</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, ‘Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens’, in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 3 (Berlin: Reimer, 1838).

terminology of Translation Studies to this day.<sup>47</sup> Translations could demonstrate key similarities between different linguistic groups; indeed, in the minds of many nineteenth-century translators it was the shared racial attributes of separate peoples which made translations between their tongues possible. The Icelander Matthías Jochumsson (1835-1920) was reflecting widely-held assumptions when he suggested that Old Norse eddaic poetry would find a potential home in English: ‘As to our old poetry it is almost impossible to get it translated into any other language; but Englishmen, who have rend [sic] the old Anglo-Saxon remnants of poetry as the poems of Cadmon and *Beowulf*, are nearest to comprehend its kind and nature.’<sup>48</sup>

For the purpose of this thesis, it will be necessary to step back from the period’s own terminology and consider updated scholarly opinions of translation. The thesis will take a broad view of what is meant by translation. As anyone who lives in any culture subject to the influence (however slight) of more than one language will know, there are many approaches to translation: a translation can be literal or idiomatic; it can use high or low registers; it can attempt to sound ‘foreign’ or to match the target language;<sup>49</sup> it can be antiquated or contemporary in its diction;<sup>50</sup> it can explain unfamiliar concepts through familiar terms or it can add new concepts to the target language. All of these methods come under the banner of translation.<sup>51</sup> Then there are works which require attention while not wholly fitting into the

<sup>47</sup> Keneva Kunz, *Retellers of Tales: An Evaluation of English Translations of Laxdæla Saga* (Reykjavík: Bókmenntafræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, 1994), p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> Matthías Jochumsson, in Lbs. 2807 4to. Matthías was a strong advocate of ties between Britain and Iceland; he was a patron of several British writers, including Mary Leith and Beatrice Clay, and wrote a tercentenary commemorative poem for Shakespeare in which he described the English with the lines: ‘*Bjartari kjör / eða betri skipan / sjaldan hefir naðst / í nokkru landi*’ [‘A better lot, / a better hap, / was seldom found / on any soil’], Matthías Jochumsson, *1616-1916: On the Tercentenary Commemoration of Shakespeare Ultima Thule Sendeth Greeting: An Icelandic Poem*, trans. by Israel Gollancz ([London]: Oxford University Press, 1916), p. 5. Matthías’s national anthem for Iceland, ‘Eldgamla Isafold’ (trans. as ‘Fire-olden Iceland’ by Mary Leith), used the melody from ‘God Save the King’, a practice followed in both Bjarni Thorarensen’s ‘Íslands minni’ and Magnús Stephensen’s ‘Þjóð-söngur Hjálmars á Bjargi.’ See Mrs Disney [Mary Charlotte Julia] Leith, *Original Verses and Translations* (London: J. Masters & Co., 1895a), pp. 123-24; and Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, *Íslenska þjóðríkið – uppruni og endimörk* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag & Reykjavíkur Akademían, 2001), pp. 195-96.

<sup>49</sup> ‘From the post-classical perspective, thinkers such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Wilhelm von Humboldt pointed out that translators are faced with an inevitable choice: they can either produce a translation that feels as if it could have been written by a fluent writer of the target language, or capture what is foreign about the original text at the risk of strangeness’, Efrain Kristal, ‘Philosophical/Theoretical Approaches to Translation’, in *A Companion to Translation Studies*, ed. by Sandra Bermann and Catherine Porter (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2014), 28-40, at p. 31. These can be seen as early variants of the theory Schleiermacher was to define later.

<sup>50</sup> See Gabriela Saldanha, ‘Style in, and of, Translation’, in *A Companion to Translation Studies*, ed. by Sandra Bermann and Catherine Porter (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2014), 95-106, at p. 96.

<sup>51</sup> Less useful are commonly applied criteria such as whether a translation is ‘faithful’ – the exact meaning of such terms is obscure, and their application is largely dependent on the opinion of the writer, see David Bellos, *Is That A Fish In Your Ear? The Amazing Adventure of Translation* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2012);

model: partial translations, works with translated quotations, paraphrases, extracts, abstracts, and summaries all fall into this category. If one is to go one step further then there is also the body of evidence comprised of works inspired by original texts which have clearly involved a process of translation in their conception: plays, novels, and any artistic adaption in English which has been inspired by Old Norse. These are no less useful when considering the socio-political context and influence of the reception of Old Norse sagas. (The departure from chronological ordering of texts in the following chapters is partially an attempt to avoid the traditional implied causality of nationalist discourse and represent instead a broad array of influences, but it is also an attempt to reflect the varying complexity of translations on offer in the early nineteenth century: paraphrase to partial to full.)

Even within a more conservative understanding of what a good saga translation might be, there is no agreed formula for its production. As numerous translation scholars have noted, ‘there has never been a consensus about any single way of mapping one original text from a source to a target language that would produce a unique and definitive translation.’<sup>52</sup> In fact, even amongst the concentrated selection of scholars of Old Norse, where one might expect an accord, there has been dispute over the merits of various approaches to translation as long as there have been translations themselves.<sup>53</sup> On the basis of such disputes, the ideal form of translation advocated for Old Norse would appear to be a peculiar mix of literal, yet modern, demonstrating original features of the source language while producing a high-quality English rendition. By the standards of translation studies this is a lofty, potentially unattainable goal: ‘The notion of a “literal” translation presupposes that a translation could be identical to the original, which is not possible, and this means that all translations are “free” in one way or another.’<sup>54</sup> On top of such modern paradoxical endeavours, the evaluations of nineteenth-century translations of Old Norse must also acknowledge the contemporary trends in translation theory, particularly regarding attitudes towards antiquarianism and editorial

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Roman Jakobsson, ‘On Linguistic Aspects of Translation’, in *On Translation*, ed. by Reuben A. Brower (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 232-39; Umberto Eco, *Dire quasi la stessa cosa: Esperienze di traduzione* (Milan: Bompiani, 2003); Thomas Spray, ‘Friðþjófs saga Revisited’, *Quaestio Insularis*, 16 (2017), 20-48. Even scholars who use these terms admit their limitations - Efrain Kristal comments: ‘The criterion for determining whether a translation is faithful or unfaithful cannot be difference, because neither faithful nor unfaithful translations are identical to their originals’, (2014), p. 29.

<sup>52</sup> Kristal (2014), p. 28.

<sup>53</sup> See, for example the contemporary articles Ian Maxwell, ‘On Translation – 1’, *Saga Book*, 15 (1961), 383-93 and George Johnston, ‘On Translation – 2’, *Saga Book*, 15 (1961), 394-402. One suspects Kendra Willson has identified a disciplinary fault when she remarks ‘philologists are precisely not the target audience for translators out of the languages in which they specialize’, Kendra J. Willson, ‘Jónas and the Panther: Translation, Alliteration, and Icelandic Identity’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 80/3 (Fall 2008), 313-44, at p. 322.

<sup>54</sup> Kristal (2014), p. 29; see also Bellos (2012).

liberties. Jón Karl Helgason notes, ‘One of the great challenges in both translating and adapting the sagas in modern times is that the implied reader of the pre-texts is a medieval Icelandic, or at least someone who knows the basics of Icelandic early history and geography.’<sup>55</sup> The same problem troubled nineteenth-century translators: should they match the tone of the original and simply present the text as they found it, or provide copious notes, emendations, and an updated vocabulary?

Translations of Old Norse sagas have been studied in detail by several scholars; methodologically, this thesis takes into account the comparative studies of translation performed by Keneva Kunz and Robert Cook on *Laxdæla saga* and *Njáls saga* respectively.<sup>56</sup> Kunz divides the criticism of saga translation into four key procedures: analysis of the translator’s intention; comparison between original and translated texts; assessment of general disparities; and evaluation of the translation.<sup>57</sup> Even the first of these stages is a considerable task; identifying translator intent is notoriously difficult, even where obvious departures from the source text occur.<sup>58</sup> How can one distinguish between a mistake and an editorial decision? The exercise becomes more complex when one has to deduce the combined intentions of the Icelandic-English translator teams (Eiríkur Magnússon and William Morris, Guðbrandur Vigfússon and F. York Powell) which played a significant role in early reception of the sagas. Yet Kunz maintains that there are benefits to such a line of inquiry: ‘Translation is a matter of choice and human choice is seldom unmotivated,’ Kunz writes, ‘alterations, omissions, and additions in translation are often occasioned and subsequently justified, consciously or unconsciously, by the translator’s own conception of his purpose.’<sup>59</sup>

As has been noted in this chapter, for the myriad theories on approaches to translation there are an equal number of theories on the ideal outcome.<sup>60</sup> The same problem faces the scholar of nationalism. While departures from the expected norm (whatever that may be) often attract most attention, it is the tenacious concepts relating to nationalism and translation within the field of Old Norse reception literature which are of greatest interest – those ideas which

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<sup>55</sup> Jón Karl Helgason (2017), p. 116.

<sup>56</sup> Kunz (1994); Cook (2002).

<sup>57</sup> In this approach, Kunz is building on Peter Newmark’s 1981 work *Approaches to Translation* (Oxford: Pergamon Press); see Kunz (1994), p. 43.

<sup>58</sup> See Kunz (1994), p. 181.

<sup>59</sup> Kunz (1994), p. 181; Kunz specifically separates this process into one of ‘motivation’ on one hand and ‘attitude and method’ on the other, pp. 182-84.

<sup>60</sup> A particularly useful model is the seemingly simple one proposed by Dieter Götz, who holds that a ‘good’ translation must fulfil three criteria: demonstration of a clear understanding of the source text; production of a ‘good’ target text; and justification of deviation from the source, Dieter Götz, ‘On Good Translations’, *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 53/2 (2005), 173-86, at p. 175.

resurface again and again. Alongside these popular cultural concepts, the thesis will consider aspects such as the motives for undertaking translations of Old Norse sagas in the first place, the context in which the work is presented and published, and the reception in wider society.

## 2. Context: Old Norse in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

Although the developments in the translation of sagas in the nineteenth century would prove important in wider reception history, Old Norse was not an unknown entity to the pre-nineteenth-century English reader. Nonetheless, in the eighteenth century, its status as an acceptable object of study was supported by only a minority of British academics, and even amongst these scholars, the sagas had yet to find the same favour as the eddaic material. In the previous century, the outlook was even more limited. Judy Quinn and Margaret Clunies Ross comment, ‘With a few exceptions, the attitude of English scholars to Norse mythology in the seventeenth century was harsh, to say the least.’<sup>61</sup>

Harsh, too, had been the depictions of Iceland and its wider literary heritage from before the eighteenth century. William Craigie, writing in 1925, noted that even the Iceland described in medieval accounts was a product of fantastical foreign imagination: the Scottish *Carte of the World* describes Iceland as a place of ‘mony ferlis’ (strange things/prodigies), notably ‘scaldend watter that birnis baith stanis and Irne.’<sup>62</sup> It should not be taken that Old Norse had no presence in pre-nineteenth-century England. Indeed, there was a vibrant movement among scholars and poets in Latin translation and imaginative imagery.<sup>63</sup> The earliest signs of interest in the antiquities of the northern lands in print can be traced back to the fifteenth century with relative ease.<sup>64</sup> This chapter will outline the extent and nature of this British reception of Old Norse sagas, particularly in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Additionally, it will provide a wider contextual view of pertinent contemporary developments across the rest of northern Europe.

In her 1993 article, ‘Norse Studies: Then, Now and Hereafter,’ Christine Fell provides a concise summary of Old Norse scholarship up to the 1990s. In the first half of the seventeenth century, Fell notes, Old Norse texts were considered to be of interest as ‘merely a part of the

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<sup>61</sup> Judy Quinn and Margaret Clunies Ross, ‘The Image of Norse Poetry and Mythology in Seventeenth-Century England’, in *Northern Antiquity: The Post-Medieval Reception of Edda and Saga*, ed. by Andrew Wawn (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1994), 189-210, at p. 191.

<sup>62</sup> *The Asloan Manuscript*, ed. by William A. Craigie, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1923-25) 163-64, cited in Peter Davidson, *The Idea of North* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2005), p. 59.

<sup>63</sup> See for example Andrew Wawn, ‘The Post-Medieval Reception of Old Norse and Old Icelandic Literature’, in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. by Rory McTurk, revised edn (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2007b), 320-37, at pp. 320-27. Clunies Ross describes pre-nineteenth-century northern antiquarianism as, ‘bold and uninhibited’, if lacking in actual knowledge of Old Norse (Clunies Ross (1998), p. 205).

<sup>64</sup> As Wawn puts it, in fifteenth-century English writing on Iceland and Scandinavia ‘the Viking age had not yet been invented for British readers’, Wawn (2002), p. 9.

early history of England', rather than possessing any inherent literary value.<sup>65</sup> Old Norse literature in British reception history had started, as it would be presented by Veblen in the 1920s, as material of interest to the historian and the anthropologist. Texts such as Richard Verstegan's 1605 *A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence In Antiquitie, concerning the most noble and renowned English Nation* presented etymological analysis of the languages of Northern Europe alongside ethnological summaries of Britain's early history.<sup>66</sup> Verstegan had no way of anticipating it, but his approach, in stressing the significance of the dynamics of relations between Saxons, Angles, Germans, and Scandinavians would prove one of the defining characteristics of nineteenth-century scholarship. After Verstegan's volume, British readers seeking knowledge of Old Norse had to wait some sixty-five years until the next significant addition to their library: Robert Sheringham's 1670 *De Anglorum Gentis Origine Disceptatio*.<sup>67</sup> Fell credits Sheringham with being the first English writer to 'quote Old Norse texts at length' as well as providing suggestions for further reading for those who were encouraged to tackle the Scandinavian tongues.<sup>68</sup> The subsequent 1676 work *Britannia Antiqua Illustrata; or, The Antiquities of Ancient Britain* by Aylett Sammes further illustrated the picture of the Old North with images of gloriously-departed warriors sitting at the tables of *Valhöll*, quaffing 'Nappy-Ale in full-brim'd Skull' – a popular mistranslation of verse twenty-five of the Old Norse poem *Krákumál* spread via Ole Worm's 1651 *Runir seu Danica Literatura Antiquissima*.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Christine Fell, 'Norse Studies: Then, Now and Hereafter', in *Viking Revaluations: Viking Society Centenary Symposium 14-15 May 1992*, ed. by Anthony Faulkes and Richard Perkins (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, 1993), 85-99, at pp. 86-87.

<sup>66</sup> See Fell (1993), p. 87. The comparative interest in mainland Europe was summarised in Dithmar Blefken's *Islandia* (1607), see Dithmar Blefken, *Island – Fremdes Land: Das Reisebuch des Dithmar Blafken 1563-1565*, ed. and trans. by Gehard Holzer and Robert Wallisch (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2012).

<sup>67</sup> Fell (1993), p. 87.

<sup>68</sup> Fell (1993), p. 88; see also Christine Fell, 'The First Publication of Old Norse Literature in England and its Relation to its Sources', in *The Waking of Angantyr: The Scandinavian Past in European Culture / Den nordiske fortid i europæisk kultur*, ed. by Else Roesdahl and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1996), 27-57, at p. 28.

<sup>69</sup> Aylett Sammes, *Britannia Antiqua Illustrata; or, The Antiquities of Ancient Britain* (London: Tho. Roycroft, 1676), cited Fell (1993), p. 92. Robert Jamieson was another early mistranslator: his 1806 *Popular Ballads and Songs* gave the phrase *af hierneskal* as 'out of skulls'; Robert Jamieson, *Popular Ballads and Songs, from Tradition, Manuscripts, and Scarce Editions; with Translations of Similar Pieces from the Ancient Danish Language, and a few Originals by the Editor*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Cadell and Davies; and London: John Murray, 1806), vol. II, pp. 91-92. For a summary of the tradition see the short but informative post "Did Vikings drink from the skulls of their enemies?" at The World-Tree Project <[www.worldtreeproject.org](http://www.worldtreeproject.org)>. As the Icelandic Árni Magnússon commented on Old Norse scholarship: 'It is the way of the world that some people put errors into circulation while other then try to eradicate these same errors. This keeps everyone busy', Árni Magnússon 1930, p. 1:24, cited Roberta Frank, 'Siegfried and Arminius: Scenes from a Marriage', in *Germania Remembered 1500-2009: Commemorating and Inventing a Germanic Past*, ed. by Christina Lee and Nicola McLelland (Tempe, Arizona: ACMRS, 2012), 1-26, at p. 8.



The British interest in Old Norse sagas, in the form recognisable in later nineteenth-century reception literature, could arguably be said to start with a Swede, Dr Uno von Troil. von Troil accompanied the young Englishman Joseph Banks to Iceland in 1772, and published his letters relating to the voyage in 1777. In these letters, *Bref rörande en resa til Island* (or *Letters on Iceland* for those perusing the English translation), von Troil covered every conceivable aspect of Icelandic life in detail, including the current appreciation of Icelandic literature, ancient and contemporary. The sagas, according to von Troil, were valuable and overlooked potential sources of English history: ‘All the historical accounts of the North are contained in the historical sayings (Sagas) of the Icelanders, which are very numerous and would be of important service in the investigation of the origin of the language, manners, and laws of England.’<sup>70</sup> The sagas, then, were an unused resource, containing material of significance to the British people; British antiquarians would do well to start reading them.

To this end, the returning expedition party donated some one-hundred and fifty-two Icelandic manuscripts to the British Museum, including fifteen hitherto-unknown histories and sagas.<sup>71</sup> Even at this initial stage of the wider European reception of Old Norse literature, Iceland was being rapidly depleted of manuscripts; von Troil lamented the lack of resources available, suggesting that this early literary raid was by no means the first:

There are no ancient manuscripts, Icelandic sagas, or historical traditions or accounts to be met with, the island having been entirely stripped of them, owing to the zeal and industry of the antiquarians and others, who formerly resorted in numbers to this country for the sole end of collecting them.<sup>72</sup>

The Swedish, von Troil explained, were well ahead of the game in this practice. Knowledge of northern antiquity was clearly (and understandably) far more widespread in Scandinavia than in Britain. For British antiquarians to catch up, they would need to study the sagas, a body of texts previously much maligned, in detail. Von Troil’s fourteenth and seventeenth letters of his collection, ‘Of Icelandic Literature’ (1774) and ‘Of the Icelandic Poetry’ (1775), provided a substantial selection of recommended reading: *Egils saga*, *Laxdæla saga*, and *Gunnlaugs saga*

<sup>70</sup> Uno von Troil, *Letters on Iceland*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: J. Robson; W. Richardson; and N. Conant, 1780), p. ix.

<sup>71</sup> Von Troil (1780), pp. ix and 33. The British Museum was still actively acquiring Icelandic texts a century later: letters to Jón Borgfirðingur Jónsson between 1871 and 1899 demonstrate a great interest from the Museum in purchasing Icelandic material, and a concurrent awareness of this fact from business-savvy Icelanders such as Jón (Lbs. ÍB 94a fol.). For Jón’s impressive sales record see Lbs. ÍB 93-105 fol.

<sup>72</sup> Von Troil (1780), p. 190. Oswald, writing a century later, agreed with von Troil’s assessment, see Elizabeth Jane Oswald, *By Fell and Fjord; or Scenes and Studies in Iceland* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1882), p. 18; as did Burton, see Richard Francis Burton, *Ultima Thule; or, A Summer in Iceland*, 2 vols (London and Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, 1875), vol. 1, p. 239.

*ormstungu*,<sup>73</sup> *Grettis saga*, *Víga-Glums saga*, and *Gísla saga Súrssonar* – such would be the revered texts of late nineteenth-century Old Norse scholarship, but seldom had they ever been mentioned together in the English language.<sup>74</sup>

The lack of interest in the sagas was undoubtedly partly a problem of availability, but English readers were potentially put off by the fanciful rhetoric of contemporary artistic readings of Old Norse literature too. It was not just erroneous translations as proffered by Sammes and Sheringham that had prime spots among the literati in eighteenth-century Britain; poets too put their minds to incorporating the exciting themes drawn from Old Norse eddaic sources into their works: halls full of other-worldly undead warriors, avenging females, and mischievous gods. The mood of the period was captured by a fragment of a poem published in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in 1789 by one Richard Hole:

“SEE, brother, see, athwart the strand,  
 Twelve youths, advance, a hostile band.  
 Ere evening spreads her vapours grey,  
 Must we the voice of Fate obey.  
 For us prepar'd is Odin's hall;  
 But they shall live, and boast our fall!”  
 “Mistaken youth!” Hialmur cries:  
 “Ere eve's grey shadows dim the skies,  
 Pierc'd with many a grievous wound,  
 Shall yonder warriors press the ground.  
 Inmates they of Odin's hall;  
 But we shall live, and boast their fall.”<sup>75</sup>

Grey vapours and the promise Óðinn's hall – such were the literary tropes which had found favour since the mid-seventeen-hundreds. As Fell notes, at the close of the eighteenth century such poetic concepts were viewed as part of a valuable native literary tradition; young English writers could hone their craft rewriting the legends of Ragnar and Angantyr. In Robert Southey's introductory poem to Amos Simon Cottle's 1797 translation *Icelandic Poetry, or The Edda of Sæmund*, Southey thus described the imagery of 'Runic faith', 'savage wilderness', and 'Scandinavian Chiefs' as being the nursery for English talent: 'Methinks / Amid such scenes as these, the Poet's soul / Might best attain full growth.'<sup>76</sup> Southey's poetry

<sup>73</sup> Von Troil (1780), pp. 154, 159, 180.

<sup>74</sup> Von Troil (1780), p. 199.

<sup>75</sup> Richard Hole, 'Letter', *The Gentleman's Magazine: And Historical Chronicle*, Jan. 1736 – Dec. 1833, October (1789), 59, 4, p. 937.

<sup>76</sup> Robert Southey, in Amos Simon Cottle (trans.), *Icelandic Poetry, or The Edda of Sæmund* (Bristol: N. Biggs, 1797), pp. xxxiii-xxxiv. See Fell (1993), p. 90.

proved the contemporary distillation of the North's romantic heritage, a summary of sorts of the ideas espoused by the Romantic movement regarding Old Norse literature. That he considered Old Norse literature a valid source for budding poets is thus representative of wider concessions. Late eighteenth-century Britain was beginning to see Old Norse literature as something worth examining.<sup>77</sup>

Chief amongst those who had contributed to this change of perception was the poet Thomas Gray (1716-1771).<sup>78</sup> Gray's two additions to the field of Old Norse reception literature were remarkably influential. 'The Descent of Odin' and 'The Fatal Sisters' were both published in Gray's 1768 volume *Poems*, having previously been envisioned as part of a broader antiquarian work.<sup>79</sup> The latter poem took a Latin rendition of the Old Norse *Darraðarljóð*, from Þormóður Torfason's 1697 work *Orcades*, and there is no evidence to suggest Gray ever referred to an Old Norse text during its composition.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, his 'Fatal Sisters' would prove influential in determining the popular conception of Old Norse saga material (*Darraðarljóð* being found in the closing chapters of *Njáls saga*). For one, the poem traded the hearth-side merriment and drinking of previous visions for a bleak and horrifying picture of the wages of battle:

Now the storm begins to low'r,  
 (Haste, the loom of Hell prepare,)  
 Iron-sleet of arrowy show'r  
 Hurtles in the darken'd air.

Glitt'ring lances are the loom,  
 Where the dusky warp we strain,  
 Weaving many a Soldier's doom,  
 Orkney's woe and Randver's bane.

See the grisly texture grow,  
 ('Tis of human entrails made,)  
 And the weights, that play below,

<sup>77</sup> Fell (1993), p. 90.

<sup>78</sup> On Thomas Gray's poetry and Old Norse see: O'Donoghue (2014), p. 70; Alison Finlay, 'Thomas Gray's Translations of Old Norse Poetry', in *Old Norse Made New: Essays on the Post-Medieval Reception of Old Norse Literature and Culture*, ed. by David Clark and Carl Phelpstead (London: VSNR, University College London, 2007), 1-20; Clunies Ross (1998), pp. 105-66; James Leigh Barribeau, *The Vikings and England: The Ninth and the Nineteenth Centuries* (PhD Thesis, Cornell University, 1982), pp. 153-240; and Conrad Hjalmar Nordby, *The Influence of Old Norse Literature on English Literature* (New York: The Columbia University Press, 1901), pp. 3-8.

<sup>79</sup> Thomas Gray, *Poems* (London: J. Dodsley, 1768), pp. 93-97 and 101-07 respectively. Gray comments that the two works were originally written to appear as an introduction (along with a third poem 'The Triumphs of Owen') to his planned *History of English Poetry*, as 'Specimens of the Style that reigned in ancient times among the neighbouring nations, or those who had subdued the greater part of this Island, and were our Progenitors', Gray (1768), p. 89.

<sup>80</sup> Fell (1993), p. 91; Gray also mentions Bartholin as a source, see Gray (1768), p. 87.

Each a gasping Warriour's head.

Shafts for shuttles, dipt in gore,  
 Shoot the trembling cords along.  
 Sword, that once a Monarch bore,  
 Keeps the tissue close and strong!<sup>81</sup>

Gray certainly felt that there was a home for Old Norse literature in the English canon; he channelled Shakespearian elements here with extravagance ('Hurtles in the darken'd air').<sup>82</sup> His Fatal Sisters were clearly meant to be read as cultural ancestors of *Macbeth's* Weird Sisters, the sinister witches involved in the plotting of men's fates. The closing sentiment too was one of dreadful forecast, yet also stressed the British setting for the tale: 'Mortal, thou that hear'st the tale, / Learn the tenour of our song, / Scotland, thro' each winding vale, / Far and wide the notes prolong.'<sup>83</sup> As a lexical unit, 'Scotland' has very little purpose here other than to stress the fact that the events supposedly take place on British soil; poetically it could be replaced by any number of terms which would prove equally appropriate. One reads Gray, as much as his 'Fatal Sisters', imploring the reader to carry forth the tale and relate its peculiarities 'thro' each winding vale' of the isles.

It was another Thomas, this time Bishop Percy, described by Wawn as 'northern antiquity's most persuasive eighteenth-century poetic advocate,' who would set the academic seal on the learning of Old Norse and Old English trivia.<sup>84</sup> Percy published three works of particular importance to Old Norse reception history and the advancement of general antiquarian studies in Britain: *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry* (1763); *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765); and his translation of *Northern Antiquities* (1770, republished in 1809 and 1847).<sup>85</sup> (Percy too attempted a rendition of the poetic imagery of *Darraljóð*, although the resulting poem was significantly closer to the original and omitted Gray's poetic embellishments.)<sup>86</sup> As with Gray, Percy's "success" can be measured in the influence on later works of medievalism and Old Norse scholarship. As Clunies Ross writes, 'If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, Percy's Norse translations, together with those of Thomas Gray, were very successful and can be seen to have triggered a fashion in British literary circles for Old

<sup>81</sup> Gray (1768), pp. 93-94; see also Roger Lonsdale (ed.), *The Poems of Thomas Gray, William Collins, Oliver Goldsmith* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1969), pp. 216-217.

<sup>82</sup> Wawn also suggests Milton as an inspiration, writing, 'The work's haunting incantatory quality arises from paratactic syntax, phrasal and sonic parallelism, and artful variations on Miltonic diction. The neo-classical and the sublime co-exist in a creative tension', Wawn (2002), p. 29.

<sup>83</sup> Gray (1768), p. 97.

<sup>84</sup> Wawn (2002), p. 27. Percy is discussed further in chapter three.

<sup>85</sup> See Clunies Ross (1998), pp. 51-74; and Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Old Norse Poetic Translations of Thomas Percy: A New Edition and Commentary* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers n.v., 2001); Wawn (2002), p. 24.

<sup>86</sup> See, for example, his second draft of the poem in Bodleian MS. Percy c.7, f.34r.

Norse poetry.<sup>87</sup> It is certainly true that Percy established something of an early canon of Old Norse texts, which would be considered the staple of Northern antiquity long into the nineteenth century. Moreover, these poems - ‘The Incantation of Hervor’, ‘The Dying Ode of Regner Lodbrog’, ‘The Ransome of Egill the Scald’, ‘The Funeral Song of Hacon’, and ‘The Complaint of Harold’ – were as much a product of Old Norse sagas as they were of eddaic material.<sup>88</sup> Although these texts were not accompanied the by extensive analysis of which Percy was elsewhere capable, and although it was only Egill Skallagrímsson’s *Höfuðlausn* which demonstrated a kindling interest in the *Íslendingasögur* themselves, it was still a tentative start.<sup>89</sup>

These early translators of sorts worked in a competitive and bustling antiquarian scene. In addition to genuine scholarly material on the literature of the North, James Macpherson’s fabricated ‘Ossian’ poetry took Europe by storm in the late eighteenth century. Many readers were drawn to Old Norse literature through an initial interest in the fictitious Celtic bard, but undoubtedly many more were drawn away, convinced of the authenticity of the poems on Fingal’s heroic deeds, and feeling that they represented a cultural heritage more in keeping with present British values than Gray’s and Percy’s bleak and bloody northerners.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, the sheer lack of knowledge of Old Norse sagas, as compared to the potentially endless material which Macpherson could produce, and the large pre-established body of Graeco-Roman classics, meant that eighteenth-century public perception of Scandinavia and the north was largely negative, and later notions of noble British traits passed down by northern forefathers were unthinkable. As Elizabeth Elstob commented in her 1715 *The Rudiments of Grammar for the English-Saxon Tongue* (complete with the subtitle ‘with an apology for the study of Northern Antiquities’), a lack of knowledge of the ‘Northern Languages has occasion’d an unkind prejudice towards them: which some have introduced out of Rashness, others have taken upon tradition.’<sup>91</sup> Elstob considered contemporary ignorance of the Saxon language, and

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<sup>87</sup> Clunies Ross (2001), p. 2.

<sup>88</sup> On Percy’s efforts at translating Old Norse see Clunies Ross (1998), pp. 85-95.

<sup>89</sup> Wawn (2002), p. 25.

<sup>90</sup> See Gylfi Gunnlaugsson, ‘Old Norse Poetry and New Beginnings in Late 18th- and Early 19th-Century Literature’, trans. by Anna Yates, in *Iceland and Images of the North*, ed. by Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson and Daniel Chartier (Québec: Presses de l’Université du Québec; and Reykjavík: Reykjavíkur Akademían, 2011), 115-55, at p. 124; Mats Malm, *Minervas äpple. Om diktsyn, tolkning och bildspråk inom nordisk göticism* (Stockholm: Brutus Östlings Bokförlag, 1996), pp. 210-15; and Dorothy Margaret Stuart, ‘“Ossian” Macpherson Revisited’, *English*, 7 (1948), 16-18. Jón Espólin translated a selection of Macpherson’s ‘Ossian’ poems into Icelandic, see Lbs. 800 8vo.

<sup>91</sup> Elizabeth Elstob, *The Rudiments of Grammar for the English-Saxon Tongue, First Given in English; with An Apology for the Study of Northern Antiquities; Being Very Useful Towards the Understanding of Our Ancient English Poets, and Other Writers* (London: W. Bowyer, 1715,) p. x; see also Wawn (2002), p. 3.

the prejudice such ignorance engendered, to be highly derogatory, and possibly even damaging for the nation: ‘The Justness and Propriety of the Language of any Nation,’ she wrote, ‘hath been always rightly esteem’d a great Ornament and Test of the good Sense of such a Nation; and consequently to arraign the good Sense or Language of any Nation, is to cast upon it a great Reproach.’<sup>92</sup>

Elstob’s sentiments did not go unheeded, and the following decades would see like-minded scholars and writers attempting to supplement public knowledge of the North through the pamphlet and the lecture podium. An early British writer to draw from first-hand evidence regarding knowledge of Iceland and its literature was Joseph Banks (1743-1820), elected president of the Royal Society in 1778, and retaining that office for forty years. Banks set sail to Iceland on the 12<sup>th</sup> July, 1772, with the first sight of the island on the 25<sup>th</sup> August, and arrived at Hafnarfjörður on the 28<sup>th</sup>.<sup>93</sup> Banks lent his notebook from the voyage to both his companion von Troil and the later traveller William Jackson Hooker, ‘permitting them to use whatever they wished from it,’ but never actually published his own account.<sup>94</sup> (In fact, Banks found von Troil’s 1777 book a distinctly ‘unsatisfying account of the trip’ as he felt it drew too heavily from Eggert Ólafsson and Bjarni Pálsson’s *Reise igiennem Island* of 1772.)<sup>95</sup> Banks’s own expedition notes went up for public auction in 1886 and promptly disappeared from public knowledge for the next century.<sup>96</sup>

Banks’s case is typical of early British engagement with Iceland and its literature. None of his companions knew Icelandic, and although they stayed for over six weeks their interests during this time were chiefly scientific in nature. In 1773, when Banks presented the British Museum with the one hundred and twenty books and some thirty manuscripts (he later added to this, bringing the total number of manuscripts up to forty volumes) he was unaware of the literary value of items such as ‘Add. 4867’, a copy of *Njáls saga*.<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, Banks appears

<sup>92</sup> Elstob (1715), p. iv.

<sup>93</sup> Halldór Hermannsson, *Sir Joseph Banks and Iceland* [original 1928], *Islandica*, vol. XVIII (New York: Kraus Reprint Corporation, 1966), p. 6. See also Karen Oslund, ‘Imagining Iceland: Narratives of Nature and History in the North Atlantic’, *British Journal for the History of Science*, 35/3 (Sep. 2002), 313-34.

<sup>94</sup> Halldór Hermannsson (1966), p. 7. See William Jackson Hooker, *Journal of a Tour in Iceland, in the Summer of 1809*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown; and John Murray, 1813), dedication and p. i. Banks’s diary, edited by Anna Agnarsdóttir, was published in 2016 by the Hakluyt Society, see Sir Joseph Banks, *Sir Joseph Banks, Iceland and the North Atlantic 1772-1820: Journals, Letters and Documents*, ed. by Anna Agnarsdóttir (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, for the Hakluyt Society, 2016).

<sup>95</sup> Halldór Hermannsson (1966), p. 8. Dick Ringler fittingly describes Eggert as ‘the sort of man who writes poetry that requires footnotes and then supplies the footnotes himself’, Dick Ringler, *Bard of Iceland: Jónas Hallgrímsson, Poet and Scientist* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), p. 3; see Lbs. 4840 4to for a copy of Eggert’s earlier 1751 work.

<sup>96</sup> Halldór Hermannsson (1966), preface.

<sup>97</sup> Halldór Hermannsson (1966), pp. 15 and 17. After Banks’s death, several more printed books were donated to the library; a list of the items is held in Reykjavík, and gives the original number of donated books (mostly

to have won hearts and minds among the Icelanders; ‘never before,’ comments Halldór Hermannsson, ‘had a stranger landed on their shores who won every one’s heart in the way Banks did.’<sup>98</sup> The sentiment is perhaps best captured in the peculiar dedicatory poem ‘The Dream’ composed by Laúrús Sigúrdson and delivered to Sir Thomas Maryon Wilson Bart. The dreamer, envisioning a past ‘heroic age,’ ‘when Ingolf Liberty from Norway brought,’ argues that this same liberty has been inherited by England; the dream-vision Ingolfr appears as a nineteenth-century ambassador for Anglo-Icelandic relations:

When I in love to England’s honor burnt,  
 My Ingolf, speaking thus, to me him turned  
 “I know, my boy, that Heav’n himself esteems  
 These men as masterpieces of the times  
 Proud to have made such jewels for the earth,  
 And the angels love the land, that gave them birth.”<sup>99</sup>

As one of the honoured ‘masterpieces,’ Banks appeared to the dreamer alongside other early adventurous British travellers.

When Banks had first arrived on the northern coast of the Reykjanes peninsula there was no such flattery. As the party caught first sight of some Icelanders from their ship, the locals attempted to flee, convinced that the British were part of an invading force.<sup>100</sup> The Icelanders were in some respects correct in their assumption. In Banks’s notes, his descriptions of Iceland’s political position and history were chiefly provided with a mind to military acquisition: ‘All ranks appeared unhappy, and would as the writer believes be much rejoiced by a change of masters that promised them any portion of liberty. The better-most people showed a predilection for England, and privately solicited the writer to propose to his government to purchase the island from Denmark.’<sup>101</sup> Banks took the notion further; why should Britain pay for Iceland when a military invasion would be so simple:

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bibles) as 126 (Lbs. 3504 8vo). The seventy-five pictures from the expedition, by John Frederick Miller, James Miller, and John Clevely Jr., are now found in the British Museum (Add. 15,511-15,512). A letter from Thomas Lidderdale, Jón Borgfirðingur Jónsson’s contact at the museum, in 1870, mentions the Banks collection and says that the library is well-stocked in ‘Books printed in Iceland down to 1772’ (Lbs. ÍB 99b fol.).

<sup>98</sup> Halldór Hermannsson (1966), p. 19. An impression of Bank’s reputation amongst Scandinavian scholars can be gained from a letter written to him on the 25 September, 1815 by Rasmus Rask, who with utmost reverence asked Banks to assist in a plan to patronize the ‘very worthy objects’ of Science and Iceland, see Rasmus Christian Rask, *Breve fra og til Rasmus Rask*, ed. by Louis Hjelmslev, 3 vols (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaards Forlag, 1941), p. 185. On Rask’s “plan,” see chapter five, below.

<sup>99</sup> Lbs. 2208 4to.

<sup>100</sup> Banks (2016), pp. 81-82.

<sup>101</sup> Banks, cited Halldór Hermannsson (1966), p. 28; a century later the Icelandic Matthías Jochumsson would suggest a similar deal: ‘The whole island might easily be bought for half a million of Eng. money or pounds of st.’, (Lbs. 2807 4to). The ‘masters’ in question were of course the Danes; Copenhagen had possessed a monopoly on Icelandic trade since the year 1730.

If it should be thought expedient to seize upon Iceland, either as an object of an exchange in the case of peace, or with the intentions to annex it permanently to the Crown of the United Kingdom, the writer has no doubt that 500 men, with very few guns, to be mounted on horses when troops arrive, would subdue the island without striking a blow.<sup>102</sup>

Indeed, in an unsent letter from around 1801, written to Magnús Stephensen (1762-1833), ‘herald of European Enlightenment’ and then chief justice of Iceland, Banks argued that Iceland by its geographical position was evidently meant to be part of the British Isles, or at very least its overseas empire.<sup>103</sup> ‘No one who looks upon the map of Europe can doubt that Iceland is by nature a part of the group of islands called by the ancients ‘Britannia,’” wrote Banks, ‘and consequently that it should be a part of the British Empire, which consists of everything in Europe accessible only by seas.’<sup>104</sup> Halldór Hermannsson suggests that British preparations for a military invasion of Iceland were all but complete in 1801, but that an unpredicted series of events that year, including the resignation of the Pitt cabinet in March, the English victory over Denmark at Copenhagen in April, and the subsequent peace treaty signed by the Danes in October, rendered such a manoeuvre unnecessary.<sup>105</sup> When in 1807 hostilities resumed between Britain and Denmark, Banks once again presented the case to the government for acquiring Iceland either peacefully or by force.<sup>106</sup>

Such a manoeuvre would not have been out of place in the early nineteenth century. A year after Bank’s second call for military intervention in Iceland, the English soap merchant Samuel Phelps, of Phelps, Troward and Bracebridge, London, was unexpectedly involved in a short-lived military coup. Phelps was convinced by his colleague J. Savignac that Iceland was an ideal trading partner, information gained through a Danish adventurer and prisoner of war by the name of Jørgen Jørgensen.<sup>107</sup> On arriving in Reykjavík the crew belatedly discovered that there were in fact strict regulations on overseas trading with anyone but the Danes; after a second similarly foiled trading endeavour they improvised and took the local officials hostage, declaring Jørgensen chief protector of Iceland and vowing to re-establish the *Alþing*.<sup>108</sup> The so-called ‘Icelandic Revolution’ of 1808-1809 was something of an embarrassment for the British

<sup>102</sup> Banks, cited Halldór Hermannsson (1966), p. 29.

<sup>103</sup> W. M. Senner, ‘Magnús Stephensen: Precursor of the “Fjölnismenn” and Icelandic Romanticism’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 72/4 (Winter 2000), 411-30, at p. 411.

<sup>104</sup> Banks, cited Halldór Hermannsson (1966), p. 31; almost a century and a half later one finds the same sentiments expressed in C. L. Wrenn, ‘A Saga of the Anglo-Saxons’, *History*, 25/99 (1940), 208-15, at p. 208; see also ‘Proposal for obtaining Iceland from the Danes’ (1796) in Lbs. 424 fol.

<sup>105</sup> Halldór Hermannsson (1966), p. 32.

<sup>106</sup> Halldór Hermannsson (1966), pp. 36-40.

<sup>107</sup> Halldór Hermannsson (1966), pp. 53-54.

<sup>108</sup> For a biography of Jørgensen see Sarah Bakewell, *The English Dane: The Life of Jørgen Jørgensen* (London: Vintage, 2006).



government, but under the right supervision such an exercise had been (and would continue to be) suggested by numerous politicians both in Iceland and Britain. The (supposedly Icelandic) author of an anonymous pamphlet published in 1813 writes regarding social and political reforms required by Icelandic society: ‘England alone could provide the means necessary for carrying them out, and he considers it all important that England should take Iceland under its protection.’<sup>109</sup> The increasing knowledge of Icelandic literature in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was already accompanied by sentiments of Britain’s political and geographical links to the land itself, and even the possibility of British ownership. English readers encountering the works of Gray, Herbert, and Southey, would not necessarily view the theatrical depictions of Norse culture as explicitly foreign.

Throughout the eighteenth century, the necessity for a clear sense of cultural consensus, a common origin tradition, appeared obvious to Britain’s early northernists. At the turn of the century, with Ireland having only recently joined political union with England, Scotland, and Wales, the political make-up of Britain was as dynamic and uncertain as its perceived relation to its northern heritage. Tucker’s article concludes with a quote from the *Critical Review* (1798), in its review of Cottle’s *Icelandic Poetry*: ‘The historian will find in it the creed of his ancestors: and the poet will acquire a variety of images peculiarly adapted for poetry by their novelty, their strangeness and sublimity.’<sup>110</sup> The reviewer captures the sheer potential of the newly rediscovered material for the English reader. The strange and the sublime world of translated Old Norse literature was many things to many people, but at the close of the eighteenth century it was first and foremost a product of the native Romantic movement, international politics, and concurrent trends in scholarly antiquarianism.

## 2.1. Wider European Reception of Old Norse

The opinionated array of early responses to old northern antiquity could not help but have an influence on the writers and scholars of the nineteenth century. Joseph Cottle, William Herbert, and Walter Scott were just a selection of those who were affected by the approach to Old Norse literature adopted by Gray and Percy. Yet Britain was by no means the only European land

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<sup>109</sup> Anonymous, cited Halldór Hermannsson (1966), p. 85. The full title of the pamphlet is *Memoir on the causes of the present distressed state of the Icelanders, and the easy and certain means of permanently bettering their condition. By an Icelander.*

<sup>110</sup> *Critical Review* (1798), cited Tucker (1965), p. 247.

whose national identity was in a state of reassessment at the start of the nineteenth century.<sup>111</sup> Icelandic writers viewed foreign interest in saga-age Iceland as an opportunity to publicise current political issues, such as the proposals for increased autonomy from Denmark. Across mainland Europe, Danish, German (or rather Prussian), Norwegian, and Swedish academics were also becoming aware of (or in some cases re-evaluating) the potential applications of Old Norse literature.

### 2.1.1. The Germanic Aspect: Vergleichende Philologie

The concept of ‘Germany’ (not yet a country in its own right, but understood rather as a collection of states sharing variations on a common language) was of particular interest to academics in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, both at home and abroad.<sup>112</sup> German philosophical thought, by the early nineteenth century, had come to be the chief framework for logic across northern Europe. The philosophy of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), and particularly his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784-91), established the common framework for much of the nineteenth century’s theoretical thinking, and Herder himself had already laid the grounds for connecting this with Old Norse, through works such as his 1778-79 collection *Volkslieder*, which contained Old Norse poetry translated into German, and his 1796 essay ‘*Iduna, Oder der Apfel der Verjüngung*’.<sup>113</sup> Nor was Herder a mere

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<sup>111</sup> The sheer mutability of national image on an international stage is captured by Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson in his description of the conceptual construction of ‘Scandinavia’: ‘From the end of the Middle Ages until around 1800, Scandinavia, Russia, and most of what is now defined as Eastern Europe were considered to be in the European North. But in the 19th century the definition of the North narrowed and the idea of Eastern Europe was born. The Scandinavian countries were now considered to be the true North, and to the north of Scandinavia was the far North’, Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson, ‘Imaginations of National Identity and the North’, in *Iceland and Images of the North*, ed. by Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson and Daniel Chartier (Québec: Presses de l’Université du Québec; and Reykjavík: Reykjavíkur Akademían, 2011), 3-22, at p. 11.

<sup>112</sup> The reception of Old Norse literature in Germany is addressed in Wawn (2007b), p. 329; and, more extensively, in Julia Zernack, *Geschichte aus Thule: Íslendingasögur in Übersetzungen deutscher Germanisten*, Berliner Beiträge zur Skandinavistik, vol. 3 (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 1994), pp. 316-73; and Julia Zernack, ‘Old Norse – Icelandic Literature and German Culture’, in *Iceland and Images of the North*, ed. by Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson and Daniel Chartier (Québec: Presses de l’Université du Québec; and Reykjavík: Reykjavíkur Akademían, 2011), 157-86.

<sup>113</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (Leipzig: Hartknoch, 1828) and ‘*Iduna, Oder der Apfel der Verjüngung*’, *Herders sämtliche Werke*, ed. by B. Suphan, vol. 18 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1883), 483–502. See Mats Malm, ‘Translations of Old Norse Poetry and the Lyric Novelties of Romanticism’, in *Studies in the Transmission and Reception of Old Norse Literature: The Hyperborean Muse in European Culture*, ed. by Judy Quinn and Adele Cipolla (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers n. v., 2016), 151-63, at pp. 154-55. On Herder’s studies in Old Norse literature, see W. Grohman, *Herders Nordische Studien* (Berlin: J. S. Preuss, 1899). On his impact on various disciplines, from theology to biology, in the nineteenth century and a concise review of recent developments in scholarly understanding of his corpus, see John H. Zammito, Karl Menges, and Ernest A. Menze, ‘Johann Gottfried Herder Revisited: The Revolution in Scholarship in the Last

interloper in the field of Old Norse literature; he was familiar with the contemporary works of Old Northern antiquarianism, from Macpherson and Percy, to Mallet.<sup>114</sup>

Germanic literature had itself gone through a century of unparalleled scholarly attention, with both the mounting interest in Tacitus's *Germania*, and the recent re-discovery of the medieval German *Nibelungenlied*.<sup>115</sup> These texts provided a contextual framework for German scholars such as Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen (1780-1856), arguably Germany's first professional 'philologist', who in 1812 published an edition of the *Lieder der ältern Edda* which eschewed 'clear or scholarly' analysis in favour of stressing that the text 'contained 'truths' about the nature of Germans.'<sup>116</sup> Comparisons between the Old Norse and German texts – such as the national appropriation (or re-establishment, depending on which side one took) of the narratives of Sigurðr and Siegfried – formed one aspect of a broader tendency to situate the rightful seat of Old Norse literature in Germany, as opposed to in Scandinavia or Britain.<sup>117</sup>

Across these early nineteenth-century works, a developing characteristic was the perceived legitimacy of the connection between the study of language and literature and the study of race.<sup>118</sup> As Geoffrey Harpham comments, proponents of comparative philology

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Quarter Century', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 71/4 (Oct. 2010), 661-84. For a comparison of Herder's understanding of 'Volk' as opposed to the Icelandic concept of 'þjóð' see Guðmundur Hálfðanarson (2001), p. 19.

<sup>114</sup> In fact, Herder strongly disagreed with a number of Mallet's principles, see Grohman (1899), pp. 20-21.

<sup>115</sup> Christina Lee comments: 'Interest in medieval Germanic literature received an unexpected boost through the rediscovery of the C version of the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied* in 1755 by Jakob Obereit (1725-1798) and Johann Bodmer (1698-1783). The first complete edition of the poem was published in 1782 by the Swiss professor Christoph Heinrich Myller (1740-1807), and, while it is not clear when scholars first saw the analogies between the poem and the *Eddas*, the *Nibelungenlied* allowed Germans to lay claims on a Nordic heritage', Lee (2012), p. 109.

<sup>116</sup> Lee (2012), p. 110. In combination with his work on Old Norse, Von Hagen's *Nibelungenlied* edition was a substantial endeavour, appearing in four volumes published between 1810 and 1842. While philology did not universally find a welcoming home in German academia - many held the views expressed later by Friedrich Nietzsche's "We Philologists": 'Consequences of philology: arrogant expectations; philistinism; superficiality; overrating of reading and writing; alienation from the people and the needs of the people... Task of philology: to disappear', – the majority of scholars at least found it a useful paradigm (Nietzsche, cited Geoffrey Galt Harpham, 'Roots, Races, and the Return of Philology', *Representations*, 106 (2009), 34-62, at p. 34.

<sup>117</sup> For a short history of the translation of Old Norse literature in Germany see Anika Lüders, 'Isländische Literatur in Deutschland: Übersetzungsgeschichte und aktuelle Tendenzen im isländisch-deutschen Übersetzungsgeschehen', *European Journal of Scandinavian Studies*, 42/2 (2012), 147-68, at pp. 148-50; Lüders notes that the decade between 2000 and 2010 saw more publications of Icelandic translations in German than in any previous decade (2012), p. 149.

<sup>118</sup> 'One can only marvel at the sheer excitement of that era two hundred years ago, when the history of languages and the history of literature were both opened up to reveal entirely new perspectives; and when philologists for a while dominated the discourse of politics and altered the shape of nations. Alas, that they did not make better use of their only-once-in-history moment', Tom A. Shippey, 'Germania, German(ic), and the Dangerous Applications of Philology', in *Germania Remembered 1500-2009: Commemorating and Inventing a Germanic Past*, ed. by Christina Lee and Nicola McLelland Tempe (Arizona: ACMRS, 2012), xii-xxv, at pp. xxiv-xxv.

claimed it was a timeless and transcendent practice, with implications for virtually every academic discipline: ‘The most telling instance was the deep investment of philology in the concept of race. The ambitious and high-minded attempt to discover a history as well as a characterological analysis of peoples and nations through a genealogical study of language had, as a corollary, the inquiry into the origins and characteristics of races.’<sup>119</sup> The study of language and literature thus gained political significance; demonstrating allegiances between tongues could support questions of territorial claims and national constitution:

[...] Underlying the philological niceties that expressed, for example, preference for one orthographic system over another was the far headier matter of ownership: ownership of the language; ownership of the cultural heritage cradled within the language and, in the broader politics of Europe from at least the mid-nineteenth century, ownership of the land on which that language was spoken. As the proprietary arguments, polemics, and romantic configurations that flowed from the pens of philosophers, politicians, philologists, and poets across northern Europe testify, laying claim to the past was a precondition for determining the future. In short, it was a matter of national identity and security.<sup>120</sup>

Moreover, while the connection between the study of philology and nationalist sentiment was not a given, it was often the deciding factor for a work’s success. As Tom Shippey notes, numerous nineteenth-century philologists ‘became philologists because of their national feelings,’ and moreover, ‘National feelings were often formed, perhaps even invented, by the process of philology.’<sup>121</sup> Nationalism was both the spur and the spawn of Old Norse philology.

The international debate regarding the interconnected nature of language, nation, and territory was further complicated by disagreement among scholars as to the terminology to be applied across the fields of linguistics, comparative literature, and history. The concept of ‘Germanic’ identity (*germanisch*) and its relation to the term ‘German’ (or *deutsch*) was of particular significance. Shippey suggests that with the brothers Grimm and their contemporaries, these words were employed ‘tactically’ in publications and public debate: ‘In the title of their *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (first volume 1854), *deutsch* means “(High) German”. Jacob Grimm’s *Deutsche Grammatik* (1819-1837) is by contrast a grammar of early Germanic languages, including Old Norse and Old English. His *Deutsche Mythologie* (first edition 1835)

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<sup>119</sup> Harpham (2009), p. 41.

<sup>120</sup> Martin Arnold, ‘Lord and Protector of the Earth and its Inhabitants: Poetry, Philology, Politics, and Thor the Thunderer in Denmark and Germany, 1751-1864’, in *Constructing Nations, Reconstructing Myth: Essays in Honour of T. A. Shippey*, ed. by Andrew Wawn, Graham Johnson and John Walker (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers n.v., 2007), 27-52, at p. 29.

<sup>121</sup> Shippey (2012), p. xiii.

relies very heavily on Scandinavian sources.’<sup>122</sup> Translations of these translations could exacerbate matters ever further. (In James S. Stallybrass’s 1880-83 translation the title of the latter was rendered as *Teutonic Mythology*.) Jeffrey Peck notes that while Grimm had arguably perceived the use of the term as ‘merely a linguistic or philological exercise’, he nevertheless afforded the concept deeper significance; ‘Grimm could not foresee how such a concept of a Germanic *Kulturnation*, while it might be based on a Herderian cosmopolitanism and universalism, would be interpreted for more narrowly patriotic and nationalistic purposes.’<sup>123</sup>

Peck may well be striking an apologetic tone on behalf of Grimm (although, of course, he is correct regarding the impossibility of correctly predicting how one’s work will be used). The concept of Germany encompassing the totality of land in which the German language ruled had been popularised as early as 1813 in Ernst Arndt’s *Vaterlandslied*. Here, the narrator asked his listeners:

Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?  
 So nenne endlich mir das land!  
 So weit die deutsche Zunge klingt  
 Und Gott im Himmel Lieder singt:  
 Das soll es sein!  
 Das, wackrer Deutsche, nenne dein!<sup>124</sup>

The German fatherland of Arndt’s song was a vision (inspired by the French Revolution) of the nation led by the people, but it was as much a philological theory as it was a patriotic concept. Moreover, the knowledge that this theory of the nation defined through language could be used as a political tool for nationalist propaganda (at the time an inherently *democratic*

<sup>122</sup> Shippey (2012), p. xv. Semantic choices can have a surprisingly influential afterlife: Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Jeffrey T. Schnapp point out in their translation of the preface to *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* that although they avoid using the English ‘saga’ for the German *Sagen* in order to avoid confusion with Old Norse texts, yet ‘it is worth noting that the Grimms often treat the *Hausmärchen* as a whole as a kind of saga of the German fatherland: the collective record of the German people’, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Jeffrey T. Schnapp (trans.), ‘Preface to *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* gesammelt durch die Brüder Grimm (1819)’, in *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*, ed. by R. Howard Bloch and Stephen G. Nichols (Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 127-47, at p. [489]; a similar approach is noted of Moe and Asbjørnsen by Terry Gunnell in his article ‘Daisies Rise to Become Oaks. The Politics of Early Folktale Collection in Northern Europe’, *Folklore*, 121/1 (2010), 12-37, at p. 16. W. P. Ker is an example of a later scholar who could similarly use the term ‘Germanic’ to refer to a variety of concepts, see W. P. Ker, *Epic and Romance: Essays on Medieval Literature* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1897).

<sup>123</sup> Jeffrey M. Peck, “‘In the Beginning Was the Word’: Germany and the Origins of German Studies”, in *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*, ed. by R. Howard Bloch and Stephen G. Nichols (Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 127-47, at p. 132.

<sup>124</sup> [‘What is the German fatherland? / Come, tell me the name of that land at last! / As far as the German tongue is heard / and God sings songs in the heavens: / Thus shall it be! / Call that, awakened Germans, your own!’] Arndt, cited Henning Unverhau, *Gesang, Feste und Politik: deutsche Liedertafeln, Sängerbunde, Volksfeste and Festmähler und ihre Bedeutung für das Entstehen eines nationalen und politischen Bewußtseins in Schleswig-Holstein 1840-1848* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH, Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2000), p. 29. See also Shippey (2012), p. xv.

propaganda) was a contributing factor to its popularity from its conception. Peck, for example, describes the process by which the Berlin-based geography professor August von Zeune created a field-book edition of the medieval Old High German epic the *Nibelungenlied* published for Prussian soldiers in the 1813 war against the French.<sup>125</sup>

In addition to such schools of thought, there was also the historical ‘Germania’ with which to contend – an ambiguously-defined concept influenced by varying national interests. Tacitus’s similarly-named text, uncovered after a prolonged dormancy through the combined efforts of Giovanni Boccaccio (in 1360) and Poggio Bracciolini (who published an edition of the text in 1455), would prove one of the most influential works of the age.<sup>126</sup> As Joep Leerssen writes:

Anyone who believes that monarchies and royal courts are a congenial climate for intrigue and moral corruption; anyone who for that reason prefers republics to monarchies; anyone who extols the virtues of simple, solid citizens over immoral aristocrats; anyone who believes that Northern Europeans are more trustworthy than Southern Europeans – is indebted to Tacitus.<sup>127</sup>

The writer’s subject matter, the tribes of northern Europe as viewed (and embellished) through the satirical lens of a self-critical Roman, provided the foundations for the development of a new national history – an emergence myth of the North. The ‘Germania’ imagined by nineteenth-century scholars such as G. August B. Schierenberg, who published eight volumes between 1872 and 1894, was supposedly the genuine origin of Old Norse literature; ‘Norse myths such as that of Sigurd had their origin in continental Germany.’<sup>128</sup>

Numerous Old Norse scholars of the twentieth and twenty-first century have viewed the product of philology within the field of the reception of the Saga Age as European nationalism.<sup>129</sup> Yet such a reading takes directional causality for granted, and simplifies the

<sup>125</sup> Peck (1996), p. 134.

<sup>126</sup> See Hagen Schultz, *Staat und Nation in der europäischen Geschichte* (München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1994), p. 141; Christopher B. Krebs, *A Most Dangerous Book: Tacitus’s Germania from the Roman Empire to the Third Reich* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2011); Ludwig Krapf, *Germanenmythus und Reichsideologie: Frühhumanistische Rezeptionsweisen der taciteischen „Germania“* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1979); and Jenny Jochens, ‘Race and Ethnicity among Medieval Norwegians and Icelanders’, in *Sagas and the Norwegian Experience – Sagaene og Noreg: Preprint Papers of the 10th International Saga Conference, Trondheim, 3rd-9th August 1997*, ed. by Jan Ragnar Hagland, Jørn Sandnes, Gunnar Foss, and Audun Dybdahl (Trondheim: Senter for middelalderstudier, 1997), 313-22, at p. 313.

<sup>127</sup> Joep Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe: A Cultural History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), p. 41; see also Shippey (2012), p. xvi.

<sup>128</sup> Frank (2012), p. 12. Not all nineteenth-century German(ic) writers were for a union with the northern lands: Ida Pfeiffer travelled around Iceland in 1845, provided one dismissive sentence on the sagas, and ridiculed the Icelanders for their uncleanness and indolence, see Ida Pfeiffer, *Visit to Iceland and the Scandinavian North* [anonymously translated] (London: Ongram, Cooke, and Co., 1852), pp. 64, 121, 158, and 179.

<sup>129</sup> See Bernd Henningsen, Janine Klein, Helmut Müssener and Solfrid Söderlind (eds.), *Tyskland og Skandinavia 1800-1914: Impulser og brytninger* (Berlin, Stockholm and Oslo: Jovis, 1997).

relation to an extent that excuses one field and vilifies the other. Our understanding of the significance of German medievalism and its connection with philology is more a product of twentieth-century history and an imbalance in retrospective studies of nationalism within Europe as a whole. Germany has to some extent been forced to review its relationship to medievalism; Britain, Iceland, and the Scandinavian lands have not received the same global pressure. The history of translation, nationalism, and philology is by no means solely a history of German scholarship.<sup>130</sup> And even when one considers the British aspect of this process, it is important not to presuppose that German academia (Grimm, Humboldt, Schleiermacher, Fichte) was the sole driving force behind northern European nationalism.<sup>131</sup> The French Ernest Renan (1823-1892), in works such as his 1876 *Dialogues Philosophiques* and his highly influential 1882 lecture ‘*Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?*’, did as much to shape the British conception of the nation with regards to Scandinavian heritage as did the writings of Herder or Hegel.<sup>132</sup> But even this traditional, international chain of causality has an element of causal accusation to it. As Shippey has remarked, while ‘connections of early medievalists and philologists with awakening German nationalism have been observed but rarely studied,’ at the same time ‘links with British, French, and other nationalisms have hardly been pursued at all, and then usually through the distorting lens of some still current political purpose.’<sup>133</sup> It is thus

<sup>130</sup> Harpham (2009), pp. 41-50.

<sup>131</sup> The German philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) has been frequently read as a key writer in the development of concepts of nationalism. Leerssen, for example, writes: ‘We see in Fichte’s lectures the merger of Herder’s and Rousseau’s thought, and the first blueprint for European ethnic nationalism’, Leerssen (2006), p. 113; see also Hallfríður Thórarinsdóttir, *Purity and Power: The Policy of Purism in Icelandic Nationalism and National Identity* (Ph.D. Thesis: New School University, 1999). Walter Veit argues that Fichte’s writing is frequently misread as being the inevitable spark that led to fascist totalitarianism: ‘Present-day interpretations of Fichte all too often associate him with the guilt for national-socialism which diffuses present-day responsibility’, Walter Veit, ‘Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Romantic Nationalism’, in *Romantic Nationalism in Europe*, ed. by J. C. Eade (Canberra: Humanities and Research Centre, Australian National University, 1983), pp. 151-64. Similarly, the study of links between Fascism and the reception of Old Norse is both pressing and productive, but it would be misleading to *unthinkingly* apply the same terminology to the phenomena of the nineteenth-century. To suggest that the political views held by those in the one century inevitably led to the events of the next is to some extent to grant Fascism a teleology which its proponents themselves seek to propagate.

<sup>132</sup> Schultz (1994), pp. 110-11; Harpham (2009), p. 48. The theories of George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) found admirers in countries across Europe and became popular in Britain from the 1820s onwards. It was not until the early nineteenth century when philosophers such as G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell attempted a serious overthrow of Hegelian thought; see Kirk Willis, ‘The Introduction and Critical Reception of Hegelian Thought in Britain, 1830-1900’, *Victorian Studies*, 32/1 (Autumn 1988), 85-111. A. J. P. Taylor writes, ‘Hegel, who succeeded Fichte in 1814, performed for the state, and especially for the Prussian state, the same service in political theory which centuries before Luther had performed in terms of theology. He argued that true freedom was to be found in working in line with the trend of history’, A. J. P. Taylor, *The Course of German History: A Survey of the Development of German History since 1815*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 61 [original London: Hamish Hamilton, 1945].

<sup>133</sup> Tom A. Shippey, in Leslie J. Workman *et al.*, ‘A Panel Discussion among Leslie J. Workman, T. A. Shippey, Allen J. Frantzen, Paul E. Szarmach, Richard J. Utz, William D. Paden, and Arthur F. Kinney’, in *The Future of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Problems, Trends, and Opportunities for Research*, ed. by Roger Dahood

important that while a study of Old Norse reception and nationalism in Britain should acknowledge the wider European tradition of academic thought, this does not become a replacement for self-analysis.

### 2.1.2. Scandinavian Context: *Sjálfstæðisbaráttan*, or the Struggle for Independence

The French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century encouraged a wave of republican fervour (or ‘universal delirium’ from the perspective of conservative British onlookers) across Scandinavia, with countries reassessing their ties to monarchy and electing to return to ‘medieval roots’ for models of state formation.<sup>134</sup> In Denmark, the pro-Prussian royals were permitted to keep a much-reduced position at the expense of granting increased parliamentary rights to the ‘Nordic’ people;<sup>135</sup> in Sweden, academics and clergymen alike debated the usefulness of hereditary rule with Old Norse texts as their reference; Icelandic nationalists were encouraged to start a process which would see them break off from the Danish crown and return to a Golden Age inspired by classical and native literary tradition; Norwegian scholars, encouraged by political separation from Denmark, painted the saga-age peasant as the cornerstone of Norway’s cultural legacy; and Elias Lönnrot’s publication of the *Kalevala* in Finland in 1835 provided a medieval identity for national writers for generations to come.<sup>136</sup>

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(Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 3-18, at pp. 4-5. See also Frederick Mechner Barnard, ‘National Culture and Political Legitimacy: Herder and Rousseau’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 44/2 (April-June 1983), 231-53, at p. 233.

<sup>134</sup> Samuel Laing, *Journal of a Residence in Norway during the Years 1834, 1835, & 1836; made with a View to enquire into the Moral and Political Economy of that Country, and the Condition of its Inhabitants*, new edn (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, & Roberts, 1859), p. 84. On national identity in Scandinavia see Azar Gat and Alexander Jakobsen, *Nations: The Long History and Deep Roots of Political Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 154-58; on wider European trends see Louk Hagendoorn, Györy Csepeli, Henk Dekker, and Russell Farnen (eds.), *European Nations and Nationalism: Theoretical and Historical Perspectives* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2000).

<sup>135</sup> Already in mid-eighteenth-century Denmark the trends in nationalist dialogue which would be prevalent in the next century were beginning to re-emerge; Barton notes that the age showed ‘signs of a growing Nordic sentiment in literature, especially from the Danish side, stimulated by the reaction to growing German cultural influence in Denmark, the awakening of interest in Nordic antiquity, and the influence of Montesquieu’s theory of climate, which seemed to verify the existence of certain common Nordic values’, H. Arnold Barton, ‘The Swedish Succession Crises of 1809 and 1810, and the Question of Scandinavian Union’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 42/3 (August 1970), 309-33, at p. 311.

<sup>136</sup> While this thesis does not deal with Finland’s involvement in the links between Northern European nationalism and the translation of medieval texts, see Derek Fewster, ‘“Braves Step Out of the Night of the Barrows”: Regenerating the Heritage of Early Medieval Finland’, in *The Uses of the Middle Ages in Modern European States*, ed. by Guy P. Marchal and R. Evans (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 31-51 for an excellent summary of their nineteenth-century medievalist nationalism and Thomas A. DuBois, ‘Frithiof’s Motley Cousins: On the Perils of Using Folklore to Create a National Epic’, in *Nordic Storyteller: Essays in Honour of Niels Ingwersen*, ed. by Susan Brantly and Thomas A. DuBois (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Pub., 2009), 178-210 for a comparison with Swedish and Estonian movements. Mari Hatavara’s article ‘History, the Historical Novel, and Nation: The First Finnish Historical Novels as National Narrative’, trans. by Oili Räsänen, *Neophilologus*, 86/1 (January 2002), 1-15 discusses Lönnrot’s *Kalevala* and the works of national



Moreover, internationalist causes could draw on emerging historical theories on the notion of a unified Scandinavian tongue, under which all corners of northern Europe might find a source for political alignment (a circumstance which had already been realised once in the Kalmar Union of 1397-1520).<sup>137</sup> In each of these cases, the Old Norse sagas, ‘animated with an unmistakable patriotic spirit,’ were a key part of the process of shaping national identity.<sup>138</sup>

### 2.1.2.i. Iceland

The Icelandic campaign for political independence (*sjálfstæðisbarátta*) was a movement of the nineteenth century with its roots in the eighteenth. Political developments were coloured by what has become seen as the ‘Icelandic Renaissance’, after the highly influential period of literature of the first twenty years of the nineteenth century.<sup>139</sup> In parallel with similar sentiments in Copenhagen, where many of the Icelandic literati of the day were based, ‘political nationalism prevailed in Iceland in the late 1840s, calling for an autonomous polity for the island. For Icelandic nationalists, this development signifies that awakening of a slumbering national spirit – the *Volkgeist*.’<sup>140</sup> The early steps in this campaign for independence are traditionally accredited to Eggert Ólafsson (1726-1768) and Jón Sigurðsson (1811-1879); indeed, the latter has a cultural significance in Iceland akin to a founding father.<sup>141</sup> In Jón Sigurðsson’s lifetime, Iceland received significant concessions from Denmark regarding its political constitution and right to self-governance; in 1843 the *Alþing* (Icelandic parliament) was reinstated as an advisory body and in 1874 Iceland attained a limited form of home rule

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writers such as Johan Ludvig Runeberg within the context of historical novels and the construction of national narrative, a theme discussed below in the chapter on Scott. See also Derek Fewster, *Visions of Past Glory: Nationalism and the Construction of Early Finnish History* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2006).

<sup>137</sup> Such theories surrounded the concept of a unified origin-language, from which all Scandinavian tongues were said to be descended (minus English and German); see Elmer H. Antonsen, ‘Proto-Scandinavian’ and Common Nordic’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 39/1 (Spring 1967), 16-39. Barton notes that ‘the earliest ideological background to the concept of Scandinavian unity must be sought far back in the Middle Ages’, (1970), p. 311. Other Europeans saw the re-union of Scandinavia as a military necessity, creating a firm barrier between Russia and the south-west of Europe, see Samuel Laing, *A Tour in Sweden in 1838; containing Observations on the Moral, Political, and Economical State of the Swedish Nation* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1839), pp. 414-15.

<sup>138</sup> Gat and Jakobsen (2013), p. 156. Such a sentiment could be heard reflected in speeches by writers such as Tómas Sæmundsson, whose 1841 article ‘Alþing’ proclaimed that ‘Iceland has kindled the light of learning in the Nordic countries’, Tómas Sæmundsson (1841), p. 74; cited Guðmundur Hálfðanarson (1995), p. 766.

<sup>139</sup> Gylfi Gunnlaugsson (2011), p. 117.

<sup>140</sup> Guðmundur Hálfðanarson (1995), p. 764.

<sup>141</sup> This is true to the extent that Jón Sigurðsson’s birthday (the 17<sup>th</sup> of June) has become a historic date for Icelanders: the national university was founded on that day in 1911, and the Republic of Iceland was founded on that day in 1944, see Birgir Hermannsson (2005), p. 174. On Jón Sigurðsson’s nationalism see Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, ‘Þjóðhetan Jón Sigurðsson’, *Andvari*, 122, nýr flokkur XXXIX (1997), 40-62, and (2001), pp. 77-96.

through a new constitution (*stjórnarskrá*).<sup>142</sup> Yet Jón Sigurðsson's theories of the nature of nations, which he composed 'as an ardent liberal, fighting for Icelandic autonomy and individual liberty on the same grounds,' were not upheld by many of his successors; 'In his opinion, a nation, just like an individual, had to be free from external control in order to develop in a rational manner; that is, individual liberty and national freedom were not two separate goals, but two sides of the same coin.'<sup>143</sup> Modern concepts of nationalism often perceive the right of the individual (personal autonomy) and the right of the nation (national liberty) as being mutually exclusive. For Jón Sigurðsson they were both intrinsic elements of Iceland's future.

Jesse Byock has traced the tradition of nationalist thought which influenced the nineteenth-century campaign for a national consciousness in Iceland back to the academic output of the German scholars Johann Gottfried Herder and Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835). As Byock writes, Icelandic writers were persuaded by these scholars that 'a nation controlled by foreigners, with foreign institutions imposed upon it, was bound to stagnate. Progress for a nation was based upon the freedom to develop its national spirit without hindrance.'<sup>144</sup> As such, the Danish monopoly on Icelandic trade could be understood as one part of a problematic dynamic which was condemning Iceland to a poverty-stricken present and bleaker future: 'If Iceland was poor, it was because it was not free.'<sup>145</sup> In such a mindset, all ills could be ascribed to foreign ownership, and a nation (and by extension a territory) could only be successfully controlled by a specific group of people who inherently belonged to it. While future Icelanders, such as the twentieth-century novelist Halldór Kiljan Laxness, would

<sup>142</sup> Willard Fiske, writing on the 5th January 1880, on the death of Jón Sigurðsson, remarked, 'Iceland's right to self-government is secure forever [...] God bless his golden memory!' (Lbs. 4868 4to).

<sup>143</sup> Guðmundur Hálfðanarson (1995), p. 767; the conflation of the rights of the individual with the rights of the nation, that each nation has a right to autonomy, is a common method of justifying nationalist discourse on the inequality of nations (i.e. each nation has "equal" right to genetic/ethnic "purity"), and a variation on this line of thought can be seen in modern capitalist notions of business ventures possessing the same rights as individuals. In the nineteenth century the conflation of individual rights and national interests was not restricted to one side of the political spectrum: in 1859 John Stuart Mill could speak of 'the worth of the state' being 'the worth of the individuals composing it', (1975), p. 141.

<sup>144</sup> Jesse L. Byock, 'Modern Nationalism and the Medieval Saga', in *Northern Antiquity: The Post-Medieval Reception of Edda and Saga*, ed. by Andrew Wawn (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1994), 163-87, at p. 173. Guðmundur Hálfðanarson is referring to such traditional lines of dialogue when he comments, '*Gullöld Íslendingasagnanna gaf mönnum fyrirheit um það hvers þjóðin var megnug ef hún stóð á eigin fótum, og því var stofnendum lýðveldisins mjög í mun að tengja hið nýfengna frelsi við íslenska fortíð*' [The golden age of the *Íslendingasögur* gave people a promise of what the nation was capable of if it stood on its own feet, and thus the founders of the republic essentially equated the newfound freedom to the Icelandic past], (2001), p. 8. On Humboldt's influence on nineteenth-century thought see David Sorkin, 'Wilhelm von Humboldt: The Theory and Practice of Self-Formation (*Bildung*), 1791-1810', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 44/1 (Jan.-Mar. 1983), 55-73.

<sup>145</sup> Byock (1994), p. 173.

critique this campaign and its simplistic assertions, it was the chief intellectual stimulant behind Icelandic politics in the eighteen-hundreds.

Part of the campaign to reclaim Iceland's national image rested on disproving descriptions of the island as regressive, simple, and cut off from wider European discourse. Whatever people may have written on Scandinavia over the course of the centuries leading up to 1800, the truth of the matter was that Icelanders were thought to live a marginal existence.<sup>146</sup> Foreign antiquarians eyed Iceland as a secluded repository for medieval literature, and, as Guðmundur Hálfðanarson has shown, this interest 'became a great source of pride to the Icelanders, because it seemed to place the small and peripheral nation firmly in the pantheon of European civilization.'<sup>147</sup> Yet being part of a European past was not necessarily the same as having potential for being involved in a European future. Icelandic Futurists attempted to dismiss such notions, and instead promote the country as a functioning element in modern Europe. They viewed the stereotype of Icelanders as morally-sound, impoverished farmers as both insulting and limiting in terms of prospective economic and cultural exchange.<sup>148</sup>

Although a part of the condescending foreign stereotype of the island as a medieval mausoleum, the Old Norse sagas could also provide material for progressive constructions of a potential national Icelandic identity.<sup>149</sup> A knowledge of antiquity did not have to mean mental stagnation. Later writers such as William Morris were keen to relate how modern Icelanders were in touch with their heroic past to a degree to which the English should aspire; the purity of modern Icelandic society for Morris lay not (solely) in a detached simplicity, as portrayed by Danish writers, but also in a collective communal wisdom. Even the isolated Icelandic farmer could hold his own with the English specialists on the subject of Old Norse literary heritage, as an episode in Morris's travel diaries of Iceland had proved:

We went into yet another stead, Eyvindarmúli, where it seemed the bonder, who was very deep in old lore, was flatteringly anxious to see me. He was a grave black-bearded intelligent-looking carle of about fifty, and soon he got to discussing with [Eiríkur]

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<sup>146</sup> See Kirsten Hastrup, 'Northern Barbarians: Icelandic Canons of Civilisation', *Gripla*, 20 (2009), 109-36, at pp. 119 and 130.

<sup>147</sup> Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, 'Interpreting the Nordic Past. Icelandic Medieval Manuscripts and the Construction of a Modern Nation', in *The Uses of the Middle Ages in Modern European States*, ed. by Guy P. Marchal and R. Evans (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 52-71, at p. 53. In fact, Clunies Ross points out, although between '1850 and 1920 some seventy-seven popular editions of sagas were published in Iceland,' few of these were *Íslendingasögur*, Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Old Norse-Icelandic Saga* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 154.

<sup>148</sup> Byock writes: 'A basic fact – and one older than nineteenth-century Romanticism itself – is that those who most admire primitive rural life are almost certainly those who have never been bound to such circumstances', Byock (1994), p. 165.

<sup>149</sup> Byock again: 'The sagas had already been seized upon from the very beginning of the Icelandic nationalist movement in the nineteenth century as clear evidence of the country's identity', Byock (1994), p. 165.

Magnússon and Jón minute probabilities of time and place in the *Njala*, pretty much as if the thing had happened twenty years ago.<sup>150</sup>

For Morris, the fact that Icelanders had retained an encyclopaedic knowledge of their own history did not have to imply cultural navel-gazing; rather, the knowledge of Old Norse literature was brought into the nineteenth century, and provided an intellectual counterpoint for modern thought. Contemporary Icelandic national consciousness and awareness of medieval literature were one and the same.

If this model seems paradoxical to a twenty-first century reader, it certainly did not to Sigurður Nordal (1886-1974), one of Iceland's chief academic and literary writers in the early twentieth century. In his 1924 essay on *Samhengi í Íslenskum bókmentum* ('Continuity in Icelandic Literature') he wrote, '*Engin germönsk þjóð, og reyndar engin þjóð í Norðurálfu, á bókmentir frá miðöldum, er að frumleik og snilldarbrag komist í javnkvisti við bókmentir Íslendinga frá fimm fyrstu öldunum, eftir að land byggðist.*'<sup>151</sup> From Jón Sigurðsson's efforts in Copenhagen to the post-World War II declaration of independence 'language, history, and literary traditions were a basis for an Icelandic national culture, separating Icelanders from all other nations.'<sup>152</sup> The established scholarly view is now that such a reading is a product of the subject it purposes to examine, but that does little to limit its popularity as a concept. In Njördur Njardvik's 1978 history of Iceland *Birth of a Nation*, the author dismisses the national image

<sup>150</sup> William Morris, *The Collected Works of William Morris: with Introductions by his Daughter May Morris: Volume VIII. Journals of Travel in Iceland 1871-1873* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1911d), p. 57.

<sup>151</sup> 'No Germanic nation, and certainly no nation in the northern hemisphere, possesses a literature from the Middle Ages that can compare in originality or taste with the literature of the Icelanders from the first five centuries after the land was settled', Sigurður Nordal, 'Samhengi í Íslenskum bókmentum (1924)', in *Ritverk. Samhengi og samtíð*, vol. I (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1996), 13-38, at p. 15. Sigurður Nordal's passage has been cited on numerous occasions: see Jörg Glauser, *Island – Eine Literaturgeschichte* (Weimar: Verlag J. B. Metzler Stuttgart, 2011), pp. 3-4, and Byock (1994), p. 167. For more Icelandic writers on nationalism see Árni Sigurjónsson, *Den politiske Laxness: den ideologiska och estetiska bakgrunden till Salka Valka och Fria män*, Ph.D. Thesis (Stockholm: Stockholms universitet, 1984), pp. 49-63; Gunnar Karlsson, 'Icelandic Nationalism and the Inspiration of History', in *The Roots of Nationalism: Studies in Northern Europe*, ed. by Rosalind Mitchison (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1980), 77-89; Gunnar Karlsson, 'Folk og nation på Island', *Scandia*, 53 (1987), 129-45; Óskar Halldórsson, 'Íslenski skólinn og Hrafnkelssaga', *Timarit Máls og Menningar*, 39/3 (1978), 317-24; and Birgir Hermannsson (2005).

<sup>152</sup> Guðmundur Hálfðanarson (1995), p. 766. Páll Pétursson asked in a 1994 *Morgenblaðið* article: '*Hvað er það sem gerir Íslendinga að þjóð? Það er öðru fremur tungan. Hún tengir okkar saman og gerir okkur sérstökkum hópi í samfélagi veraldarinnar*' [What is it that makes Icelanders a nation? It is primarily the language. It brings us together and makes us one solid group in the wider community of the world], Páll Pétursson, 'Tungan gerir Íslendinga að þjóð', *Morgenblaðið*, 19 June (1994), p. 29; discussed in Guðmundur Hálfðanarson (2001), p. 15. See also Finnbogi Guðmundsson ('The Icelandic language is continuously the key to our medieval legacy') in 'The Medieval Legacy: It's Survival and Revival in Later Centuries', in *The Medieval Legacy: A Symposium*, ed. by Hans Bekker-Nielsen *et als*. (Odense: Odense University Press, 1982), 71-87, at p. 87; and Sigurdur A. Magnússon, 'Icelandic Literature Preserver of National Culture', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 1/3 (Apr. 1968), 83-93. Jón Helgason, in his 1944 essay '*Að yrkja á íslenzku*' ('Composing Poetry in Icelandic') took this sentiment further by stressing that an understanding of Icelandic literature was *only* possible for native speakers, see Willson (2008), p. 317.

derived from Old Norse sagas as a popular myth: ‘It is a fairly common notion in older books about ancient Iceland, that the new settlers were great heroes of distinguished birth. It has even been said, that they formed the flower of the Norse people, and that this explained why Icelandic and Norwegian culture differed.’<sup>153</sup> As Njardvik hastens to add, ‘this idea has scarcely any basis in reality,’ and yet real or not, the notion of the Icelandic nationality fused with the literary tradition of the country – the nation, the tongue, the land – has not disappeared.<sup>154</sup> Patterns of nationalist discourse prevalent in the early nineteenth century still colour Icelandic politics and should be kept in mind when considering the British reception of Old Norse.

### 2.1.2.ii. *Sweden*

With the aid of hindsight, it might seem logical that Iceland voiced its own cultural claims to saga literature. As Byock has demonstrated in his work on the interaction between the sagas and Icelandic nationalism, the sagas played an important role in supporting ‘claims for cultural superiority’ back home, and these in turn ‘played a significant role in shaping the identity of the different emerging national groups.’<sup>155</sup> Unfortunately for the Icelanders, while they were laying claim to their “own” tales for the purpose of nationalist politics, there were those in mainland Europe who also wanted to claim the sagas. The classification of the *Íslendingasögur* as definitively Icelandic was actively disputed; for the continental Scandinavian states, ‘Icelandic texts were remnants of Viking traditions that were not created in Iceland but only recorded and preserved there by Norse emigrants.’<sup>156</sup>

Sweden was one such state. The start of the nineteenth century saw Swedish political and cultural circles entering a period of potential reform, in which medieval texts would come to provide historical validity for new social constructs. On the 13 March 1809, king Gustav IV Adolf of Sweden was deposed by a revolution; the country had lost control of Finland, which became an autonomous territory of Russia, in the same year, and new exercises in national conception were on the cards. Swedish Old Norse scholars of the time (Johannes Bureus, Georg

<sup>153</sup> Njördur P. Njardvik, *Birth of a Nation*, trans. by John Porter (Reykjavík: *Iceland Review*, 1978), p. 17.

<sup>154</sup> Njardvik (1978), p. 17. Jóhann Páll Árnason notes, ‘Although the medieval heritage alone did not – as many Icelandic nationalists liked to think – make the Icelanders a nation, its exceptional importance for the long-term process of nation formation can hardly be doubted. A very distinctive historical experience, accompanied by vigorous cultural articulation, left a legacy bound to affect all later interaction with the broader Nordic world and its European civilizational background’, (2004), p. 105.

<sup>155</sup> Jesse L. Byock, (1994), p. 164.

<sup>156</sup> Byock (1994), p. 184; Jesse L. Byock, ‘History and the Sagas: The Effect of Nationalism’, in *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*, ed. by Gísli Pálsson (Middlesex: Hisarlik Press, 1992), 44-59, at p. 57.

Stiernhielm, Olof Verelius, Olof Rudbeck) were keen to use Old Norse sources to update and improve the understanding of Sweden's national history.<sup>157</sup> Mats Malm explains that these scholars 'would argue that Old Norse texts were older – and thus more accurate – sources than the Greek and Latin classics.'<sup>158</sup> Sweden did not have many sagas of its own, but scholars such as Rudbeck claimed that this was in fact advantageous, since 'in writing about one's own nation, the tendency is to make the portrait more beautiful than reality can justify.'<sup>159</sup> In many ways, Rudbeck argued, one's enemy's account was far more reliable where praise was concerned (a sentiment supported in Mallet's *Northern Antiquities* regarding the writings of Tacitus). Foreign admiration was considered more legitimate.

Regardless, Icelandic, and by extension Iceland, was not considered foreign by all Swedish academics. Carl Säve, writing in 1854, could comment: '*Isländskan är icke för Svenskan ett främmande språk, utan hon är – i allmänhet taladt – bara en fornform deraf: Isländskan ä i stort endast Fornsvenska!*'<sup>160</sup> Such linguistic claims were paired with the wider European literary concepts of the Romantic, the Gothic, and the Sublime. Old Norse-derived history could be approached in Swedish scholarship as a work of art, as well as a serious historic subject, and frequently materialised as both. As Lars Lönnroth comments, the late eighteenth century had witnessed an expansion in the variety of ways Swedes approached Old Norse literature (much as had occurred, to a lesser extent, in Britain); '*Det var först i andra hälften av 1700-talet som den fornordiska dikten började studeras inte bara av patriotiska perukstockar som vittnesbörd om förfädernas hjälteeddygder utan också av romantiskt sinnade skönandar som litterär konst av högsta dignitet, uttryck för det som dåtidens estetiker kallade*

<sup>157</sup> Olof Rudbeck (1630-1702) was considered responsible for the *vagina gentium* theory, which saw Sweden as the cradle of the civilised world; 'The North was the 'womb of nations'', David Wilson, 'The Viking Age in British Literature and History in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', in *The Waking of Angantyr: The Scandinavian Past in European Culture / Den nordiske fortid I europæisk kultur*, ed. by Else Roesdahl and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1996), 58-71, at p. 59. Rudbeck also published an early lexicon of Old Norse in 1691, based on material collected by Olof Verelius, see Peter Fjågesund, *The Dream of the North: A Cultural History to 1920* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi B. V., 2014), p. 156. In fact, one thousand years earlier in his work on the Goths, the sixth-century Roman historian Jordanes already described Scandinavia as *vagina nationum*, the *officina gentium*, or 'source of all nations.' See also Kristoffer Neville, 'Gothicism and Early Modern Historical Ethnography', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 70/2 (Apr. 2009), 213-34, at pp. 218-19.

<sup>158</sup> Mats Malm, 'Olaus Rudbeck's Atlantica and Old Norse Poetics', in *Northern Antiquity: The Post-Medieval Reception of Edda and Saga*, ed. by Andrew Wawn (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1994), 1-25, at p. 1; see also Jan Evind Myhre, 'The 'Decline of Norway': Grief and Fascination in Norwegian Histiography on the Middle Ages', in *The Uses of the Middle Ages in Modern European States*, ed. by Guy P. Marchal and R. Evans (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 18-30.

<sup>159</sup> Malm (1994), p. 5.

<sup>160</sup> ['Icelandic is not a different language from Swedish, rather it is – generally speaking - merely an older variant of it: Icelandic is mostly just Old Swedish'], cited Anna Waillette, *Sagans svenskar: Synen på vikingatiden och de isländska sagorna under 300 år* (Malmö: Sekel Bokförlag, 2004), p. 257.

“*det sublime.*”<sup>161</sup> The Grays of Sweden had finally caught up with the Percys. And yet Swedish historians had been influencing public opinion through engagement with Old Norse literature for considerably longer than the Latin-schooled British. As early as the sixteenth century, Swedish academics had been looking to the north for sources. As O’Donoghue writes, for mainland Scandinavians ‘it became evident that in Iceland there were texts which not only seemed to provide copious evidence for Scandinavian history, but also could be readily expounded by Icelanders.’<sup>162</sup>

### 2.1.2.iii. Norway

Although Norway had ceded any last vestige of control over Iceland and Greenland to Denmark in 1814, it also received its own constitution and became politically autonomous, ending a period of Danish control stretching back to 1536.<sup>163</sup> Post-1814 literature in Norway is therefore often considered ‘national’ literature.<sup>164</sup> There had been an earlier literary movement in Norway, exemplified by the formation of *Det Norske Selskab* (the Norwegian Society) in 1772, and bolstered by the establishment of the first university (the Royal Frederick University in Christiania, later Oslo) in 1811, but this movement had been opposed to the practice of mining Old Norse material in the manner of Europe’s nationalist writers such as Klopstock and Ewald.

With the new constitution, things changed. The Norwegian parliament adopted medieval designations – *storting*, *logting*, and *odelsting* – in order to reflect regained independence.<sup>165</sup> Meanwhile, scholars in the fields of history, anthropology, and literature ‘wrestled with problems of defining Norwegian language, culture and history. One intuitively turned to the Old Norse language, to stave churches, to sagas and other features of an age when

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<sup>161</sup> ‘It was only in the second half of the eighteenth century that the Old Norse poetry began to be studied not only by patriotic fugeys as witnesses of their ancestors’ heroic deeds, but also by romantic-minded spirits as literary art of the highest dignity, an expression of what the aesthetic of the period called “the sublime”’, Margaret Clunies Ross and Lars Lönnroth, ‘Den fornnordiskamusan’, in *Myter om det nordiska: Mellan romantik och politik*, ed. by Catharina Raudvere, Anders Andrén, and Kristina Jennbert (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2001), 23-58, at p. 47.

<sup>162</sup> O’Donoghue (2014), p. 12.

<sup>163</sup> The Scottish translator and scholar of Old Norse Samuel Laing argued that Britain was morally bound to ensure Norway’s continued national liberty through its (in Laing’s mind, disastrous) involvement in the political negotiations with Sweden in 1813 and 1814; see Laing (1859), pp. 8-9.

<sup>164</sup> See Jan Ragnar Hagland, ‘The Reception of Old Norse Literature in Late Eighteenth-Century Norway’, in *Northern Antiquity: The Post-Medieval Reception of Edda and Saga*, ed. by Andrew Wawn (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1994), 27-40, at p. 27.

<sup>165</sup> Myhre (2015), p. 21.

Norway was an independent kingdom.’<sup>166</sup> The sagas went from being considered the realm of backward-minded Romantics to that of respectable historians and budding politicians.

The revived Norwegian appropriation of Old Norse for nationalist purposes did not necessarily engender hostility to or from the Icelanders. Throughout the nineteenth century, and in a similar manner to the Icelandic nationalists of the same period, Norwegian historians promoted the notion of the farmer or peasant as the defining element of Norwegian society, a figure possessing an intrinsic understanding of their nation achieved through centuries of tilling its soil and fishing its seas. There was therefore comparatively little flaunting of the Norwegians’s period of rule over the Icelanders, and although Iceland’s own national origin myth was built around the notion of a “Golden Age” before the *gamli sáttmáli* (or ‘Old Covenant’) of 1264, Icelandic nationalists were more concerned with cutting ties with Denmark by emphasising older relationships to Britain, Norway, and the northern isles than they were with settling age-old scores.<sup>167</sup> Moreover, Norway’s ever-increasing confidence in the presentation of a saga-derived national image was viewed as a positive development overseas, and particularly in Britain:

Whilst it may not have been appreciated by the British Establishment at the time, the cultural challenge that came out of Norway during these decades suggested very strongly that Norway was standing on its own feet and was capable of independent and critical thinking. And so, incidentally, it proved that it possessed those very qualities of rugged individualism that the British liked to celebrate in themselves as a legacy of their Viking ancestors. And indeed, the Viking age formed an important background for a large number of popular novels, children’s books, and poems which established a significant point of contact between nineteenth-century Norway and the distant past.<sup>168</sup>

Thus, H. L Brækstad argued in his 1891 lecture on English-Norwegian relations, while the early history of the two countries had been one of bloodshed, in the nineteenth century there were cultural bonds to be made. The new wave of raiding parties would target Britain’s bookstores and playhouses: ‘Now, a thousand years later, we are contemplating another invasion of your empire; with our authors, our poets, our artists and our bards in the front, we

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<sup>166</sup> Myhre (2015), p. 20; see Barbara G. Scott, ‘Archaeology and National Identity: The Norwegian Example’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 68/3 (Summer 1996), 321-42, at pp. 321-23.

<sup>167</sup> Thus, paradoxically, Eiríkur Magnússon, although openly hostile to the Danish control of Iceland, could write approvingly of Norway: ‘Identity of blood and language engendered an enduring sense of brotherhood, which, through the lapse of ages has maintained to this day’, (Lbs. 2196, 4to), even while remaining hostile to Iceland’s 1264 loss of independence: ‘The path of the weak is thorny, and the thorns in Iceland’s path stung deep’, (1909), p. 122. The period prior to the *gamli sáttmáli* is referred to as Iceland’s *þjóðveldisöld* (‘commonwealth’, or more literally ‘age of the nation’s power’).

<sup>168</sup> Peter Fjågesund and Ruth A. Symes, *The Northern Utopia: British Perspectives of Norway in the Nineteenth Century* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi B. V., 2003), p. 76.



intend to invade your country again, but not in the fashion of our ancestors.’<sup>169</sup> Moreover, the Norwegian affinity with the British contrasted fittingly with their rival Sweden’s preference for the French. As a Norwegian newspaper put it in 1860: ‘We love the English and drink tea; the Swedes love the French and drink coffee.’<sup>170</sup>

The invasion went both ways. Over the course of the nineteenth century numerous British explorers, historians, and later holiday-makers ‘discovered’ Norway as an alternative to the previous century’s traditional southern Grand Tour. Developments in naval technology encouraged an increasing trade between British and Norwegian ports. At the close of the century, in 1896, the Danish Prince Charles, later King Håkon of Norway, married Princess Maud, Victoria’s granddaughter, ‘thus placing the resurrected line of Norwegian monarchs on a secure, Anglo-Scandinavian foundation.’<sup>171</sup> Norway achieved full independence in 1905.

#### 2.1.2.iv. Denmark

At the start of the nineteenth century Denmark was one of the major powers in Europe, with a respected military, overseas territories, and a monarchy with links to the major houses of neighbouring lands. In 1796 the society for Scandinavian literature, or *Det Skandinaviske Litteraturselskab*, was established in Copenhagen.<sup>172</sup> Rising popular nationalist sentiment within politics and theology followed several disastrous military encounters in the early eighteen-hundreds, but the resulting Old Norse-inspired discourse offered dwindling returns for the country (or perhaps more realistically, simply did little to help matters). By the end of the century, Denmark’s army and navy had been all but annihilated, their home territory reduced by two fifths, and their overseas colonies were calling for independence. During this period, Danish writers and historians drew varying degrees of inspiration from Old Norse texts as documents legitimising Danish sovereignty, either in its own right or as part of a northern collective including wider Scandinavian and British elements.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> H. L. Brækstad, ‘Norway’, in *National Life and Thought of the Various Nations Throughout the World*, Eiríkur Magnússon, J. E. Thorold Rogers, J. Theodore Bent, F.H. Groome, Mrs Cunninghame Graham, Pulsky, W. R. Morfill, *et al.* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1891), 181-200, at p. 200.

<sup>170</sup> H. F. Tozer, ‘Norway’, in *Vacation Tourists and Notes of Travels in 1860*, ed. by Francis Galton (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1861), 362-421, at p. 383.

<sup>171</sup> Fjågesund and Symes (2003), p. 101.

<sup>172</sup> Barton (1970), p. 312.

<sup>173</sup> Despite frequent conflict with British interests throughout the nineteenth century, Denmark and its writers continued to emphasise ancestral ties with the British: see, for example, the poem ‘Englandssangen’ by Danish poet Johannes V. Jensen, cited in Martin S. Allwood (ed.), *20th Century Scandinavian Poetry* (Oslo: Gyldendal; Sweden: Marston Hill, Mallsjö, 1950), pp. 42-43.

Despite the general opinion amongst Danish scholars that the literature of Old Norse (termed Old Danish rather than Old Icelandic) was their own heritage, they nevertheless idealised a primitive, pure, and undoubtedly patronising view of Iceland, which, in combination with a trade-monopoly placed on the northern island, was behind much of the islanders's nationalist sentiment.<sup>174</sup> As Byock writes, Icelanders perceived life under Danish rule to be a poor shadow of that enjoyed by their Saga Age ancestors, and dismissed Danish portraits of Iceland as a Lost World of ancient Scandinavian values as highly condescending: 'Scandinavian romanticism, which saw 'the saga island' as a living relic of the Middle Ages, did not fit the cultural self-perception of Reykjavík's intellectuals.'<sup>175</sup> Danish and Swedish writers into the eighteenth century had been continuing the medieval impression of Iceland as a hellish backcountry.<sup>176</sup>

Moreover, to many Danes the island was seen as a remote drain on Denmark's time and resources; the ideal situation from a Danish nationalist point of view would be an appropriation of the Old Norse literature alongside a discharge of territorial responsibilities. Such a negotiation could prove profitable for Britain too, as John Cochrane wrote in his 1796 *Proposal for Obtaining Iceland from the Danes*: 'The Government of that Country finding that Iceland was every day becoming a greater burthen [sic] to Denmark while at the same time the misery of the wretched Inhabitants was increasing, bethought themselves of selling the Island – and on this subject they wrote over to this country.'<sup>177</sup> Denmark could potentially retain the scholarly interest in Old Norse literature, the lion's share of manuscript collections, and the brightest of Iceland's own scholars, while simultaneously satisfying Icelandic nationalists and relieving pressure on state funds.

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<sup>174</sup> Guðmundur Hálfðanarson comments: 'Í augum [Dana] var íslenskan móðurtunga allra norræna tungumála og því bar að varðveila hana og hlúa að henni í hvívetna' [In the eyes of the Danes, Icelandic was the mother tongue of all the Norse languages, and it was thus important to preserve and foster it in all respects], (2001), p. 198.

<sup>175</sup> Byock (1994), p. 184; see also p. 173.

<sup>176</sup> Davidson (2005), p. 33.

<sup>177</sup> John Cochrane, 'Proposal for obtaining Iceland from the Danes' (1796) in Lbs. 424 fol.; the price was set at £1,200,000.

## 2.2. Summary; or, *Gunnlaugs saga* in English

The purpose of these introductory chapters has been to provide brief introductions to some of the key debates in the fields of nationalism and translation, as well as to provide a contextual picture of the state of the wider reception of Old Norse literature up until the early nineteenth century, and the nationalist reception in Germany, Iceland, and Scandinavia. All of these topics might be usefully grouped under the heading ‘Medievalism’. In Umberto Eco’s collection of essays *Faith in Fakes*, the author provided an early commentary on this now widely-recognised field, a phenomenon Eco defined as the continual rewriting of the middle ages into the present day.<sup>178</sup> The literary histories of the sagas discussed in this thesis are each a unique example of this artistic practice; every new rendition of each saga is a new fabrication of the past. Yet far from rendering these subsequent texts unoriginal, unfaithful, or unworthy of attention, this process itself is a valuable topic of research, not as a means of analysing the validity of translations but as an opportunity to reflect on the contextual stimuli which influenced them. The relevance of the study of this phenomenon, and the exact relationship between it and other forms of political and social construction, should be readily apparent to the twenty-first-century reader. As was the case when Eco was writing at the end of the millennium, Western culture is at present experiencing ‘a period of renewed interest in the Middle Ages, with a curious oscillation between fantastic neomedievalism and responsible philological examination.’<sup>179</sup> Nineteenth-century saga reception possibly offers an even stranger array of texts, from fantastic and irresponsible philological studies to sober and thoughtful works of medievalist fantasy, along with every conceivable option in between.

In 1834, three years before the young Victoria was crowned Queen of the United Kingdom, John Barrow Jr. (1808-1898), the author of *Excursions in the North of Europe* and son of distinguished statesman Sir John Barrow, spent a summer in Iceland, travelling there in order to compare the national composition of the Icelanders’s character with that of other Scandinavian peoples, and to view the infamous ‘subterranean fire’ for which the island was

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<sup>178</sup> Umberto Eco, ‘The Return of the Middle Ages’, in *Faith in Fakes: Travels in Hyperreality*, trans. by William Weaver (London: Vintage, 1998), 61-85. The first recorded use of the term ‘Medievalism’ is in 1844, see David Matthews, ‘From Medieval to Medievalism: A New Semantic History’, *The Review of English Studies*, 62/257 (2011), 695-715, at p. 695. On (nineteenth-century) medievalism see: Alice Chandler, *A Dream of Order: The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth-Century English Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970); and ‘Order and Disorder in the Medieval Revival’, *Browning Institute Studies*, 8 (1980), 1-9; and Rosemary Jann, ‘Democratic Myths in Victorian Medievalism’, *Browning Institute Studies*, 8 (1980), 129-49.

<sup>179</sup> Eco (1998), p. 63.

by then renowned.<sup>180</sup> Although chiefly a scientist (his family name is attached to *Bucephala islandica*, a species of goldeneye duck), Barrow also had a commendable knowledge of Icelandic literature, being aware of the tale of the ‘worthy adventurer’ Ingólfr Arnarson, of ‘Flokké’ and his ravens, and, to some extent, of the sagas themselves.<sup>181</sup> The Icelanders, Barrow claimed, were once ‘deservedly famed for their literary productions; and it is pleasing to find that they still keep alive the spirit of research and that literary pursuit for which their ancestors were distinguished.’<sup>182</sup> Barrow’s knowledge of Old Norse literature may have come principally from the late eighteenth-century publications of Thomas Percy, but he had also prepared for his voyage by reading *Gunnlaugs saga* (in Latin) and used extracts from it in his notes as evidence of historical bonds between Iceland and Britain:

Ethelred was liberal to poets who amused him; Gunnlaugr, the Scald, sailed to London, and presented himself to the king with an heroic poem which he had composed on royal virtues. He sang it, and received in return a purple tunic, lined with the richest furs, and adorned with fringe, and was appointed to a station in the palace.<sup>183</sup>

The interest of Barrow’s chosen extracts relied not only on their presentation of strong cultural ties between the two nations, but on the predicted surprise of his readers at the ease of communication between the Icelandic poet and the English king. Barrow explained that at the time depicted in the sagas ‘the English language was almost wholly composed of Saxon or Scandinavian.’<sup>184</sup> Here, three terms which readers may have previously assumed to be distinct were apparently all part of an earlier English national identity.

Although not from an original Old Norse edition, the *Gunnlaugs saga* passage demonstrates an early example of a persistent theory of national relations derived from saga literature. The saga’s initial popularity can probably be ascribed to the poet William Herbert, who had provided a sketch of the story in his 1804 volume of poems, but others soon

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<sup>180</sup> John Barrow, *A Visit to Iceland, by Way of Tronyem, in the “Flower of Yarrow” Yacht, in the Summer of 1834* (London: John Murray, 1835), p. ix. An early draft of Barrow’s work is found in Lbs. 604 fol., including letters to Barrow from John Stanley. Stanley’s own handwritten journal is found in Lbs. 3886-88 4to, and his relationship with Iceland, inspired at least in part by a fascination in the Sublime, is discussed at length in Andrew Wawn, ‘John Thomas Stanley and Iceland: The Sense and Sensibility of an Eighteenth-Century Explorer’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 53/1 (Winter 1981), 52-76, in particular at pp. 53-54.

<sup>181</sup> Barrow (1835), pp. 83-85.

<sup>182</sup> Barrow (1835), p. 105.

<sup>183</sup> Barrow (1835), p. 234, from *Gunnlaugs saga* p. 89. For comparison see *Gunnlaugs saga Ormstungu*, in *Borgfirðinga sögur, Íslensk fornrit III.*, ed. by Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1938), 51-107, at ch. 10, pp. 83-87, or William Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon’s translation *The Story of Gunnlaug the Worm-Tongue and Raven the Scald*, in William Morris, *The Collected Works of William Morris: with Introductions by his Daughter May Morris*, in 24 vols (London: Longmans, Green, 1910-15), vol. X: *Three Northern Love Stories; The Tale of Beowulf* (1911f), p. 21.

<sup>184</sup> Barrow (1835), p. 235.

followed.<sup>185</sup> Henry Holland addressed the saga at some length in his ‘Preliminary Dissertation on the History and Literature of Iceland,’ found in Sir George Steuart Mackenzie’s 1812 *Travels in the Island of Iceland*.<sup>186</sup> Holland noted that the sagas provided important ‘sketches of the state of society’ and found ‘*Gunnlaugs ok Skald-Rafni Saga*’ to be the most interesting of the collection.<sup>187</sup> Wawn has argued that Holland’s use of the saga ‘transcends mere repetition’ to an extent that was unique at the time he was writing; as with Herbert and Barrow, this was a model of Old Norse reception in which English writers were for the first time seeking out original sources (or at least the available Latin translations), and forming their own theories on the relevance of the literature to Britain.<sup>188</sup>

Fifty years after Barrow’s enthusiastic depiction of Saxon/Scandinavian England, one finds the scholar George Stephens translating a passage of the same saga, *Gunnlaugs saga ormstúngu*, in order to support his own notion of the banded nature of the northern tongues:

*Ein var þá túnga á Englandi sem í Noregi ok í Danmörku; en þá skiptust túngur í Englandi er Vilhjalmur Bastarðr vann England.*

One was tho (then) the tung on (in) England [in the time of King Ethelred, an. 979-1016] sum (as) in Norway eke (and) in Denmark; an (but) tho shifted (were altered) the-tungs in England as (when) William the-Bastard wan England.<sup>189</sup>

The translation was typical of Stephens’s style, in that he attempted to broaden radically the modern lexical meanings of English pronouns and to push the boundaries of acceptable modern English grammar, as with his attempt to (re)introduce suffixed (or here prefixed) definite articles, but these comments are beside the point. Communication for the purpose of broadening accessibility to the text was not a necessity. By the time that Stephens was writing, a full English translation of *Gunnlaugs saga* had been available for over a decade, but it was the Latin editions of the late eighteenth century which had first sparked an interest in concepts

<sup>185</sup> See Sir George Steuart Mackenzie, *Travels in the Island of Iceland, during the Summer of the Year MDCCCX*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Company, 1812), p. 32 and William Herbert, *Select Icelandic Poetry, translated from the Originals* (London: T. Reynolds, 1804). O’Donoghue describes Herbert’s work as the ‘highpoint of accurate and readable translations, by an English-language poet who worked for the first time with the original Icelandic’, (2014), p. 104. Of William Herbert’s poems see in particular: ‘Helga’ (1815); ‘Hedin’ (1820); and ‘Attila’ (1838); and the discussion of his work in Clunies Ross (1998), pp. 183-97.

<sup>186</sup> Holland, in Mackenzie (1812), pp. 23, 30-32 and Lbs. 3876 4to, pp. 116-18. Holland quotes from the 1775 Havnæ edition.

<sup>187</sup> Holland, in Mackenzie (1812), p. 29, 30.

<sup>188</sup> Andrew Wawn, “‘The Courtly Old Carle’: Sir Henry Holland and Nineteenth-Century Iceland”, *Saga Book*, 21 (1982-83), 54-79, at p. 72; Wawn continues: ‘There are hints of a vivid engagement with the narrative, far remove from the blandness of Herbert’s account’, (1982-83), p. 72.

<sup>189</sup> George Stephens, *Handbook of the Old-Northern Runic Monuments of Scandinavia and England* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1884a), p. xiv; Stephens’s Old Norse text is taken from the 1847 Copenhagen edition, vol. 2, p. 221.

of northern identity.<sup>190</sup> Readers were well aware from their translations of *Burnt Njal*, *Grettir the Strong*, and *Frithiof the Bold* that the ancient Scandinavians had assimilated into British life with the greatest of ease, whether they were attending feasts in Orkney, trials in York, or battles in Ireland. Courageous readers could, by the time Stephens was writing, offer considerably closer translations than ‘One was tho the tung on England sum in Norway eke in Denmark’, and explain the significance of such a societal model to boot. Matthew Arnold, writing at the end of the nineteenth century, envisioned the British race standing atop a precipice before terrible ruin; the only thing that could save them was an earnest awakening of interest in their ancient ancestors.<sup>191</sup> A review of translated saga literature over the previous two centuries would have shown Arnold just how awake the British were.<sup>192</sup>

This chapter has reviewed the state of play of Old Norse saga literature in Britain leading up to the nineteenth century. Clearly eddaic material had achieved cultural relevance by the early years of the eighteen-hundreds, and sagas, although improperly known, were becoming a feature of discussions on the cultural constitution of Britain. From contemporary histories of Germany, Iceland, and the Scandinavian countries, one can identify similar processes of cultural reevaluation at varying stages of completion. Finally, this chapter has noted that even in the absence of substantial saga translations, British writers of the early nineteenth century were tentatively using Old Norse to support personalised readings of British history. The following chapter examines one example of the fully-developed end-product of this practice.

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<sup>190</sup> See William Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon’s translation of 1868, Eiríkur Magnússon and William Morris (trans.), ‘The Saga of Gunnlaug the Worm-tongue and Rafn the Skald’, *Fortnightly Review* (1869a), 27-56. Northern identity has become a particular topic of interest in British and Scandinavian scholarship over the last two decades, see Katherine Cockin, ‘Introducing the Literary North’, in *The Literary North*, ed. by Katherine Cockin (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Pallgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1-21; Davidson (2005); Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the National Imagination* (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 2004); and Frank Möller and Samu Pehkonen (eds.), *Encountering the North: Cultural Geography, International Relations and Northern Landscapes* (London: Ashgate, 2003).

<sup>191</sup> Matthew Arnold, *The Study of Celtic Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> reprint of 1<sup>st</sup> edn [1891] (London: John Murray, 1912), p. x.

<sup>192</sup> In 1997 Kennedy counted nine complete translations of *Gunnlaugs saga*, see John Kennedy, ‘The English Translations of Heimskringla: from 1844 to 1996’, in *Sagas and the Norwegian Experience – Sagaene og Noreg: Preprint Papers of the 10th International Saga Conference, Trondheim, 3rd-9th August 1997*, ed. by Jan Ragnar Hagland, Jørn Sandnes, Gunnar Foss, and Audun Dybdahl (Trondheim: Senter for middelalderstudier, 1997), 347-56, at p. 347.

### 3. Narrating the North: Blackwell's *Northern Antiquities*

"If you really wish to understand this picture, and to hear about Northern Mythology, I shall be glad to tell you; but I can't explain everything in a few questions and answers. It will take more than one evening; for if you hear anything, I should like you to hear enough to have some ideas of the beauty and grandeur of the old tales in which our forefathers believed."

"Mythology has rather a school sound," said Harry, doubtfully.

"But we never hear anything about Northern Mythology at school," said William; "and the Grecian and Roman is interesting enough when one has not to translate it."<sup>193</sup>

The alarmingly well-informed children of Annie and Elizabeth Keary's 1857 *The Heroes of Asgard and the Giants of Jötunheim* are lucky enough to have aunts and uncles with an encyclopaedic knowledge of Old Norse literature, at least enough to keep them entertained with contemporary Christian readings of mythology while awaiting dinner at Christmas time. Not all nineteenth-century children (or adults) were so fortunate. As young William insightfully muses, potential readers of Old Norse were at a dual disadvantage; eddas and sagas had no place, as of yet, in the nineteenth-century classroom, and even if they had, the pupils would have had to struggle with untranslated, unglossed texts, with no dictionary or grammar to help them.

As the previous chapter demonstrated, Old Norse was not an unknown entity. In the mid-nineteenth century the English reader could expect to learn from multiple sources that the Northmen were intricately connected with British history in a way that informed the present-day sensibilities of the Victorian gentleman or lady.<sup>194</sup> In the preface to the first volume of his 1844 translation of Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*, Samuel Laing explained that 'these Northmen have not merely been the forefathers of the people, but of the institutions and

<sup>193</sup> Annie Keary and Elizabeth Keary, *The Heroes of Asgard and the Giants of Jötunheim; or, The Week and its Story* (London: David Bogue, 1857), pp. 6-7. Depending on the institution, Anglo-Saxon studies could generate just as much antipathy as Old Norse; Frederick Metcalfe commented in 1880 that 'Anglo-Saxon times, and things, and thoughts have been voted by most Englishmen obsolete and abstruse; in fact, a bore, and out of their line', Rev. Frederick Metcalfe, *The Englishman and the Scandinavian; or, A Comparison of Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse Literature* (London: Trübner & Co., 1880), p. vi.

<sup>194</sup> In a case which must have spoken directly to Blackwell's worldview, he notes that the word 'guild' was 'probably derived from the Old Norse verb *gjalda*, to pay, to contribute to'; Percy had suggested that 'our modern clubs are evidently the offspring of the ancient gilds and guilds of our northern ancestors' – in fact the modern English word derives from the Old English *gild*, *gyld*, or *gegylda*, and has cognates in all Germanic languages, but Percy's and Blackwell's will to derive it from Old Norse demonstrates the imaginative Victorian appropriation of Scandinavian antiquity. Thomas Percy, *Northern Antiquities; or, An Historical Account of the Manners, Customs, Religion and Laws, Maritime Expeditions and Discoveries, Language and Literature of the Ancient Scandinavians, (Danes, Swedes, Norwegians and Icelanders) with Incidental Notices Respecting our Saxon Ancestors*, new edn revised by I. A. Blackwell (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1847), p. 198.

character of the [English] nation.’<sup>195</sup> Across such preliminary translations of Old Norse literature, the broad and indistinct terminology of ‘Northmen’ allowed northern writers to pool idealised character traits, picking and choosing potential national characteristics from a rich array of historical traditions. The second thing the nineteenth-century reader would know was that these Northmen were readily identifiable by a catalogued collection of well-defined character traits. For examples of these they needed to look no further than some of the period’s history books.

In J. A. Blackwell’s 1847 edition of Bishop Thomas Percy’s *Northern Antiquities* the nineteenth-century British reader was offered one such history, billed as a rare glimpse into the world of the ancient Scandinavian north via Old Norse literature. While Blackwell could say of Percy’s original translation that it had appeared at a time when the subject matter was ‘imperfectly known’ this was certainly changing by the middle of the century.<sup>196</sup> Blackwell’s significantly revised edition was a work some ninety years in the making, stemming from the efforts of the Swiss scholar Paul Henri Mallet in the mid-eighteenth century, and comprised of a social history of the peoples of ancient Scandinavia and Iceland, and their wider impact on the modern nations of northern Europe. At the time, translations of Old Norse texts into English were scarce, and reliable information on the sagas was equally so. The few *Íslendingasögur* which had been translated by the mid-nineteenth century were available only as extracts. Old Norse enthusiasts in Britain had to be content with poetic adaptations or Latin translations.

Unlike Percy and his contemporaries, Blackwell had the advantage of (limited) first-hand knowledge of Old Norse. He put this into practice creating a partial English translation of Snorri’s *Prose Edda* directly from the original language, and his expertise was also offered on the sagas themselves. In *Northern Antiquities* he provided running commentaries and translated extracts of three of the major sagas: *Kormáks saga*, *Njáls saga*, and *Laxdæla saga*. Through these, Blackwell suggested, one could obtain a realistic impression of the character and historic fortunes of the ancient Scandinavian nations. Perhaps more importantly for the continuing promotion of Old Norse literature, Blackwell also appended Sir Walter Scott’s

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<sup>195</sup> Samuel Laing (trans.), *The Heimskringla; or Chronicle of the Kings of Norway*, 3 vols (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1844b), vol. 1, p. iii. Laing’s was the first full English translation, and his 261-page ‘Preliminary Dissertation’ would prove highly influential on later Old Norse antiquarians. He is discussed in more detail in chapter four.

<sup>196</sup> Percy (1847), editor’s preface. On Blackwell’s edition and Victorian Old Norse-derived notions of nationalism see Thomas Spray, ‘Northern Antiquities and Nationalism’, *eSharp*, 23, ‘Myth and Nation’ (Spring 2015a), 11, 1-17.



translated abstract of *Eyrbyggja saga*, a translation which was not only widely influential, but which was to alter the focus of Anglo-Icelandic relations for decades to follow.<sup>197</sup>

This chapter will examine mid-nineteenth-century impressions of the sagas and of Old Norse literature in general as displayed in Blackwell's 1847 work. It will consider the contextual discussions on Old Norse literature and notions of nationalism, race, and ethnicity which were prevalent in Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century, and analyse *Northern Antiquities*'s authors's opinions on the sagas's historical and moral value, interwoven northern characteristics, and nationalist potential. Taking into account the underlying role political agendas often play in literary analysis, the chapter will attempt to demonstrate how the three authorial figures of *Northern Antiquities* used their influential positions as translators to promote disparate yet recurrent nationalist theories on the northern peoples.

*Northern Antiquities* was hardly an original concept. It was neither the first to choose Scandinavia as the focus for multinational ethnic history nor the first to draw on Old Norse material as evidence for its historical claims. The preceding years had witnessed a blossoming of British interest in northern studies.<sup>198</sup> To name just a handful of texts, in the decades either side of Blackwell's edition Old Norse academics were aided in their efforts by Grenville Pigott's 1839 *Manual of Scandinavian Mythology Containing a Popular Account of the Two Eddas and of the Religion of Odin*, Samuel Laing's 1844 translation of *Heimskringla*, W. E. Frye's 1845 translation of Danish poet Adam Oehlenschläger's 1819 '*The Gods of the North*', and Benjamin Thorpe's 1851-52 *Northern Mythology*.<sup>199</sup>

Provided they stepped outside of the English language, nineteenth-century readers could also discover the family sagas through a selection of volumes from the Arnamagnæen Commission, who had produced several editions of Old Norse texts with facing-page Latin translations around the turn of the century.<sup>200</sup> The *Íslendingasögur* could now boast at least

<sup>197</sup> Walter Scott's 1814 *Eyrbyggja saga* 'Abstract' and its 1847 republication are discussed in detail in the following chapter.

<sup>198</sup> Fell (1993), p. 91.

<sup>199</sup> David Ashurst identifies Pigott as a typical writer of the period, whose work 'characterises the people who produced the Old Norse myths, links them to "us" and aligns them with three of the main pillars of the Victorian value system: merchantile expansion, technical innovation and the more equivocal virtue of military vigour (tempered in the modern context, no doubt, by justice and the Christian charity unknown to our heathen ancestors)', David Ashurst, 'Eddic Myth, Victorian Values: The Popularisation of Old Norse Mythology in Britain, 1837 to 1876', in "*Sang an Aegir*" – *Nordische Mythen um 1900*, ed. by Katja Schulz and Florian Heesch (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter GmbH, 2009), 45-71, at p. 47. As noted below, this approach to Old Norse literature was the contemporary norm. Frye's popular translation of Oehlenschläger's poem came with a highly reverential prefacing letter dedicating the work to Christian VIII of Denmark; see Adam Gottlob Oehlenschläger, *The Gods of the North, An Epic Poem*, trans. by William Edward Frye (London: W. Pickering, 1845), p. iv.

<sup>200</sup> Theodore M. Andersson notes, 'The dominant focus on the family sagas that has been characteristic of the twentieth century does not represent a forgone consensus but is rather a holdover from a significant shift in

Latin publications of *Gunnlaugs saga* (1775), *Víga-Glúms saga* (1786), *Eyrbyggja saga* (1787), *Njáls saga* (1809), *Laxdæla saga* (1826), and *Kormáks saga* (1832) – certainly a promising start. These volumes were ‘expensive, and never easy to obtain in Britain’, but could still be found in certain library collections.<sup>201</sup> It is likely not a coincidence that the three sagas with which Blackwell dealt in detail were the last three to appear in this series, and it seems probable that he (and Percy) had access to the majority of these texts. (Indeed, Blackwell tells us as much in the case of the 1832 *Kormáks saga*.)<sup>202</sup> The publication of these facing-page Latin translations seems to have had a significant impact on the early instances of translated saga extracts. From histories of the north to early travel journals, such extracts were a popular way to demonstrate a thorough mastery of Scandinavian knowledge, and Blackwell’s inclusion of Scott’s *Eyrbyggja saga* abstract (also based on the text from this series) demonstrated the continuing appetite for such writings. Scott’s translations had been adopted and adapted by a number of early nineteenth-century British seafarers for their accounts of explorations of Snæfellsnes, as is further examined in the next chapter.

Nonetheless, it is worth bearing in mind, as summarised in the previous chapter, that the incidences of Old Norse literature in works prior to Mallet’s 1756 history were limited and, where they occurred, frequently misleading. Works such as Aylett Sammes’s 1676 *Britannia Antiqua Illustrata* – possibly the ‘first substantial work in English to treat Northern Mythology’ – purported to cite authoritative Old Norse sources (Sammes quoted *Hávamál* and included passages of eddaic lore) but these passages came straight out of Latin translations, and in any case the literature itself was frequently vilified.<sup>203</sup> The notion that Old Norse was debasing or corrupting the English language was prevalent. Where Scandinavians or Norsemen appeared in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literature it was almost uniformly as unsavoury characters.<sup>204</sup> Thus, in William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* it is the villainous Scandinavian King ‘Sweno’ who starts the conflict at the play’s opening. Northern tropes abound in the Thane of Ross’s description to King Duncan of Sveinn’s assembled host at Fife: “Where the Norwegian Banners flowt the Skie, / And fanne our people cold. / Norway himselfe, with terrible numbers,

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interest in the nineteenth century’, Theodore M. Andersson, ‘Three Outlooks on the Future of Old Norse-Icelandic Studies’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 69/4 (Fall 1997), 415-17, at p. 416.

<sup>201</sup> Wawn (2002), p. 45; indeed, they provided the source texts for several of the translations discussed in this thesis.

<sup>202</sup> See Percy (1847), p. 321.

<sup>203</sup> Quinn and Clunies Ross (1994), p. 194.

<sup>204</sup> Judy Quinn and Margaret Clunies Ross provide a number of examples, including John Dryden’s 1691 play *King Arthur, or, The British Worthy*, where the main antagonist is one Oswald of Kent – a heathen Saxon King who sacrifices to the Norse gods, and Alexander Pope’s *The Dunciad* III, see Quinn and Clunies Ross (1994), pp. 206-07.

/ Assisted by that most disloyall Traytor, The Thane of Cawdor, began a dismall Conflict.”<sup>205</sup> The Scandinavian element in Ross’s field-report is both fearfully boreal and inherently immoral, siding with traitors and party to rebellion (aspects later adopted by the eponymous protagonist). Shakespeare clearly knew his popular stereotypes; North meant to all foul weather and violence.<sup>206</sup>

From this unpromising start, reception of Old Norse literature in the eighteenth century might appear positively rich. After Mallet published his multi-volume 1756 work, the north of Europe rushed to incorporate northern elements into national literature. In the fields of poetry and drama, the following decades saw such works of northern romanticism as H. W. Gerstenberg’s ‘Gedichte eines Skalden’ (1766); F. G. Klopstock’s ‘Hermanns Schlacht’ (1769); Johannes Ewald’s ‘Rolf Krage’ (1770) and ‘Balders Død’ (1775).<sup>207</sup> Yet these patriotic songs exhibited a naïve enthusiasm, demonstrating the lack of development in academic engagement with the North. As Christine Fell noted in her summary of Old Norse scholarship of the period, there was still negligible source material available and more than a few popular misconceptions, *Northern Antiquities* not excluded: ‘The image of the North,’ Fell writes, was constructed from ‘a fairly slight range of skaldic and Eddic poetry, and of course through mixtures of fact and nonsense on runes, on mythology, on “barbarian” customs from widely read secondary syntheses such as Mallet.’<sup>208</sup> In the case of Mallet’s history, this mixture of fact and nonsense was only made more confusing for English readers by the additional input of two

<sup>205</sup> William Shakespeare, ‘The Tragedy of Macbeth’, in *Mr. William Shakespeare’s Comedies, Histories & Tragedies* (London: Isaac Iaggard & Edward Blunt, 1623), ff. 131-51, at act I, scene II, f. 131. Incidentally, *Macbeth* was the first of Shakespeare’s plays to be translated into Icelandic. Matthías Jochumsson worked on it between 1866 and 1869 before finally completing his translation in 1874; see William Shakespeare, *Macbeth, sorgarleikur eptir W. Shakespeare*, trans. by Matthías Jochumsson (Reykjavík: various, unnamed, 1874). Eiríkur Magnússon strongly criticised Matthías’s translation as being too loose, and tried his own hand at translating, producing *Stormurinn* [‘The Tempest’] in 1885; see William Shakespeare, *Stormurinn*, trans. by Eiríkur Magnússon (Reykjavík: Sigm. Guðmundsson prentari, 1885). The negative reception of this translation, more a literal aid to students than any attempt at poetry, is summed up by Stefán Einarsson in his article on Shakespeare in Iceland: ‘Unfortunately the reviewers were right about the stiffness of Eiríkur Magnússon’s extra-literal translation. No harm was done when he had to give up his planned translation of *The Winter’s Tale* (*Vetraræfintýri*)’, Stefán Einarsson, ‘Shakespeare in Iceland: An Historical Survey’, *ELH*, 7 (1940), 272-85, at p. 281. See also B. Kahle, *Ein Sommer auf Island* (Berlin: Ad. Bodenburger, 1900), p. 212.

<sup>206</sup> Even authors with an obvious predilection for the North have enjoyed playing up to its harsher qualities. Thus, William Morris’s poem ‘Meeting in Winter’ decried, ‘Then the north shall spare us not; / The wide-reaching waste of snow / Wilder, lonelier yet shall grow / As the reddened sun yet falls down’, William Morris, *The Collected Works of William Morris: with Introductions by his Daughter May Morris*, in 24 vols (London: Longmans, Green, 1910-15), vol. VI. *The Earthly Paradise, A Poem*, IV. (1911b), p. 133, just as W. H. Auden’s ‘Journey to Iceland’ posited that the ‘North means to all: “Reject!”’, Wystan Hugh Auden and Louis MacNiece, *Letters from Iceland* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1937), p. 25.

<sup>207</sup> By the latter see *Rolf Krage: Et Sørjespil, i fem Handlinger* (Copenhagen: Nicolaus Møller, 1770); *Balders Død: Et heroisk Syngespil, i tre Handlinger* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1774); and John L. Greenway, ‘The Two Worlds of Johannes Ewald: Dyd vs. Myth in “Balders Død”’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 42/4 (Nov. 1970), 211-30.

<sup>208</sup> Fell (1993), p. 93.

separate editors and translators, carrying with them the combined wisdom (and follies) of a century of academic thought.

Bishop Thomas Percy's *Northern Antiquities* had already negotiated a fine line between subjective scholarship and ideological nationalism long before its mid-nineteenth-century overhaul. As mentioned, Percy's 1770 translation was taken from the French of Paul Henri Mallet, and was itself reissued in 1809 and again in a new edition in 1847 with considerable editing from J. A. Blackwell.<sup>209</sup> Both Blackwell and Percy made it clear that the primary vision for their material was as national (and demonstrably nationalist) history.<sup>210</sup> Their interaction with Old Norse texts such as Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* and the *Íslendingasögur* demonstrates the methods by which traditional oral myths and tales could become part of a divisive national image, as well as the contemporary academic environment encouraging such engagement. Nineteenth-century advocates of romantic-nationalist and ethnic-nationalist ideologies appropriated northern Europe's settlement myths and cultural heritage with increasing zeal.<sup>211</sup> Meanwhile, the ever-expanding field of comparative philology, with its notion of language as the defining characteristic of race, enabled the appropriation of Old Norse literature across Scandinavia, Germany, and Britain.<sup>212</sup>

In the midst of this socio-political melee it is perhaps unsurprising that Blackwell's translations and paraphrases were framed by a confusing medley of conflicting nationalist ideals and faux-scientific reasoning. Editorial changes between issues were not always clearly marked and this was even more the case with the work's initial translation. Identifying editorial bias was thus particularly complicated, as the nineteenth-century reader had to navigate three layers of revisions and at least two of translation to reach their own opinions of the text. Each writer introduced new concepts. With its drive to present Old Norse as a historical asset and

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<sup>209</sup> Percy owned both Mallet's two-volume 1755-56 edition and his seven-volume 1762 second edition, see Thomas Percy, *The Library of Thomas Percy, 1729-1811, Bishop of Dromore* (London: Sotheby & Co., 1969), p. 42. Blackwell actually appears as 'I. A. Blackwell' in his publications and his exact identity is something of a mystery, although there are some excellent theories: Sigrún Pálsdóttir has persuasively put forward the case that he was Joseph Andrew Blackwell, based on material from Bodleian Libr., Oxford. MS. Eng. lett 451 fol. 1-2 and MS. Clar. Dep 12 fol., 106, 125., see Sigrún Pálsdóttir, 'Northern Antiquities og dularfulli ritstjórninn Blackwell', *SAGA: Tímarit Sögufélags*, 44/1 (2006), 65-80, at p. 67.

<sup>210</sup> On Percy and the use of the Middle Ages for British nationalist purposes see Gwendolyn A. Morgan, 'Percy, the Antiquarians, the Ballad, and the Middle Ages', in *Medievalism in England II*, ed. by Leslie J. Workman and Kathleen Verduin (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), 22-32, at p. 22.

<sup>211</sup> 'The settlement of Iceland has often been set in the context of the dream of freedom and equality for all in opposition to monarchical oppression. This romantic attitude is not just a gross simplification of the problem; it must also be seen as entirely wrong in many respects', Njardvik (1978), p. 18.

<sup>212</sup> Hans Aarsleff captures some sense of the attraction of this emerging field when he writes, 'Etymology revealed a providential order, words and their history recorded mankind's moral mission. Philology became another word for philosophy', Hans Aarsleff, 'Language and Victorian Ideology', *The American Scholar*, 52/3 (Summer 1983), 365-372, at p. 365.

draw national characteristics from ancient texts, the much-rewritten *Northern Antiquities* became a model of the often-paradoxical arguments characterising the histories of northern European nations. A concrete settlement myth proved a nation's origin; it made the nation 'ancient and legitimate.'<sup>213</sup> Yet the Old Norse society as presented in Blackwell's text was anything but concrete. Depictions of the distant past of northern Europe blended fact and fiction as a matter of practice and the content of *Northern Antiquities* was no different.

### 3.1. Editorial Intent

*Northern Antiquities*'s three writers had three very different agendas. Frequently, these were at odds and this could make for a confusing read. Even by the time Blackwell had come to the helm it was often a case of two steps forward one step back, as outdated notions regarding the North resisted reconstruction. Fell notes, for example, that Blackwell's attempt to correct Percy and Mallet on the confusion between the infamous incorrect translation of 'curved drinking horns' as 'gold-inlaid skulls of enemies' was not particularly effective.<sup>214</sup> One still finds the poet Matthew Arnold referring to 'gold-rim'd skulls' in his 1855 work 'Balder Dead.'<sup>215</sup> The correct translation was available to Arnold, but either he was unaware of it or he purposefully opted for the more dramatic version (he owned an early edition, so it is difficult to be sure).

A similarly stubborn fallacy could be found in *Northern Antiquities*'s discussion of the figure Óðinn. After loosely setting out the grounds for why such a figure did not exist, the work then proceeded to treat this supposed fore-father of the nations of the north as a fully-realised historical figure; this was done on the fragile supposition that 'Odin' was a cover name for a real (yet equally improbable) Aryan Adam.<sup>216</sup> The name choice was ascribed to the simplicity

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<sup>213</sup> Tom A. Shippey, 'A Revolution Reconsidered: Mythography and Mythology in the Nineteenth Century', in *The Shadow-Walkers: Jacob Grimm's Mythology of the Monstrous*, ed. by Tom Shippey (Arizona: Brepols, 2005), 1-28, at p. 4. Jón Karl Helgason points out that in the nineteenth century most Icelanders saw the sagas as historical sources; Jón Karl Helgason, 'Continuity? The Icelandic Sagas in Post-Medieval Times', in (ed.), *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. by Rory McTurk, revised edn (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2007a), 64-81, at pp. 76-77.

<sup>214</sup> Fell (1993), p.93. The problem was not even discovered until 1839, by Grenville Pigott; Wawn notes that some nineteenth-century scholars 'believed it was part of a Classicist conspiracy to denigrate the old north', (2002), p. 23.

<sup>215</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Poems* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1965), p. 101, l. 14. Arnold was well-read in the works of Mallet, Gray, and Carlyle - see Clyde de L. Ryals, 'Arnold's "Balder Dead"', *Victorian Poetry*, 4/2 (Spring 1966), 67-81, at p. 68.

<sup>216</sup> In the Kearys's novel Alfred proudly reveals his one piece of knowledge about Odin: 'Hengist and Horsa were descended from him - I do know so much', Keary & Keary (1857), p. 9. Three decades later the racist sociology of Julia Clinton Jones's *Valhalla, The Myths of the Norseland* continued Keary's trope of bemoaning the lack of knowledge of these figures of Britain's national origin myth; 'It is much to be deplored that so slight

of those communities he endeavoured to rule. This approach is clearly doubly problematic: firstly, in its tired assumption of mental inferiority of earlier cultures, imposing notions of an undeveloped barbarous mindset onto what historians recognise to have been sophisticated social groups; and secondly, in that it merely displaced the most unlikely aspect of the settlement myth, which was not that there was ever an extant figure called Óðinn, but rather that one single figure could have “fathered” the whole of a genetically “pure” North with no inter-racial integration. And fathered from where? The geographical origins as laid out in *Northern Antiquities* were decidedly suspect. ‘Asgard’ was described as a genuine geographical location. Percy showed scepticism towards the theory. His chapter title read: ‘Of Odin, His *Supposed* Arrival In The North, And The Changes Which He Is *Said To Have* Effected,’ but the chapter nevertheless essentially proceeded to describe a historical figure.<sup>217</sup>

His true name was Sigge, son of Fridulph; but he assumed that of Odin, who was the Supreme God among the Teutonic nations: either in order to pass among his followers for a man inspired by the Gods, or because he was chief priest, and presided over the worship paid to that deity. [...] Sigge, full of his ambitious projects, we may be assured, took care to avail himself of a title so proper to procure him respect among the people he meant to subject.<sup>218</sup>

From these already dubious anthropological origins, the narrative quickly descended into fantasy: ‘Odin, for so we shall hereafter call him, commanded the Æsir, whose country must have been situated between the Pontus Euxinus, and the Caspian Sea. The principal city was Asgard.’<sup>219</sup> *Northern Antiquities* explained that Óðinn became the head of the bloodline for the great nations of the north – but with the reservation that as ‘Óðinn’ was the word for the major deity it may have merely been that all these nations claimed divine genealogy.

The subsequent accounts of the historical Óðinn’s life in Denmark drew extensively on the available mythology. At the time his life was drawing to an end, for example, readers were told that Óðinn assembled those he knew back in Sweden, whereupon:

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a knowledge of Scandinavian Mythology prevails, popularly, with those who boast descent from Hengist and Horsa, and whose pride it is that in their veins flows the blood that long ago thrilled through the bold hearts of the Vikings, descendants of the old Norse Gods’, Julia Clinton Jones, *Valhalla, The Myths of Norseland: A Saga, In Twelve Parts* (San Francisco, CA: Edward Bosqui & Co., 1880), p. 7. Gibbons, a century earlier, had linked the avenging Northerners of Rome’s demise to an historical Óðinn: ‘Our fancy may create, or adopt, a pleasing romance, that the Goths and Vandals sailed from Scandinavia, ardent to avenge the flight of Odin, to break the chains, and to chastise the oppressors, of mankind’, Edward Gibbons, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, abridged edn, ed. by David Womersley (London: Penguin Books, 2005) [original London: Strahan & Cadell, 1776-89, in 6 vols], p. 747.

<sup>217</sup> Percy (1847), p. 79; emphasis is my own.

<sup>218</sup> Percy (1847), pp. 79-80.

<sup>219</sup> Percy (1847), p. 80.

[...] he gave himself nine wounds in the form of a circle with the point of a lance, and many other cuts in his skin with his sword. As he was dying, he declared he was going back to Asgard to take his seat among the other gods at an eternal banquet, where he would receive with great honours all who should expose themselves intrepidly in battle, and die bravely with a sword in their hands. As soon as he had breathed his last, they carried his body to Sigtuna, where, comfortably to a custom introduced by him into the north, his body was burnt with much pomp and magnificence.<sup>220</sup>

Neither Mallet nor Percy felt at liberty to confirm or deny these narratives, but the fact that they were included at all gave them more authority than those of Saxo Grammaticus or the prologue to Snorri's *Prose Edda*, both of which were omitted as unreliable sources.

It was not just that Mallet had originally put together a riotous amalgamation of Norse imagery; the objectivity of his academic motivation was also questionable. First and foremost, he was from royal circles. Mallet's knowledge of Old Norse literature and culture was acquired during his time in Copenhagen, where he was the fellow pupil of the young King Christian VII of Denmark. Mallet's perspective was one of, 'a Professor of French at the Academy of Arts in Copenhagen, working to a commission from the Danish government.'<sup>221</sup> It is not surprising, then, that the Danes often came across as the saviours of European culture in his accounts.<sup>222</sup> Mallet fostered an anti-Roman sentiment, dividing the inhabitants of ancient Europe into two camps. For Mallet it was less of a case of 'what have the Romans done for us' than 'what have the Scandinavians *not* done'. The answer, according to him: very little.

One clear example was Mallet's repeated insistence that the North gave Europe the concept of liberty. He took this as tacit: 'Is it not well known that the most flourishing and celebrated states of Europe owe originally to the northern nations whatever liberty they now enjoy, either in their constitution, or in the spirit of their government?'<sup>223</sup> In this, Mallet was echoing the sentiments of the French philosopher Montesquieu (1689-1755).<sup>224</sup> Montesquieu's *L'Esprit des Lois* (or *On the Spirit of the Laws*), published in 1748, eight years before Mallet's work, had hypothesised that present-day European liberty was a product of bygone

<sup>220</sup> Percy (1847), p. 82.

<sup>221</sup> Wawn (2002), pp. 25-26.

<sup>222</sup> On Mallet's work within the context of early reception of Old Norse in France, see François-Xavier Dillmann, 'Frankrig og den nordiske fortid – de første etaper af genopdagelsen', in *The Waking of Angantyr: The Scandinavian Past in European Culture / Den nordiske fortid I europæisk kultur*, ed. by Else Roesdahl and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1996), 13-26, at pp. 17-19; Malm (1996), pp. 203-10; and Malm (2016), p. 159.

<sup>223</sup> Percy (1847), pp. 57-58. In his revised 1862 *The Races of Men*, Robert Knox described the Saxon or Scandinavian race as 'democrats by their nature, the only democrats on the earth, the only race which truly comprehends the meaning of the word "liberty"', Robert Knox, *The Races of Men: A Philosophical Enquiry into the Influence of Race over the Destinies of Nations*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, revised (London: Henry Renshaw, 1862), p. 46; see also p. 374.

<sup>224</sup> Or, to give him his full title, Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de la Brède et de Montesquieu.

Scandinavian values.<sup>225</sup> Following Montesquieu's radical reading of Scandinavian history, the French image of the barbarous Norseman underwent a dramatic transformation. Suddenly the North was recognised as the font of Christian reinvigoration, chivalry, genetic purity, spiritual reawakening, and many other idealised national characteristics. Historical deeds formerly considered destructive and cruel were now framed as heroic violence, a line of thought readily utilised in nationalist rhetoric.<sup>226</sup> The classic example of the great Romantic ideal, *la liberté ou la mort*, found echoed around the northern nations (consider the Scottish 'Oath of Argyle'), could be shown to be a spiritual descendant of *Krákumál's hlæjandi skal ek deyrja*.<sup>227</sup> This thematic strand, laughing in the face of death, scorning the bounds of pacifism, was ideal for writers of an expansionist, militaristic, nationalist persuasion.<sup>228</sup>

Mallet concurred with Montesquieu's arguments but went further still. He believed that the unchecked Roman yoke would have debased and destroyed every last vestige of civilised community in Europe until all were returned to a barbaric state. It was the interference of the northern nations which prevented such a calamity, and this intervention was not merely good luck. It was preordained fate, a Hegelian model of history:

But nature had long prepared a remedy for such great evils, in that unsubmitting, unconquerable spirit, with which she had inspired the people of the north; and thus she made amends to the human race, for all the calamities which, in other respects, the inroads of these nations, and the overthrow of the Roman empire produced.<sup>229</sup>

<sup>225</sup> On Montesquieu see Flemming Lundgreen-Nielsen, 'Grundtvig's Norse Mythological Imagery – An Experiment that Failed', in *Northern Antiquity: The Post-Medieval Reception of Edda and Saga*, ed. by Andrew Wawn (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1994), 41–67, at p. 43. The Victorian novelist Robert Ballantyne had his narrator take the same stance in the 1869 *Erling the Bold*: 'Liberty, crushed elsewhere under the dead weight of feudalism, found a home in the bleak North, and a rough but loving welcome from the piratical, sea-roving Norsemen', Robert Michael Ballantyne, *Erling the Bold, A Tale of the Norse Sea-Kings* (London: J. Nisbet, 1869; republished Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1874), p. 3.

<sup>226</sup> 'Romantic writers chose to view such aggression in a sufficiently oblique way to enable them to identify virtuous features amidst the mayhem: the Vikings hated cowardice, and were thus compelled occasionally to be cruel', Régis Boyer, 'Vikings, Sagas and Wasa Bread', in *Northern Antiquity: The Post-Medieval Reception of Edda and Saga*, ed. by Andrew Wawn (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1994), 69–81, at p. 74. Boyer later comments that 'the myth of the North in France remains to this day a popular and powerful one – it deserves a fuller study than I shall attempt in this essay. The myth has been sustained by the fact that the French have never tried to clarify what is the North and what is not. We have been content to regard that region as the true home of the mysterious and the other-worldly', Boyer (1994), p. 69.

<sup>227</sup> 'Liberty or death' / 'Laughing I shall die'; see Boyer (1994), p. 74.

<sup>228</sup> Boyer suggests considering this a 'manifestation of what we might call the literary temptation of Romanticism, and perhaps of our own time as well: writers simply refused (and refuse) to seek out reality, preferring to write from within the highly charged world of their vividly coloured dreams', as opposed to a historical reading, which is of course as what Montesquieu and Mallet presented their works, Boyer (1994), p. 75.

<sup>229</sup> Percy (1847), p.58. Percy is once again mirroring Gibbons here – 'it was justly to be dreaded, that so many distant nations would throw off the unaccustomed yoke, when they were no longer restrained by the powerful hand which imposed it', (2005), p. 14.



Thus, even in the chaos left by the removal of Rome, the North persevered thanks to the inbuilt characteristics of its peoples.

In Mallet's work then, Scandinavia gave to Europe (and thus to the world) the concept of liberty, in turn shown to be a natural development of the martial spirit and subsequent preference for death over cowardice, described as a defining feature of the northern races, and exemplified through Old Norse sagas:

“There is on a mountain in Iceland,” says the author of an old Icelandic romance, “a rock so high that no animal can fall from the top and live. Here men betake themselves when they are afflicted and unhappy. From this place all our ancestors, even without waiting for sickness, have departed unto Odin. It is useless, therefore, to give ourselves up to groans and complaints, or to put our revelations to needless expenses, since we can easily follow the example of our fathers, who have all gone by the way of this rock.”<sup>230</sup>

Such bleakly stoic self-sufficiency in Europe's northern saviours was paired with a *Valhöll*-esque eternal passion for fighting. Even in peacetime, Mallet wrote, ‘the resemblance of war furnished out their highest entertainment.’<sup>231</sup> Citing Tacitus to the same end, Percy similarly noted that the Germanic tribes, ‘when not engaged in war, pass their time in indolence, feasting, and sleep. The bravest and most warlike among them do nothing themselves.’<sup>232</sup> Percy believed that the Romans were not able to comprehend the northerners being anything other than inactive and slovenly in their spare time. This, the author claimed, was a gross misunderstanding of the whole situation. Their apparent lack-lustre mentality when not at war was an expression of freedom, it was ‘the badge and noblest privilege of their liberty.’<sup>233</sup>

Furthermore, Mallet posited that this northern liberty was a natural development from the defining features of the Northmen's religious practices, law codes, and climate – principally the latter. For Mallet, the development of liberty could be ascribed to ‘their climate and manner of life, which gave them such strength of body and mind as rendered them capable of long and painful labours, of great and daring exploits.’<sup>234</sup> Physical qualities were held up as the

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<sup>230</sup> Percy (1847), pp. 150-51. The episode in question is found in *Gautreks saga*.

<sup>231</sup> Percy (1847), p. 195.

<sup>232</sup> Percy (1847), p. 195.

<sup>233</sup> Percy (1847), p. 195; ‘Strongly moulded by the hand of nature, and rendered hardy by education, the opinion they entertained of their own courage and strength must have given the peculiar turn to their character. A man who thinks he has nothing to fear, cannot endure any sort of constraint; much less will he submit to any arbitrary authority’, Percy (1847), p. 240.

<sup>234</sup> Percy (1847), p.125; Heidi Hansson argues that these climate-based arguments promoted the notion of a North-South divide in the nineteenth century, presenting ‘the North as masculine and rational and the South as feminine and artistic’, Heidi Hansson, ‘Between Nostalgia and Modernity: Competing Discourses in Travel Writing about the Nordic North’, in *Iceland and Images of the North*, ed. by Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson and Daniel Chartier (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec; and Reykjavík: Reykjavíkur Akadémían, 2011), 255-82, at p. 257). These views of the effect of climate on race were still very much prevalent at the close of the

foundation for modern political ideals. In nineteenth-century philology, the argument of climatic influence on bodily constitution could be extended to encompass linguistic variation. The Scottish historian John Pinkerton (1758-1826), arguing the case for meteorological influence on language development, linked the Picts to the Vikings, noting that with northern nations the severity of the winter forced them to keep their mouths as tightly closed as possible:

This seems a remarkable instance of the effect of climate upon language; for P and W are the most open of the labial letters; and V is the most shut. The former requires an open mouth; the latter may be pronounced with the mouth almost closed, which rendered it an acceptable substitute in the cold clime of Scandinavia, where the people delighted, as they still delight, in gutturals and dentals. The climate rendered their organs rigid and contracted; and the cold made them keep their mouths as shut as possible.<sup>235</sup>

Alongside Mallet's additions, Percy and Blackwell both expanded on this notion of national characteristics, particularly regarding physique and language, being determined by location. The land formed the people; the people formed the nation. Percy's choice of biological terminology such as 'blood' and 'fibres', and faux-biological terms such as 'humours' and 'temperament' added a degree of respectability to proceedings. This was writing which knew to ground its claims in contemporary scientific language. Montesquieu had used a similar explanation to justify the North-South divide back in his 1748 work: 'Accordingly we have since found liberty to prevail in North America, but not in the south.'<sup>236</sup> As Boyer writes, thanks to Montesquieu's theory 'unlike the languid peoples of the sultry South, the bold "barbarians" from the icy North could claim to be "pure",' a distinction carried into the present day in

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nineteenth-century: in 1892 Seymour D. Thompsen wrote to Matthías Jochumsson, 'he conditions exist to make you Icelanders, if not the most intellectual, at least the most scholastic people in the world,' and stressed that the climate was behind this (Lbs. 2808 4to). Julia Clinton Jones's 1880 work also referenced the supposed effects of climate on race, see Jones (1880), pp. 11-12.

<sup>235</sup> Pinkerton (1789), p. I. 354, cited Wawn (2002), p. 76; Wawn describes Pinkerton's theory as 'philological Teutonism with a vengeance, with the old northern and modern nationalist wish fathering the linguistic thought', Wawn (2002), p. 76.

<sup>236</sup> Montesquieu (1748), cited in Percy (1847), p. 125. Sigrún Pálsdóttir (2006) argues that Blackwell was on the fence when it came to the notion of a north-south divide, neither favouring one side nor the other. On the survival of 'Germanic' concepts in modern-day political thought, Maike Oergel suggests that nineteenth-century ideas of the north's inherent alienation from the south are still very much present in English society, as exhibited in parliamentary and public relations with mainland – and particularly southern – Europe. The same patterns of behaviour are at play and as with all ingrained ideologies they endeavour to present themselves as the normal way of life. See Maike Oergel, "'Germania' in England: Functions of the Germanic in English Identity Constructions and British Historical Thinking in the Nineteenth Century', in (ed.), *Germania Remembered 1500-2009: Commemorating and Inventing a Germanic Past*, ed. by Christina Lee and Nicola McLelland (Tempe, Arizona: ACMRS, 2012), 121-36; and Maike Oergel, 'The Redeeming Teuton: Nineteenth-Century Notions of the 'Germanic' in England and Germany', in *Imagining Nations*, ed. by Geoffrey Cubitt (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 75-91.

numerous political pamphlets and fantasy novels alike.<sup>237</sup> The response from *Northern Antiquities* showcased the excellent qualities of the northerners: ‘The bodily strength of the northern warriors kept up in them that courage, that opinion of their own valour, that impatience of affronts and injuries, which makes men hate all arbitrary government and despise those who submit to it.’<sup>238</sup> It is fair to say that Mallet had romantic notions of what the North deserved. His work, in the words of Martin Arnold, was ‘imbued with ideas of the sonorous and disturbing northern sublime’ and fixated on the figure of Rousseau’s ‘noble savage.’<sup>239</sup> In short: it was a work of its time.

In Mallet’s preface – which Percy’s mirrored in many ways – he remarked on the state of northern studies at home and abroad. He was dismayed at the lack of public interest in a North that had so evidently defined modern Europe, remarking, ‘History has not recorded the annals of a people who have occasioned greater, more sudden, or more numerous revolutions in Europe than the Scandinavians, or whose antiquities, at the same time, are so little known.’<sup>240</sup> By Percy’s time the phrase was no longer ‘little known’ but rather ‘wrongly applied’. As such, Percy took it on himself to re-write the contemporary historians of his day, specifically regarding their old division of races (on linguistic grounds) between the banners of Celtic and Teutonic. Percy conceded that rectifying past errors was a formidable task, not to be taken lightly: ‘In the very remote ages, prior to history,’ he explained, ‘one cannot pretend to say what were the distinct bounds or limits of each people. They were, like all other barbarous nations, roving and unsettled.’<sup>241</sup> He discussed the difficulties and the reasons why others had gone awry.<sup>242</sup> On the earlier historical theories of the likes of Keysler and Pelloutier (two of several contemporary historians to whose work he took great exception), Percy remarked that

<sup>237</sup> Boyer (1994), p. 72; ‘Montesquieu’s theories about the relationship of climate to character had become well known: it was the bracing cold of northern Europe which had generated the greater energy exhibited by northern people, whose nerve and sinew, accordingly, far surpassed that to be found amongst the rest of (southern) mankind’, Boyer (1994), p. 71. Thus, Byron could write in his *Don Juan* ‘Happy the nations of the moral North! / Where all is virtue, and the winter season / Sends sin, without a rag on, shivering forth’, George Gordon Byron, *The Complete Works of Lord Byron*, ed. by John Galt (Paris: Baudry’s European Library, A. & W. Galignani & Co, 1837), p. 689, v. 64, ll. 1-3. On the North and associations of coldness see Anka Ryall, ‘In Love with a Cold Climate: Representations of the North in Nineteenth-Century Travel Writing from Scandinavia’, *Journal of Northern Studies*, 8/2 (2014), 121-37.

<sup>238</sup> Percy (1847), p.125.

<sup>239</sup> Arnold (2007), p. 30. On this popular theme see Lars Lönnroth, ‘The Noble Heathen: A Theme in the Sagas’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 41/1 (Feb. 1969), 1-29.

<sup>240</sup> Percy (1847), p.55.

<sup>241</sup> Percy (1847), p. 4.

<sup>242</sup> On the possible excuses for the ancient historians’s frequent errors in assigning geographical boundaries to the early tribes of Northern Europe, Percy remarks that the further back one looked, the more similar people appeared: ‘The more men approach to a state of wild and uncivilised life, the greater the resemblance they will have in manners, because savage nature, reduced almost to a mere brutal instinct, is simple and uniform; whereas art and refinement are infinitely various’, Percy (1847), p. 7.

‘so much learning and ingenuity have scarcely ever been more perversely and erroneously applied, or brought to adorn and support a more groundless hypothesis.’<sup>243</sup> This was naturally a state which Percy attempted to rectify within his own work. He started by clearing up the matter of national claims to Old Norse literature. Logically not *everyone* could claim Old Norse literature as the work of their ancestors. His new order grouped the Anglo-Saxons firmly with the Germans, Belgians, and Scandinavians; the Britons were grouped with the Gauls and the Irish. As far as Percy was concerned, everyone else was of little consequence. With these two families Percy detailed two highly-individual proto-national groups. According to him, these and their emergent nations differed in almost every aspect, being ‘*ab origine* two distinct people, very unlike in their manners, customs, religion, and laws.’<sup>244</sup> As one can clearly observe, Percy’s motives concentrated on resolving what he feared were terrible academic flaws with the present national division of historical peoples. He was primarily concerned with defining races.

Thomas Percy displayed a strong interest in notions of ancestry (particularly his own) and history throughout his wider publications.<sup>245</sup> His personal library contained several works investigating his own family’s past.<sup>246</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross believes it was this ancestral self-interest of *Northern Antiquities* which attracted Percy to consider it for translation. As Clunies Ross notes, Percy ‘constantly draws attention to parallels between the English language and customs and those of medieval Scandinavia,’ to the extent that the English-speaking readers were persuaded of their ‘special affinity with early Norse literature and culture.’<sup>247</sup> Percy had practiced trial-runs of many of his ideas about the north before coming to translate Mallet.<sup>248</sup> His 1763 *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry* is a case in point; here Percy told his readers everything that an attentive reader of Mallet would already know:

The ancient inhabitants of the northern parts of Europe are generally known under no other character than that of a hardy and unpolished race, who subdued all the southern nations by dint of courage and numbers. Their valour, their ferocity, their contempt of

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<sup>243</sup> Percy (1847), p.2.

<sup>244</sup> Percy (1847), p.3.

<sup>245</sup> See for example Thomas Percy, *The Hermit of Warkworth, a Northumberland Ballad, In Three Fits or Cantos* (London: T. Evans, 1782), p. 22.

<sup>246</sup> Percy (1969), p. 12, 32.

<sup>247</sup> Clunies Ross (2001), p. 33.

<sup>248</sup> In preparation for an uncompleted project, his *Ancient English and Scottish Poems*, Percy wrote to George Paton on January 12, 1769, explaining the necessity to preserve and publish works of historical importance: ‘What I chiefly want to recover are those fine old historical songs, which are only preserved in the memories of old people, &c: these are in so perishable a state, that I apprehend it is nearly as much merit to retrieve them from that oblivion which they are falling into, as to compose them at first’, Thomas Percy (1769), cited Vincent H. Ogburn, ‘Thomas Percy’s Unfinished Collection, *Ancient English and Scottish Poems*’, *ELH*, 3 (1936), 183-89, at p. 185.

death, and passion for liberty, form the outlines of the picture we commonly draw of them: and if we sometimes revere them for that generous plan of government which they everywhere established, we cannot help lamenting that they raised the fabric upon the ruins of literature and the fine arts.<sup>249</sup>

Atop the old gnomic saw that barbarians have no books, Percy further argued that the ‘ancient Danes’ were responsible for all the good poetry in the ‘Teutonic race,’ and that Icelandic was the ‘mother’ of the modern Scandinavian languages.<sup>250</sup> He pursued the line of thought that literary form followed ancestry, and provided numerous examples in the form of the five translated passages of poetry: ‘The Incantation of Hervor’; ‘The Dying Ode of Regner Lodbrog’; ‘The Ransome of Egill the Scald’; ‘The Funeral Song of Hacon’; and ‘The Complaint of Harald.’<sup>251</sup> He also provided readers with ‘islandic original’ versions of the texts.<sup>252</sup> These poems would later find their way into the appendix material in his translation of Mallet.

Percy’s personal input, in combination with Mallet’s, created a volume critical of older, antagonistic views of Scandinavian history; Percy found previous scholars too keen to accept the word of early historians such as the Danish Saxo Grammaticus.<sup>253</sup> Thus despite its ideological motives *Northern Antiquities* often came across as highly sceptical and reserved, making the occasional exclamations of national pride even more conspicuous. Percy frequently warned readers against taking the Old Norse sagas at their word, concerned by the mythological flights of fancy, the marvellous, the allegorical, and the fabulous. There was, Percy remarked, ‘a great danger of being sometimes misled.’<sup>254</sup> This danger obviously worried Mallet to a far greater degree, since he was the foremost sceptic of the pack, asking if *any* historical credit

<sup>249</sup> Thomas Percy, *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry Translated from the Islandic Language* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1763), p. i.

<sup>250</sup> Percy (1763), pp. ii-iii.

<sup>251</sup> Percy (1763), pp. viii. Percy’s five extracts found their way into the 1809 edition of *Northern Antiquities*, where they were printed with accompanying Icelandic text, see Thomas Percy, *Northern Antiquities; or, A Description of the Manners, Customs, Religion and Laws, of the Ancient Danes, including those of our own Saxon Ancestors*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: C. Stewart, 1809), pp. 279-328. Episodes of *Egils saga* had been working their way into pieces of reception literature for several years, and *Northern Antiquities* itself contained an interesting translation of the scorn-pole passage from the saga, see Percy (1847), p. 156.

<sup>252</sup> Percy (1763), pp. 85-99. Percy was helped in his linguistic efforts by the Reverend Edward Lye, see Wawn (2002), p. 26.

<sup>253</sup> Percy (1847), pp. 74-75. Percy is not completely against Saxo’s work, rather just despairs at how previous scholars have unthinkingly accepted or dismissed such writers: ‘It will appear pretty extraordinary to hear a historian of Denmark cite, for his authorities, the writers of Iceland, a country cut off, as it were, from the rest of the world, and lying almost under the northern pole. But this wonder, adds Torfeus [one of the earlier historians with whom Percy takes issue], will cease, when the reader shall be informed, that from the earliest times the inhabitants of that island have had a particular fondness for history, and that from among them have sprung those poets, who, under the name of Skalds, rendered themselves so famous throughout the north for their songs, and for the credit they enjoyed with kings and people’, Percy (1847), p. 75.

<sup>254</sup> Percy (1847), p.76.

could be given to literature preserved by such an ignorant people, and gathered through overseas rumours and hearsay.<sup>255</sup> His argument posited that almost all knowledge deriving from Old Norse texts (with the obvious exception of the Icelandic episodes in the *Íslendingasögur*) originally came to Iceland in the form of foreign gossip.<sup>256</sup> Percy put an editorial caution on this notion: the sagas were now understood to a greater extent, he suggested, and were at least as useful as other medieval texts for the purpose of building a coherent picture of the Viking Age. ‘The Icelanders have always taken great care to preserve the remembrance of every remarkable event that has happened not only at home,’ corrected Percy, ‘but among their neighbours the Norwegians, the Danes, the Swedes, the Scots, the English, the Greenlanders, &c.’<sup>257</sup> Old Norse literature had a Europe-wide historical significance.

When J. A. Blackwell took up the task of editing in 1847 he had philological grounds for revision.<sup>258</sup> He urged his readers to familiarise themselves with the works of Rask, Schlegel, Grimm, Arndt, Klaproth, and Bopp. In his notes and essays Blackwell was chiefly concerned with matters of ethnicity (or ‘ethnology’ as he preferred) and the hereditary transition of biological attributes. Blackwell considered this Northern Ethnology to be the logical child of the already-extant fields of anthropology and ‘glossology’ (again, Blackwell’s preferred term for comparative philology): ‘Anthropology having established the existence of distinct races, and glossology the existence of distinct linguistic families, it remained for the higher science of ethnology to ascertain whether the races of the one coincided with the families of the other.’<sup>259</sup> In his preface, he asserted that Percy’s edition(s), far from correcting Mallet’s earlier errors, had appeared at a time when the subject matter was *still* imperfectly known, and the disciplinary boundaries for the study of Old Norse were yet to be decided. Blackwell claimed that, at first, he had merely wished to revise Percy’s work, but on many matters, he had felt the need to intervene and put things right. In particular, Percy’s translation of the *Prose Edda* suffered from being taken from Mallet’s French with dubious assistance from a Latin copy. Mallet himself had used a Latin text from 1665. Neither one worked from an Old Norse version.

By contrast, Blackwell came to the table offering actual knowledge of the original language and contemporary scientific theories on the division of nations. He was frequently

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<sup>255</sup> Percy (1847), pp. 76-77.

<sup>256</sup> ‘We must be sensible that almost all that could be then known in Iceland of what passed in other nations, consisted in popular rumours, and in a few songs which were handed about by means of some Icelandic Skald who returned from thence into his own country’, Percy (1847), p. 77.

<sup>257</sup> Percy (1847), p. 75.

<sup>258</sup> See Wawn (2002), p. 26.

<sup>259</sup> Percy (1847), p. 36. The answer, according to Blackwell, was a resolute ‘yes’.

frustrated with the earlier theories proposed by Mallet and Percy. Little was left unedited. He questioned Percy's grouping of nations and his idea of Britain being twice invaded by the Danes; instead, Blackwell was adamant that the Angles were a Germanic people and not a Scandinavian one (his own terminology for dividing the Western and Northern Germanic tribes).<sup>260</sup> As Blackwell reasoned, the gulf in editorial opinion demonstrated the leaps that philology had taken in Britain since the start of the century:

The fact is, ethnology as a science was too little known in the last century for a writer to make a proper distinction even between races, much less between the different branches of the same race. [...] It is no longer disputed that the Saxon invaders of England belonged to the Lower Germanic, and the Jutes to the Scandinavian branch of the great Teutonic family.<sup>261</sup>

The Angles, meanwhile, 'were a Germanic tribe speaking a language very similar to Old Saxon and Frisic.'<sup>262</sup> Blackwell dismissed the Scandinavian Jutes as a negligible influence. While many of *Northern Antiquities*'s claims went uncontested by Blackwell, he took exception to these twice-erroneous divisions of race, taking the matter of national progression very seriously. Commenting on Percy's preface, Blackwell pondered the future of the mantle of superior racial development which had come to rest momentarily on the two giants of northern Europe: the intellectual node of Germany and the physical peak of England.<sup>263</sup> Here he allowed himself a rare moment of self-congratulatory revelry:

When we turn our attention to a small island on the north-western coast of Europe, we behold a nation, formed by the genial blending of Saxon and Scandinavian tribes, arrived at a height of cosmic prosperity and maritime greatness hitherto unparalleled. Ay 'tis a pardonable vanity to record the fact; England, matchless in the mechanical arts, irresistible in arms, sweeping from the surface of the ocean the fleets of every rival nation that dares dispute her maritime supremacy, is now in possession of that heritage, whose succession we have traced through cognate races, and will, we trust, long retain it by virtue of the law which appears to have regulated its transmission; that it should be held for the time being, by the most energetic tribe of the race to which it had devolved, by the tribe that physiological

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<sup>260</sup> Blackwell changed the subject of the title from 'Danes' – as it had appeared in the 1809 edition, to 'Scandinavians.'

<sup>261</sup> Percy (1847), p.182.

<sup>262</sup> Percy (1847), p.132.

<sup>263</sup> On the ascent of the German nation Percy writes: 'At the present day we find the Germans arrived at the highest point of intellectuality the human mind has hitherto attained, recasting in a Teutonic mould these ancient systems of Hindostantic and Hellenic philosophy, which would have become so intimately inwoven with our whole social existence, that without them, modern civilisation would be but a sensual refinement doomed to inevitable decay', Percy (1847), p. 44.

and psychological qualities rendered the most adapted to make use of it for the development of humanity.<sup>264</sup>

Blackwell was realistically just printing what Percy had already hinted at. In his description of northern races, Percy had characterised them as less susceptible to pain, less tempted by earthly pleasures, less prone to extreme emotions, more self-sufficient, less susceptible to ambition, championing reason above fancy, and caution over heedlessness.<sup>265</sup> These were nothing less than the fantastical sweeping statements of racial profiling. Percy dealt in stereotypes, and labelled them a scientific, academic description of a bloodline.

Percy's explanation for this abundance of positive traits was that northern simplicity, base unintelligence, laid the flagstones for the development of rational and undecorated civilisation: 'By these means was liberty preserved among the inhabitants of Germany and the north, as it were in the bud, ready to blossom and expand through all Europe, these to flourish in their several colonies.'<sup>266</sup> For all the mysticism there was a clear and logical progression in the ideas of *Northern Antiquities*: savage Germans and Scandinavians developed, in their primitive state, a law system dealing largely with concepts of individual liberty and pragmatic physical realism; this in turn led to the foundation of the solid societal norms requisite for civilised peoples. In Percy's mind, and to some extent in Blackwell's, it was thus a short step from axe-wielding ruffians manning long-ships to the pride of Victoria's navy. The evidence of Old Norse texts slotted seamlessly into a 'new chain of events' from which developed, 'The laws, the manners and principles, which have ever since governed so many celebrated nations, whose superiority of genius seems to have called them forth to determine one day the fate of almost all the rest of the world.'<sup>267</sup> Suddenly Blackwell's aura of self-satisfaction does not seem

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<sup>264</sup> Percy (1847), pp. 44-45; Ashurst finds Blackwell's approach here to be indicative of wider nineteenth-century impressions of the Empire and its evolution via global interaction: 'In Blackwell's widely disseminated and influential thinking, then, we find a vigorous expression of Victorian optimism – of the belief in progress – and of Britain's mission, its imperial destiny, as a civilising power. Race is certainly an issue, but the preservation of racial purity is not; rather the introduction of new blood into a ruling people is seen as one of the means by which humanity as a whole is likely to progress', (2009), p. 51. Indeed, the views offered by Blackwell were common to the time, and can be seen espoused in works like the 1850 *The Races of Men* by Robert Knox (1791-1862), and by academic figures such as James Hunt (1833-69), who founded the Anthropological Society of London in 1863, and championed Anglo-Saxons as the pinnacle of racial development. See also Macmaster (2001), p. 14, and Douglas A. Lorimer, 'Theoretical Racism in Late-Victorian Anthropology, 1870-1900', *Victorian Studies*, 31/3 (Spring 1988), 405-30, at pp. 405-06.

<sup>265</sup> 'Being less sensible to pain than the more southern nations, less easily moved by the bait of pleasure, less susceptible of those passions which shake the soul too violently, and weaken it by making it dependent on another's will, they were the less a prey to ambition, which flatters, and intimidates by turns in order to gain the ascendant. Their imagination more constant than lively, their conception more steady than quick, naturally resisting novelties, kept them from falling into those snares out of which they would not have known how to escape', Percy (1847), p. 125.

<sup>266</sup> Percy (1847), p. 126.

<sup>267</sup> Percy (1847), p. 127.



out of place; Percy was evidently content with this premise of ‘pardonable vanity’, writing, ‘One cannot without difficulty quit an object so pleasing.’<sup>268</sup> While *Northern Antiquities* began life as a work of Danish royalist sympathies, by the nineteenth century it was firmly in the hands of the British Empire.

What is clear from the above examples is that English readers seeking out a knowledge of Old Norse mythology and culture had to first negotiate numerous layers of editorial opinion. With *Northern Antiquities* they had the challenging task of navigating three separate lines of nationalist thought along the way.

### 3.2. Presentation: Emerging Themes

*Northern Antiquities* was noteworthy for its confirmation of certain assumed stereotypes such as the brutish and unsophisticated nature of the northern mindset; a sentiment found in the descriptions of both the Old Norse texts and their contextual homeland. Yet the ancient northerners (somewhat paradoxically) appeared the most literate barbarians around. In *Northern Antiquities*, their dramatic shift from peasantry to mastery was ascribed to cultivated literary and public interaction. Percy argued that while the druids of the Celtic peoples treated their faith with a secrecy which shrouded its tenets from the common people, cultivating a degenerative level of obscurity, the mythology of Óðinn, Bragi, and dedicatory lays was the polar opposite of this:

No barbarous people were so addicted to writing, as appears from the innumerable quantity of Runic inscriptions scattered all over the north; no barbarous people ever held letters in higher reverence, ascribing the invention of them to their chief deity, and attributing to the letters themselves supernatural virtues.<sup>269</sup>

Percy considered the range of Old Norse literary material to be an advantageous factor, but his own analysis of the literature was blinkered by contemporary scholarship. The early mythological poems were described as stylistically ‘very enigmatical and figurative, very remote from the common language, and for that reason, grand, but tumid; sublime but obscure’ with everything expressed by ‘imagery, figures, hyperboles, and allegories.’<sup>270</sup> A dramatic

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<sup>268</sup> Percy (1847), p. 127.

<sup>269</sup> Percy (1847), p.14.

<sup>270</sup> Percy (1847), p.237.

mythological cosmos was highly beneficial to a developing state, Percy reasoned, but if the population could not understand it, its purpose was a little unclear. Percy was reluctant to be too admiring, although Blackwell found his approach inappropriate (not least because it overlooked the dramatic distinction between eddaic and skaldic poetry). Furthermore, neither Percy nor Blackwell could conceive of satisfactory models for the Old North's transformation from illiterate barbarians to cultured historians; a process far less improbable when one considered the North's long engagement with oral narratives, a subject overlooked by both editors.

Of the two, Blackwell came closer to productive literary analysis. Defining eddaic poetry, he divided it into six separate categories of which one he termed 'The Mythic-Ethnologic'. This category, he explained, contained but one poem: 'the *Rígs-mál*,' which detailed as allegory 'the origin of the different races, or, more properly speaking, castes, located in Scandinavia at the period it was composed.'<sup>271</sup> In Blackwell's eyes, *Rígs-mál* provided a portrait of early Scandinavian social structure, complete with class division. Blackwell recommended the poem for British readers interested in studying the development of northern political ideas as applied to their own society:

The *Rígs-mál* furnishes a striking proof of the aristocratic spirit that prevailed in Scandinavia at a very early period of its history, and we should recommend its attentive perusal to those writers who, allowing a tolerable free scope to their imaginative faculties, expatiate on the marvels which, according to their notions, have been wrought by the influence of a Scandinavian democratic element, transfused in the veins of the phlegmatic Saxon.<sup>272</sup>

There are two points of interest here. Firstly, Blackwell assigned an unusual amount of ethnological credit to a mythological poem, particularly as he himself categorised it as an allegory, and therefore a work of fiction. Secondly, he missed the definition of 'democratic'

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<sup>271</sup> Percy (1847), p.365. Eiríkur Magnússon argued for exactly the opposite reading of the poem: the author 'was not working out any serious genealogical statement. The whole was a poetical conceit, not intended for serious analysis', Eiríkur Magnússon, 'Edda', *Saga Book*, 1 (1897), 219-39, at p. 223 [reissued in *Saga Book*, 23 (1992), 317-37].

<sup>272</sup> Percy (1847), p. 367. Robert Jamieson was a follower of such a reading; Jamieson saw the poem as a realistic depiction of Scandinavian society, divided into an early class system: 'It is deserving of much more attention, in an historical point of view, than it has hitherto met with, as it gives, in a few short lines, a complete picture of the manners, dress, education, pursuits, and habits of life, of our old forefathers', Jamieson, in Robert Jamieson, Henry Weber, and Walter Scott, *Illustrations of Northern Antiquities, from the Earlier Teutonic and Scandinavian Romances; Being an Abstract of the Book of Heroes, and Nibelungen Lay; with Translations of Metrical Tales, from the Old German, Danish, Swedish, and Icelandic Languages; with Notes and Dissertations* (Edinburgh: John Ballantyne and Co.; and London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1814), p. 444; see also Clunies Ross (1998), p. 200. Another notable supporter was the Reverend Frederick Metcalfe, in his *The Saxon and the Norseman, or a plea for the study of Icelandic conjointly with Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: [printed for private circulation], 1876), p. 43.

that most Icelanders would hold. Blackwell's version included both the aristocracy and a caste system. The former he actually listed as an inherent trait of the Teutonic race – specific to the nations of the Scandinavian branch.<sup>273</sup> This approach was characteristic of the text as a whole: over-dramatic close-reading of religious or mythological notions leading to generalisations on northern stereotypes. These generalisations were subsequently explained via nineteenth-century science and social constructions in order to promote nationalist claims.

A further example is the consideration of the Old Norse creation myth. Percy remarked that the northern creation narrative bore striking similarities to those of other early societies, but that it was in the idiosyncratic elements of the Old Norse myth that national traits could be discerned. In those alterations, Percy wrote, was 'the same spirit of allegory, the same desire of accounting for all the phenomena of nature by fictions, which has suggested to other nations the greatest part of the fables with which their theology is infected.'<sup>274</sup> Percy saw the theology as wholly fictitious and melodramatic but nevertheless artistic in its own way; Blackwell suggested that the characteristic coarse nature of the entire system was a ploy to craft a hardened society fit to take the reins of history and to invigorate the lesser neighbouring races, and employed a spectrum of faux-scientific racial terminology ('invigorate', 'blending', 'cognate') to back up his convictions. As Percy's had, Blackwell's explanation of Old Norse mythology rested not merely on the spirit of the literature but on the very nature of the people themselves. This spirit was characterised by a 'mode of thinking and writing peculiar to a simple and gross people, who were unacquainted with any rules of composition' but who nevertheless possessed a vivid imagination, 'despising or not knowing the rules of art.'<sup>275</sup> He used this as a precursor to proclaiming that the mythology demonstrated a clear expression of affinity with nature and through this a deep-seated understanding of liberty. The circle of logic was complete. The reader's understanding of the behavioural tropes of the northerners was created from such hyper-dramatic renditions of literature. As time progressed, *Northern Antiquities* demonstrated, the same narratives impressed their artistic and libertarian values onto an innately strong and pragmatic people. The poetry, mythology, and even the early law codes of Scandinavia reflected the 'genius of a nation' and along with religion could act as a 'faithful mirror' in which one could observe the defining spirit of the North.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Percy (1847), p. 367.

<sup>274</sup> Percy (1847), p. 99.

<sup>275</sup> Percy (1847), p. 99.

<sup>276</sup> Percy (1847), p. 122.

### 3.3. The Application of Idea(l)s

In a later publication with similar ideas, the third volume of James S. Stallybrass's *Teutonic Mythology* (translated from the German of Jacob Grimm), readers were informed of two essential points to keep in mind when considering Old Norse and German mythological texts: 'First, that the Norse mythology is genuine, and so must the German be; then, that the German is old, and so must the Norse be.'<sup>277</sup> Similarly to the arguments espoused by Mallet, Percy, and Blackwell, Stallybrass's text displayed a nationalist incentive to discover cultural ties between the writer's own nation and a heroic antiquity. The philosophical and philological thought of the day suggested that this antiquity, displayed with panache in Old Norse literature, could be successfully linked with Germanic and British history. One would therefore expect at least Percy and Blackwell to demonstrate an enthusiastic acceptance of Old Norse; what readers actually encountered were exclamations of frustration and scepticism.

For Percy, the Old Norse material too often presented a terrible confusion of ideas representing a backward people buried in ignorance.<sup>278</sup> Blackwell nominally disagreed but could not help but despair at the evidence of superstition in the northern peoples. On the use of runes and runic magic, Blackwell and Percy could only blame the Old Norse literature for putting nonsensical ideas into their ancestors's heads. The behaviour was characteristic, they hastened to explain, of all nations in their early stages of 'simplicity and ignorance', that period in a nation's history which, 'prejudice makes us regret, and wish that the arts had never corrupted their primeval innocence.'<sup>279</sup> Percy let it rest there. The expansion of science and Christianity to the northern lands had expunged such ludicrous beliefs; 'Superstition' he remarked, 'has faded and vanished before its growing light.'<sup>280</sup> Blackwell was not entirely convinced, having reservations about the totality of this change. He worried that the earlier foolishness found in the literature might be indicative of an ignorance still extant in the far reaches of the North, something akin to a racial infection which might undermine all the

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<sup>277</sup> James Steven Stallybrass (trans.), *Teutonic Mythology*, 4 vols (London: George Bell & Sons, 1882), p. ix.

<sup>278</sup> Percy (1847), p. 182.

<sup>279</sup> Percy (1847), p. 227.

<sup>280</sup> Percy (1847), p. 227. Percy argued that over time new civilised principles replaced physical hardships: 'Such was the effect of Christianity in the north, an event which, considered only in a philosophical light, should be ever regarded as the dawn of those happy days which were afterwards to shine out with superior splendour' Percy, (1847), p. 241. According to *Northern Antiquities*, the exact causes of the transition from primitive peoples to educated civilisations were threefold: 'Restlessness,' particularly strong in the northern peoples, encouraged them to strive for better; a change of climate, allowing for more free time and relaxation; and communication through trade and religion, which brought with it 'new arts, manners, and opinions', Percy (1847), p. 243.

positive national derivations from Old Norse literature.<sup>281</sup> This difference in approach was particularly notable in the presentation of Snorri's *Prose Edda*. In the notes to Percy's 1809 version he pointed out by way of an excuse that early nations shared a widespread level of fancy in their historical and religious literature; it was not just the Norsemen who blended history and myth in order to create the perfect origin story, in fact, 'all the ancient nations of Europe describe their origin with the same circumstances.'<sup>282</sup> While this might have been enough for Percy, Blackwell found the unscholarly mixture of fact and obvious fiction to be quite frankly embarrassing. He turned his nose up at Mallet's and Percy's notes and relegated them to the back of the book.

Further editorial embarrassment can be detected behind the fact that in all three editions of *Northern Antiquities* the translation of the *Edda* itself was presented minus the prologue and epilogue.<sup>283</sup> As an explanation, Blackwell wrote, 'We have not disfigured our pages by reproducing these absurd productions, which, it is needless to say, throw not the least light on the subject they were intended to elucidate.'<sup>284</sup> Harsh words from Blackwell, but he was not alone. Percy too called them 'utterly worthless' dissertations tacked on to a genuine work of literature – meritless fancies wherein the pagan gods of Rome, Greece, and the North were muddled together with elements of Christianity in a misguided attempt at assimilation.<sup>285</sup> Clearly something about Snorri's style was not to their liking. Modern editions include the preface by default. The choice not to demonstrate that these writers saw the *Prose Edda* not as a piece of literature whose merits were to be considered by the reader but as evidence of ancient cultural worth. That considered, they wanted to present it in the best possible light for

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<sup>281</sup> Percy (1847), p. 227.

<sup>282</sup> Percy (1847), p. 509. On Old English variants on the origin myth see Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

<sup>283</sup> In the 1847 edition one can note the appearance of the terms 'race' and 'nation' in the translation, as in the passage concerning the Frost-Giants: "Tell me," said Gangler, "what was the state of things ere the races mingled, and nations came into being." Here one sees an example of how the vocabulary of nationalism worked its way into translated texts. In his account of saga translation into English, the scholar John Kennedy notes that translations unintentionally capture something of the age in which they are produced, holding up a mirror with which one can observe the translator's society: 'Translations, and whatever editorial apparatus is associated with them, reveal how individual translators regarded the texts they translated, and what they expected their audience to gain from reading their handiwork. In a real sense, each and every translation is an interpretation of the Icelandic text on which it is based', Kennedy (2007), pp. 4-5. Passages such as the above serve to confirm this. Combined with features such as tracing royal northern lineage back to a historical Óðinn figure, this method of translation created an ideal body for national claims to legitimacy. As discussed above, this practice also occurs in the sagas, see for example chapter one of *Flóamanna saga*, which provides a genealogy from Haraldr 'Fine-Hair' all the way back to Óðinn, see *Flóamanna saga*, in *Harðar saga, Íslensk fornrit XIII.*, ed. by Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1991), 229-327, at p. 271.

<sup>284</sup> Percy (1847), p. 397.

<sup>285</sup> Percy (1847), p. 378.

an expectant British readership, which meant removing aspects which did not fit their pre-established notions.

Percy commented in his preface that just as, ‘Truth is uniform and simple, so error is most irregular and various.’<sup>286</sup> With its threefold intentions and confused ideologies *Northern Antiquities* was undoubtedly a showcase of irregular and various opinions. Nevertheless, one should not develop the impression that Mallet, Blackwell, and Percy failed in their editorial duties. *Northern Antiquities* was still an impressive achievement, some five-hundred and seventy-eight pages of early inter-disciplinary Old Norse scholarship. It contained both mythological material and numerous saga extracts, and each of its authors contributed something of their own time to the work. Each possessed his unique doubts of the subject material, each had his own sceptical thoughts, each his own flights of fancy. Just as in modern-day scholarship, the value of the Old Norse texts as source material was variably questioned. There was often a definite sense of the texts as authoritative – note Blackwell’s mention on the opening page of Mallet’s honoured position with regards to education. *Northern Antiquities* was surprisingly cautious regarding its view of the past – more so than one might expect. Its writers did not simplistically opt for the first source and take that as a given. One notes a preference for geographical proximity (northern historical sources being considered more favourably than their southern commentaries) but nevertheless this did not automatically promote writers such as the Danish Saxo Grammaticus to a state of unassailable credibility.<sup>287</sup> Instead, the pros and cons of the literature of Old Norse as critical sources were considered in detail: on the one hand they were seen as genuine medieval texts, on the other hand the author considered just how this information came from the far reaches of the northern seas and what transformations it may have undergone.

Ultimately the writers used this material for the same goal: linking English history and culture with an exciting and newly-appreciated body of literature. For Percy and Blackwell, England’s greatest possession was the momentary heritage of greatness.<sup>288</sup> So far, this chapter has charted their interest in racial characteristics drawn from this newly-translated mythological material through their arguments on the classification and sub-division of peoples. Furthermore, it has identified recognisable stereotypes promoted by Mallet, Percy and Blackwell, such as the harsh, crude character of the North and its people which was remarkably the origin of unparalleled literary engagement and social liberties.

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<sup>286</sup> Percy (1847), preface.

<sup>287</sup> See footnote 253, above.

<sup>288</sup> Percy (1847), pp. 44-45.

Through these two strands of characterisation, supported by evidence from the Old Norse texts, *Northern Antiquities* ascribed to the northern races both a propensity for violence and a sense of gentlemanly conduct, combining defining features of the ‘noble savage’ – a popular concept in nineteenth-century Britain, although more than a little patronising when applied to its Scandinavian and Germanic neighbours. The first of these, the North’s affinity with violence, was demonstrated through tales of feats of immense strength in battle and an all-round physical nature:

Whoever attempts to delineate the manners of the ancient inhabitants of the north, will find their love of war and passion for arms amongst the most characteristic and expressive lines of the portrait. Their prejudices, their customs, their daily occupations, their amusements, in short every action of their lives, were all impressed with this passion.<sup>289</sup>

Every small detail of the northern character was imbued with warlike qualities. When Blackwell considered the social structures of northern life, violence was central to his calculations. The Northmen’s religion was shaped by it. Their free time was spent emulating it. Their foreign policy knew no other aspect. On becoming an adult, according to Percy, young Scandinavians were each given a sword, buckler, and lance, and officially ‘became a member of the state’ before they could join the wider martial family.<sup>290</sup> National identity went hand in hand with military nature.

The second recognisable conclusion from Blackwell and Percy’s characterisation of the Northmen was vaguer but essentially a peculiar combination of gentlemanly conduct, heroism, and personal independence. An example is the treatment of women. In comparison to the ‘Asiatics and more southern nations,’ Scandinavians were reportedly not overtaken by bouts of lust to the same extent; the northern nations ‘did not so much as consider the other sex as made for their pleasure, as to be their equals and companions, whose esteem, as valuable as their other favours, could only be obtained by constant attentions, by generous services, and by a proper exertion of virtue and courage.’<sup>291</sup> This image may not have convinced the classicists of Greece and Rome, whose supporters held the northerners as barbarous, but for Percy and Blackwell juxtaposition of ferocious nature with fair and equal conduct was a logical product of martial liberty. This, Blackwell argued, fed directly into modern British gentlemanly

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<sup>289</sup> Percy (1847), pp. 194-95.

<sup>290</sup> Percy (1847), p. 136.

<sup>291</sup> Percy (1847), p. 199.

behaviour.<sup>292</sup> The imagined northerners of the nineteenth century were thus perhaps not overly historical but they were nevertheless well-defined. A strong body fixated on warlike matters and a strong mind engaged with the philosophies of liberty combined to form idealised ancestors. The legacy of eighteenth-century reception of eddaic tradition, partially updated for the nineteenth-century readership, was finding a target audience in the new context of contemporary ethnology.

### 3.4. Blackwell's Saga Extracts

As noted above, a central feature of *Northern Antiquities* was Blackwell's adaption and manipulation of earlier impressions of the northern nations. This study has also noted that in Blackwell's 1847 edition, using evidence from Old Norse poetry and building on the previous arguments of Mallet and Percy, he ascribed to the northern races two main qualities: essentially consisting of a propensity to violence and a deeply-held reverence for autonomy. Yet for British readers this image was almost entirely constructed from eddaic material and early histories, with little or no reference to the sagas.<sup>293</sup>

The reason for this was that Percy was highly dubious of Old Norse sagas as a creditable object of study; Mallet was even more so.<sup>294</sup> Yet where Percy had seen merely a 'gross medley, in which we can at present distinguish nothing very certain,' Blackwell believed that the sagas should for the most part be trusted as reliable sources, at least to the same extent as other documents from their time.<sup>295</sup> Percy was relatively complimentary of Iceland and its medieval inhabitants, writing that 'the reader has doubtless by this time observed that we are indebted to [the Icelanders] for almost all the historical monuments of the northern nations now

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<sup>292</sup> All three writers of *Northern Antiquities* supported the idea of nations as 'evolving' (to use a problematic word) entities with numerous potential developmental paths. Percy's conclusion struck this tone characteristically, proclaiming, 'The face of Scandinavia changes daily. It already shines with somewhat more than borrowed lights. Time produces strange revolutions! Who knows whether the sun will not one day rise in the north?', Percy (1847), p. 243.

<sup>293</sup> As Aunt Margaret cautions in the Kearys's children's tale, 'If we go on talking too long we shall begin to fancy that everything may be explained by Northern Mythology', Keary & Keary (1857), p. 63.

<sup>294</sup> Kennedy notes the temporary nature of this perception. By the end of the nineteenth century the *Íslendingasögur* would have come to be seen as the most reliable and anthropologically-interesting texts in the Old Norse canon: 'The predominance of *Íslendingasögur* among English translations probably owes much to the perception that many of what are considered to be the most profound and insightful works – *Brennu-Njáls saga*, *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, and *Laxdæla saga* – are included in this genre', Kennedy (2007), p. 15.

<sup>295</sup> Percy (1847), p. 83.



remaining.<sup>296</sup> He praised their heroism and their hardy composition, which afforded them both a ‘violent hatred for arbitrary power’ and a resistance to a ‘rude climate and the perils of a seafaring life.’<sup>297</sup> But for Percy, as a scholar of the late eighteenth century, Old Norse literature meant primarily poetry – whether heroic or mythological. The sagas were largely an unknown.

Indeed, much of the common wisdom of the nineteenth century regarded the sagas as rather problematic, particularly owing to their inclination toward the supernatural and the alarming period between the actual events described and the story being committed to vellum. Nevertheless, Blackwell consistently defended them as historical sources, protesting that previous scholarship held them to unreasonable standards: ‘We should be satisfied when the author’s statements and opinions, taken as a whole, are sufficiently trustworthy to enable us to mark the principle traits in the national character of a people.’<sup>298</sup> Since the question of sagas as historical sources is one which has seen a great deal of scholarly attention in the last fifty years, it is interesting to note that this is not just a modern concern.<sup>299</sup> Blackwell considered in great detail the gap in time between the events in the tales and their composition. Though clearly this caused him some consternation, he decided in the end that the best course for academics was to proceed with caution, advising ‘a considerable degree of scepticism’ in the study of the texts.<sup>300</sup> Nevertheless, he viewed many of the main sagas such as *Njáls saga* and *Kormáks saga* as being essentially correct as far as historical, factual documents could be.<sup>301</sup> Readers were informed that the sagas ‘bear internal evidence of being trustworthy records of the periods to which they severally refer’.<sup>302</sup>

The statements of one Saga are also frequently corroborated by those of another, and the Danish literati of the present day who have subjected these ancient documents to a critical examination, regard upwards of a hundred of them to be fully entitled to the claim of historical authenticity.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Percy (1847), p. 237; some of Percy’s compliments would not have pleased nineteenth-century Icelandic nationalists: ‘While they were heathens, the Icelandic annalists were always deemed the best in the north’, (1847), p. 237.

<sup>297</sup> Percy (1847), pp. 190, 281.

<sup>298</sup> Percy (1847), p. 309-10; His comments echoed Scott’s views on the matter, which were laid out at the end of the book complete with the wider implications pertaining to Britain. As discussed below, Scott was a strong voice in favour of a “melting-pot theory”, emphasising that modern Britain had necessarily been constructed from numerous foreign elements.

<sup>299</sup> See, for example, Thomas A. DuBois, ‘Ethnomemory: Ethnographic and Culture-Centred Approaches to the Study of Memory’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 85/3 (Fall 2013), 306-31.

<sup>300</sup> Percy (1847), p. 311.

<sup>301</sup> Percy (1847), p. 311.

<sup>302</sup> Percy (1847), p. 310.

<sup>303</sup> Percy (1847), p. 310-11.

Blackwell's attitude, his will to believe, reflected the extent to which contemporary scholars were prepared to go to authenticate possible material toward a national origin myth.<sup>304</sup> The mention of the Danish literati should alert one to the fact that *Northern Antiquities* was, on a number of levels, a pro-Danish history of Europe. Denmark was at this point still one of the major powers of Europe (even after a series of disastrous military defeats at the start of the century) and held something of a monopoly on Icelandic literature. Mallet's Danish education has been referred to already, but Blackwell too owed a good deal of his knowledge to the Danish, since both his source texts and reference materials came from the aforementioned 'Danish literati'. Considering the mid-nineteenth-century hostilities between the Danes and their Prussian neighbours, it is unsurprising that the new revised *Northern Antiquities* made a point of distinguishing between the Scandinavian and the Germanic.

Defining who had a claim to Old Norse literature was a key task for Blackwell's saga extracts. Mallet had seen the race divide as a basic dichotomy, with the Celtic people on one side and the Teutonic on the other. Percy had grouped the Anglo-Saxons along with the Germans and Scandinavians, while the Britons, Gauls and the Irish made up a separate branch. In early nineteenth-century academia the common grounds for the Northern European race divide were those set down by Tacitus. The theory saw the Germanic and Scandinavian races as two similar but separate entities, connected by the overall term of 'Teutonic' peoples. As Blackwell explained to his readers, this theory posited that Germanic tribes were groups where, 'Men were distinguished for their courage and love of justice, the women for their chastity and conjugal affection' while the Scandinavians were a positive force of 'primitive simplicity.'<sup>305</sup> The sagas, Blackwell argued, demonstrated that this basic division was completely unsupported.

Part of the misapprehension could be explained by authorial approach, a point on which Blackwell praised saga authors highly over classical writers such as Tacitus:

The Sagaman relates the actions of his fellow-citizens without attempting to draw a single conclusion from the facts stated. Tacitus, from hearsay and the few personal observations he was enabled to make among a people whose language was totally unknown to him, constructed a brilliant theory of primæval virtue as a contrast to the vices which civilisation had necessarily introduced among the Romans.<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> Tom Shippey notes of the period that 'the nations of Europe were becoming increasingly interested, and anxious, about their own origins, and were increasingly ready to fund research which would prove themselves ancient and legitimate', (2005), p. 4.

<sup>305</sup> Percy (1847), p. 311.

<sup>306</sup> Percy (1847), p. 312.

As far as Blackwell saw it, the situation was a little ironic: the profiling of the North stemmed from a text which was in reality a satire about what Rome was not, rather than a history of what the North was - not a fact the foremost northern philologists would have readily acknowledged. As Blackwell put it: 'The Sagaman, in a word, dealt with every-day facts, with sober reality; Tacitus with theatrical fiction.'<sup>307</sup> In fact, the editor was insistent that those who wanted anything other than hard fact should stop reading and seek out Tacitus instead.<sup>308</sup>

In Blackwell's eyes, the Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons were common ancestors of the Teutonic race, but in comfortably separate branches. Yet the "them and us" mentality was from a specifically Danish angle. Blackwell's key source on the sagas was the Danish theologian and historian, professor Peter Erasmus Müller (1776-1834). Müller had studied in Copenhagen and spent time touring academic institutions in Germany and was particularly open to concurrent theories of the inequality of nations, and these theories featured prominently in his multi-volume *Sagabibliothek* (1817-20), a work cited at great length by Blackwell:

The island itself [Iceland], that has little else to offer than fire and ice, would appear to other nations to be of importance only as a place of banishment. But this island possessed in the ninth and tenth centuries two inestimable treasures – civil liberty and security. The boldest Northmen were thus induced to seek refuge there, and for four hundred years it flourished as a free state.<sup>309</sup>

Under Blackwell's editorial pen, Müller proceeded to describe Iceland as the 'perfect commonwealth.'<sup>310</sup> He explained that the nation-state led to an interest in autonomous rights, particularly individual freedom. This meant in turn that the Icelanders were fascinated by all independent agents, whatever their nationality: 'The Sagaman was in this manner the narrator of everything that happened in the north.'<sup>311</sup> The consequence of this, in the eyes of Müller and Blackwell, was that Iceland became the 'foster-mother of northern history' and in turn the Icelandic sagas held the secrets to this exalted position.<sup>312</sup>

Müller's commentary on the sagas's appeal to the nations of northern Europe was indicative of international opinion on Old Norse literature in the mid-nineteenth century. For those attempting to study the genetic build of their own nation, the sagas were invaluable:

But if the Sagas that relate to the domestic occurrences of Iceland serve to elucidate the history of northern heathenism, and to show its predominating spirit, they will, for the

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<sup>307</sup> Percy (1847), p. 312.

<sup>308</sup> Percy (1847), p. 312.

<sup>309</sup> Müller (1817-20), trans. Percy (1847), p. 387.

<sup>310</sup> Müller (1817-20), trans. Percy (1847), p. 387.

<sup>311</sup> Müller (1817-20), trans. Percy (1847), p. 387.

<sup>312</sup> Müller (1817-20), trans. Percy (1847), p. 388.

same reason, acquire an importance, not only for Britons, in whose veins there flows so much Scandinavian blood, but also for most of the other European nations.<sup>313</sup>

It was a popular opinion. Blackwell subscribed with relish. While the intellectual Germans and physically-strong British enjoyed their time in power, the characters of the sagas were a curiosity from which he and the historians of numerous nations could pick and choose national traits. Njáll's heroism in the face of death, a scene convincingly rendered in Blackwell's heroic diction, was one such moment. Here was evidence of the bravery and moral fortitude of the old Icelanders, traits passed on to Blackwell's British readers:

"I will not stir," cried Njáll, "for I am an old man incapable of avenging my sons, and with dishonour I will not live."

"And I," said Bergthora, "when a young woman, plighted my troth to Njáll that his fate should be mine, and that troth shall be kept unbroken."

She then said to Kári's son, "Thee shall they carry out, thou must not be burnt."

"Thou didst promise me, my dear grandmother," answered the child, "that we should never part so long as I wished to remain with thee, and methinks it is much better to die with thee and Njáll, than to live with those people."<sup>314</sup>

As one of the longer passages which can more or less be seen as a direct translation (regardless of quality, but as opposed to a paraphrase) of the original Old Norse, it is easy to see why this scene in particular appealed to Blackwell. The strength of Britain's national and international integrity depended on the notion of grandchildren as brave and loyal as Kári's son Þórðr.

When it came to analysis of the sagas themselves, Blackwell's readers had little back-up material to go on with the selected passages. All three (*Njáls saga*, *Laxdæla saga*, and *Kormáks saga*) had appeared as facing-page Old Norse and Latin translation editions at the start of the century but there were no English translations. *Njáls saga* would be the first to get the English language treatment with George Dasent's 1861 translation *The Story of Burnt Njal, or Life in Iceland at the End of the Tenth Century*. *Laxdæla saga* would receive poetic attention from William Morris in 'The Lovers of Gudrun' as part of *The Earthly Paradise*, 1868–1870, but was only published as a complete translation by Muriel Press in the year 1899.<sup>315</sup> *Kormáks saga* had to wait until the twentieth century for its first English translation with William Gershom Collingwood and Jón Stefánsson's 1902 *The Life and Death of Cormac the Skald*.

<sup>313</sup> Müller (1817–20), trans. Percy (1847), p. 389.

<sup>314</sup> Percy (1847), p. 343. Blackwell's rendition of personal names is particularly impressive for the period; he is one of the few Victorians writing on Njáll to spell the Icelandic name correctly.

<sup>315</sup> See Kunz (1994). In fact, Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon had produced a full copy of *Laxdæla saga* during their early Old Norse translation sessions and intended to publish this as part of the 'Saga Library' series but it was never released to public readership. See Linda Julian, 'Laxdæla Saga and 'The Lovers of Gudrun': Morris' Poetic Vision', *Victorian Poetry*, 34/3 (Autumn 1996), 355–71; and Oscar Maurer, 'William Morris and Laxdæla Saga', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 5/3 (Autumn 1963), 422–37.

Readers of Blackwell's edition of *Northern Antiquities* therefore had no English copies of these sagas to which to refer. Blackwell's summaries were largely unchallenged and unchallengeable.

With this in mind, it is easy to see how Blackwell's ideas could have gathered supporters. He claimed to be merely presenting texts which told volumes in themselves: 'In giving this sketch we must let the sagas speak for themselves,' he began the third chapter of additional material for *Northern Antiquities*.<sup>316</sup> Blackwell informed readers that his intention regarding the extracts was to provide a commentary on the 'laws that define conjugal rights and regulate the intercourse between the sexes,' and indeed his method was largely to chart the treatment of women and the processes of cross-familial legal disputes in the saga age via selected episodes of the sagas themselves.<sup>317</sup> Blackwell's literary review of his three extracts took as tacit the correlation between saga characters and the Scandinavian races:

The graphic sketches which they have themselves given of their social existence, produce on the whole, an unfavourable impression. The worst traits of the ancient Scandinavian character – craftiness, remorseless cruelty, a spirit of sanguinary revenge, perfidy, malice, slander, recklessness regarding the lives and property of others – are, in fact, everywhere but too conspicuous; though we also find the Scandinavian energy, valour, enterprise, love of independence, and a few other redeeming traits, that render the picture somewhat less sombre.<sup>318</sup>

That is to say, Blackwell interpreted the morality (or in this case the lack of it) of the characters as being indicative, a direct reflection, of the national temperament of Icelanders. The textual evidence was, for him, scholarly evidence suited for what we might now term "ethnic profiling."<sup>319</sup> And while Blackwell had openly praised the saga narrator's ability to refrain from subjective commentary, he himself had no such scruples.

Blackwell was open in his dislike of many of the saga characters, and not just the antagonists. His tone varied from apologetic to cynical; 'The manners of a semi-barbarous people,' he told readers, 'are certainly not so attractive as the polished refinement of modern civilisation.'<sup>320</sup> In his *Kormáks saga* summary Blackwell stressed the unsuitability of the saga's protagonist:

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<sup>316</sup> Percy (1847), p. 310.

<sup>317</sup> Percy (1847), p. 309.

<sup>318</sup> Percy (1847), p. 361.

<sup>319</sup> 'Ethnic profiling,' also encountered under the term 'racial profiling,' is the practice of using perceived national or racial stereotypes to make generalised assumptions about other people, rather than considering them to be individuals capable of a variety of personalities.

<sup>320</sup> Percy (1847), p. 310.

Kormak, we must presume, was one of the most celebrated Skalds of the tenth century, though his compositions, if we may judge by the sixty or seventy strophes that are attributed to him, were equally as devoid of true poetic genius as those of the other *verse smiths* – we can use no better epithet to designate the generality of these northern Skalds – who, in that rude age, hammered out their rhapsodical ideas in the form of alliterative verse.<sup>321</sup>

Possibly on account of this animosity, the editor did not present the bulk of Kormákr's poetry. In a similar show of editorial licence, characters were introduced with wider character generalisations. The description of Kormákr's brother is a classic example; from '*Þorgils var hljóðlyndr ok hægr*' of the Old Norse text, Blackwell gave his readers: 'His brother, who appears to have been very much attached to him, was, unlike the generality of his countrymen, of a mild and taciturn disposition.'<sup>322</sup>

Where *Kormáks saga* had Blackwell questioning the poetic taste of the medieval Scandinavian saga authors, other sagas presented nineteenth-century readers with more violent moral dilemmas. In this vein, the editor clearly considered *Njáls saga* to be particularly realistic and frequently problematic:

*Kormaks Saga* is, comparatively speaking, free from those sanguinary scenes that form such tragical episodes in the generality of the Icelandic Sagas. The following abstract from *Njálssaga* will, we fear, in this respect, not tend to efface any unfavourable impression which the perusal of Kormak's may have left on the mind of the reader.<sup>323</sup>

Indeed, with one of the longest of the family sagas condensed into a mere five pages there was little space for *Njála*'s complex legal actions, bitter matrimonial disagreements, or the conflicting demands of blood-feud. Plot points were frequently confused. Blackwell had Skarpheðinn travel abroad with Helgi and Grímr, where in the saga he stays in Iceland; later in the tale Skarpheðinn and his brothers break into Hǫskuldr's house to kill him, rather than meeting him out in his home-fields.<sup>324</sup>

Blackwell found some positive aspects in his concise paraphrase (Flosi Þórðarson's actions at the burning of Njáll and his sons are said to display 'a few redeeming traits') but for the most part the more violent episodes were seen as petty and thuggish.<sup>325</sup> The editor was openly hostile to the feud between Hallgerða and Bergþora (which he termed a 'festival of

<sup>321</sup> Percy (1847), p. 321.

<sup>322</sup> ['Þorgils was taciturn and gentle/fair'], *Kormáks saga*, in *Vatnsdæla saga; Hallfreðar saga; Kormáks saga, Íslensk fornrit VIII.*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1939), 203-302, at ch. 8, p. 206; Percy (1847), p. 321.

<sup>323</sup> Percy (1847), p. 339.

<sup>324</sup> Percy (1847), pp. 341 and 343.

<sup>325</sup> Percy (1847), p. 343.

dispute’) and had little time for considering any social complexities therein. Here Hallgerðr was a textbook villainess, but Njáll’s wife was little better. The sense of disdainful distaste is not hard to detect in phrases such as: ‘The two ladies went on murdering in this manner for some time...’<sup>326</sup> Other female characters did not fare any better. Hildigunna, despite all her positive traits, was described as ‘fiery and freakish.’<sup>327</sup> Unna’s sexual difficulties with her husband Hrútr were simplified to such a degree that she sounded like a particularly petulant child.<sup>328</sup>

True to his word, Blackwell largely used *Laxdæla saga* as a study of the practices of marriage and courtship in medieval Iceland, and particularly of polygamy in Scandinavia, with Høskuldr’s lovers being the chief exhibit.<sup>329</sup> Here the reader would presumably be able to see some of the fine gentlemanly conduct of which *Northern Antiquities* had spoken frequently up to this point. Yet as with the focus on violent conduct, the honourable behaviour of the Icelanders proved to be thin on the ground in the sagas. Blackwell may well have named Kormákr ‘the Scandinavian Petrarca’ but the few instances of poetry he gave were described as the pastime of petty gossipmongers.<sup>330</sup> One of these in particular was a ‘Nothing-verse, which, among the scandal-loving Icelanders, soon obtained an extensive circulation.’<sup>331</sup> Vulgar poetry and loose tongues would hardly convince nineteenth-century readers to start tracing their family trees back to Iceland.

There were clearly gentlemen among the northern ranks. Blackwell greatly admired Kormákr’s adversary Bersi, and even granted the protagonist a compliment or two. He recounted how Oddr and Guðmundr taunted Kormákr and generally made his life unpleasant by attempting to ‘cast aspersions on his character.’<sup>332</sup> In response Kormákr ‘bore this annoyance for some time with exemplary patience, only indulging himself now and then by composing satirical verses on his adversaries.’<sup>333</sup> On the female side, he wrote that Helga, of the same saga, was a particularly fine match for any gentleman suitor:

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<sup>326</sup> Percy (1847), p. 340. The corresponding episode of *Njála* takes up several chapters. It is true that Blackwell has a general tendency to play down the violence inherent in the narrative, but this does appear to be more acute when he is describing female characters.

<sup>327</sup> Percy (1847), p. 342.

<sup>328</sup> Percy (1847), p. 340. In the original saga Hrútr is cursed with a penis which becomes so excessively large whenever he wants to have sex that he and his wife never manage to consummate the marriage. Blackwell’s censoring is undoubtedly in part Victorian sensibility, but it may just as easily be plain misogyny.

<sup>329</sup> Percy (1847), pp. 312-14.

<sup>330</sup> Percy (1847), p. 339.

<sup>331</sup> Percy (1847), p. 334.

<sup>332</sup> Percy (1847), p. 322.

<sup>333</sup> Percy (1847), p. 322.

Helga, in addition to her personal charms, was possessed of broad lands and numerous flocks and herds – things which, though not essentially conducive to conjugal felicity, render at least the marriage state exceedingly comfortable.<sup>334</sup>

A desired match for any enterprising Icelander. The same was not so for all courting Icelanders though; Kormákr, in his failure to marry Steingerða, clearly made an enemy of Blackwell, who suggested that the poet evidently thought above his station, placed undue importance on sorcery, or was ‘like most poets [...] somewhat crotchety.’<sup>335</sup> Steingerða did not escape judgement either, described as a ‘capricious lady’ for twice failing to marry Kormákr.<sup>336</sup> Guðrun of *Laxdæla saga* was also chastised for her fickle tendencies: ‘If the Jesuits had in that age darkened the earth with their ambiguous presence,’ mused Blackwell, ‘we think Gudruna might have become a very useful member of their *worthy* community.’<sup>337</sup> Thus the British reader came out of Blackwell’s chapter with a phenomenally negative idea of who the medieval Icelanders were.

Blackwell argued that on the evidence of the sagas alone one should place medieval Icelandic society comfortably above the average on the scale of barbarity to civilisation.<sup>338</sup> That the Icelanders achieved this in the middle of nowhere and with minimum outside interference, Blackwell claimed, made them of particular interest to all who would study human nature.<sup>339</sup> With regards to this, at the conclusion to his summaries, Blackwell confidently informed readers that his saga ‘abstracts’ would ‘render any further details respecting the manners and customs of the Icelanders superfluous.’<sup>340</sup> Yet it is difficult to say what the nineteenth-century reader had actually gathered concerning the manners and customs of the Icelanders. Blackwell’s commentary was for the most part morally critical and frequently sarcastic in tone. The positive traits mentioned throughout *Northern Antiquities* were nowhere to be found in the textual evidence. While Blackwell praised the saga author’s facts and promised readers clarity of scope, his pool of textual sources proved so vast that perfidy and malice stood out most.

To summarise, in the middle of the nineteenth century, British readers seeking to learn more about the ancestry of their own people in relation to their Scandinavian relatives were taken to consulting works in which eddaic and skaldic poetry, sagas and songs, were presented alongside one another as historical assets for public consideration. This particular text was a

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<sup>334</sup> Percy (1847), p. 324.

<sup>335</sup> Percy (1847), p. 322.

<sup>336</sup> Percy (1847), p. 331.

<sup>337</sup> Percy (1847), p. 359.

<sup>338</sup> Percy (1847), p. 361.

<sup>339</sup> Percy (1847), p. 361.

<sup>340</sup> Percy (1847), pp. 360-61.



complex palimpsest of nationalist theory and fashionable social science, meaning that readers could pick from a variety of views on Old Norse literature, albeit none with absolute objectivity. The influence of these many theories was long-lived. From its initial English publication in 1809 up to the early years of the twentieth century, *Northern Antiquities* was reedited and reissued in varying forms some six times.<sup>341</sup> Blackwell's own translations from Old Norse, particularly his *Edda*, were reissued in 1887, 1898, and 1902. Yet, as the next chapter will address, more so than Blackwell's extensive commentaries on the sagas, it was his inclusion of Walter Scott's work on *Eyrbyggja saga* which would prove the most productive to the Norse-inspired national image of nineteenth-century British readers.

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<sup>341</sup> Wawn (2002), p. 184.

#### 4. From Shetland to Snæfellsnes: Exploring *Eyrbyggja saga*

In chapter ten of Halldór Laxness's 1968 novel *Kristnihald undir Jökli* ('Christianity under the Glacier'), Tumi Jónsen relates to the protagonist Umbi the tale of Þórgunna, an enigmatic Hebridean woman who passes away while staying at the farm Fróða in Snæfellsnes, near to the present-day town of Ólafsvík.<sup>342</sup> According to Þórgunna's wishes, her body is to be carried to Skálholt, but the journey is long and the coffin bearers are forced to stop en route at a farm, where they receive beds for the night but no food. This does not please the deceased Þórgunna: '*En um nóttina reis lík konunnar hið mikla á fætur skamnnakið, gekk til búrs og sótti mjöl, síðan til eldhúss og bakaði líkmönnum sínum brauð að írskum sið og stakk þeim þykkar sneiðar af hleifnum.*'<sup>343</sup> The tale told to the young outsider Umbi makes up one episode of a much larger work of supernatural incidents and inter-familial disputes known as *Eyrbyggja saga*, which relates the fortunes of residents of the Snæfellsnes peninsula in the settlement age.<sup>344</sup> Laxness's twentieth-century novel captures the manner in which the saga had developed an unquestionable attachment to the local scenery and to the locals themselves. Tumi Jónsen certainly has his own commentary on his region's tale:

Til skýringar fyriburði þessum kemst sögumaður Tumi Jónsen svo að orði: Má vera að hér hafi þó verið um flatbrauð að ræða. Mun flatbrauð hafa verið tíðara á þeim dögum en brauð í hleifum. Sumir men hafa haldið því fram að atvik það sem nú var greint hafi borist líkmönntum í drauma. Aðrir telja að mönnum hafi missýnist og muni þarna hafa verið um einhverja aðra konu að ræða en Þórgunnu. Forfeður mínir Jónsenar trúðu öllu sem stendur í Íslendingasögum og ég fylgi þeim svona hérumbil þó ég sé bæði föðurverrúngur og ættleri.<sup>345</sup>

<sup>342</sup> Halldór Kiljan Laxness, *Kristnihald undir Jökli* (Reykjavík: Helgafell, 1968), pp. 64-67. The chapter title, *Errilegar konur undir Jökli*, can be translated as 'Serious/daughty women (or perhaps more fittingly 'grave women') under the glacier'.

<sup>343</sup> 'But during the night, the woman's large corpse rose to its feet stark naked, went to the pantry and fetched flour, then went afterwards to the kitchen, and baked Irish-style bread for her coffin-bearers, and gave them thick slices from the loaf', Halldór Kiljan Laxness (1968), p. 66.

<sup>344</sup> *Eyrbyggja saga*, in *Eyrbyggja saga; Eiríks saga rauða, Íslensk fornrit IV.*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þorðarson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1935), 1-186.

<sup>345</sup> 'In order to explain this occurrence the storyteller Tumi Jónsen had this to say: "It may be, however, that we are actually talking about flatbread here. Flatbread may have been more common in those days than bread in loaves. Some have argued that the events of which I have spoken only happened to the coffin-bearers in their dreams. Others believe that the men were confused and that some other woman than Þórgunna was involved. My ancestors, the Jónsens, believed everything in the family sagas, and I tend to follow them in this, although I am no match for my father nor my ancestors', Halldór Kiljan Laxness (1968), pp. 66-67. *Eyrbyggja saga* is not the region's only *Íslendingasaga*; *Barðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Bjarnar saga Hítælakappa* also take place there.

Umbi finds himself exasperated at the local manner of relating sagas; the supernatural elements are passed over with barely a comment, while the seemingly unimportant details (what kind of bread the revenant baked) are discussed in detail. The saga literature's connection to the land is shown to be at once an exercise in family tradition (as Jón remarks, his acceptance of the sagas is a product of his father's and grandfathers' views) and in the localising of traditional narratives (the fact that Þórgunna's pallbearers receive no food from the miserly farmers between Fróða and Skálholt is of no surprise to the present-day *sagumaður*).

A century before Laxness's surrealist philosophical tale of eccentric priests and colourful farmers, the peninsula had been the focus of another work of world literature.<sup>346</sup> In Jules Verne's 1864 *Voyage au centre de la terre* the equally eccentric professor Otto Lidenbrock (with the assistance of his reluctant nephew Axel) had pinpointed the crater of Snæfell as the entrance to the centre of the earth.<sup>347</sup> Professor Lidenbrock's source for this fantastic information was a coded runic message written by the (fictional) Icelandic scholar Arne Saknussem and discovered while perusing an original copy of Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*. Yet for Lidenbrock, it had been the prospect of consulting an Old Norse text which had initially fired his enthusiasm:

En parlant ainsi, mon oncle ouvrait & fermait successivement le vieux bouquin. Je ne pouvais faire moins que de l'interroger sur son contenu, bien que cela ne m'intéressât aucunement.

"Et quel est donc le titre de ce merveilleux volume?" demandai-je avec un empressement trop enthousiaste pour n'être pas feint.

"Cet ouvrage!" répondit mon oncle en s'animant, "c'est *l'Heims-Kringla* de Snorre Turleson, le fameux auteur islandais du douzième siècle; c'est la Chronique des princes norvégiens qui régnèrent en Islande!"

"Vraiment! m'écriai-je de mon mieux, & sans doute c'est une traduction en langue allemande?"

"Bon!" riposta vivement le professeur, "une traduction! Et qu'en ferais-je de ta traduction! Qui se soucie de ta traduction! Ceci est l'ouvrage original en langue islandaise, ce magnifique idiome, riche & simple à la fois, qui autorise les combinaisons grammaticales les plus variées & de nombreuses modifications de mots!"<sup>348</sup>

<sup>346</sup> On Snæfellsjökull's literary heritage throughout the ages see Glauser (2011), pp. 43-45. The same tale is in fact the basis for Robert Louis Stevenson's story *The Waif Woman*, see John M. Simpson, 'Eyrbyggja Saga and Nineteenth-Century Scholarship', in *Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference at the University of Edinburgh*, ed. by Peter Foote, Hermann Pálsson, and Desmond Slay (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1973b), 360-94.

<sup>347</sup> Jules Verne, *Voyage au centre de la terre* (Paris: J. Hetzel, 1864), p. 38.

<sup>348</sup> 'And saying this, my uncle opened and closed the ancient tome in succession. I felt compelled to enquire about its contents, although this did not interest me in the slightest. "And what is the title of this marvellous volume?" I asked with an eagerness too enthusiastic not to be put on. "This work," replied my uncle, getting animated, "is the *Heimskringla* of Snorre Turleson, the famous Icelandic author of the twelfth century; it is the

The (admittedly also fictional) professor was not alone in his reverence for the original language of the twelfth-century Icelanders. The revived literary appreciation of the Snæfellsnes peninsula began in the early nineteen-hundreds with scientific and sociological explorations and would culminate in an established tourist scene, offering British travellers personalised experiences around the scenes of *Eyrbyggja saga*'s most-loved episodes.

The development of such saga-tourism was a slow process; when compared to the thriving tourist trade of the late nineteenth century, Scandinavia saw few visitors from Britain in the eighteenth century.<sup>349</sup> The North was still imagined along the lines of depictions such as Guðbrandur Þorláksson's 1590 map of Iceland, complete with: 'razor-toothed catfish, ravenous sting-rays, spouting whales, winged horses, sharp-toothed crocodiles, horned bisons, sinister-looking crabs, and prawns too large for any cocktail,' – hardly an invitation to prospective British tourists.<sup>350</sup> As Tucker writes, pre-Victorian Britain lacked the material to make informed opinions of Iceland and its literature: 'It had not discovered the North to be a wonderful holiday resort; it was unsure of its response to Icelandic poetry.'<sup>351</sup> Something had to change.

This chapter will examine the development of these British impressions of Iceland and Old Norse literature in the first half of the nineteenth century. It will consider the legacy of Walter Scott's translated material on *Eyrbyggja saga*, particularly after its inclusion in Blackwell's 1847 *Northern Antiquities*, and demonstrate the dramatically contrary models of nationalism which could be drawn from a single saga. It will consider Scott's distinct, inclusive concept of the nation, and compare this with other prominent nineteenth-century writers on Old Norse literature such as Samuel Laing and Thomas Carlyle. Fundamentally, the chapter will attempt to demonstrate how Scott's focus on Iceland and the North in general as physical, geographical locations brought the discussion of Old Norse literature out of the antiquarian

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chronicle of the Norwegian princes who reigned in Iceland!" "Really!" I exclaimed as best as I could, "and no doubt it is a translation into the German language?" "Good grief!" the professor replied sharply, "a translation! And what would I be doing with your translation? Who cares for your translation! This is the original work in the Icelandic language, this magnificent idiom, at once rich and simple, allowing the most diverse grammatical combinations and numerous variations of words", Verne (1864), p. 10. On Verne and Old Norse see Wawn (2002), pp. 91-92.

<sup>349</sup> See Jeremy Black, *The British and the Grand Tour* (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1985), pp. 31-32. Mary Wollstonecraft is a notable exception; her *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* of 1796 set the tone for the next hundred years, in which British writers would imbue the landscapes of northern Europe with political purpose (although not always Feminism), see Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (London: J. Johnson, 1796); Masae Kawatsu, 'Wollstonecraft's Politicized Landscapes in Scandinavia', *Studies in English Literature*, 41 (2000), 37-53, at p. 38; and Ryall (2014), pp. 124-25.

<sup>350</sup> Wawn (2002), p. 10.

<sup>351</sup> Tucker (1965), p. 247.

poetry anthology and into the fields of international trade, high adventure, and ultimately the late spirit of Romantic Nationalism.

#### 4.1. Iceland First Seen: Eddas to Sagas

The principle goal of British sea-farers travelling to Iceland in the early nineteenth century was to conduct scientific or trade-related studies. Biologists,<sup>352</sup> botanists,<sup>353</sup> ethnographers, theologians,<sup>354</sup> geographers,<sup>355</sup> geologists,<sup>356</sup> and statesmen were the key writers of early accounts, and British views of Iceland were coloured accordingly.<sup>357</sup> Yet on Iceland's own shores and in the candle-lit studies of Copenhagen's city centre a belated form of Romantic Nationalism was inspiring young Scandinavian writers to think of their northern lands outside of the scientific tradition.

The Danish poet Adam Oehlenschläger (1779-1850) was one such writer. Oehlenschläger's poetry, in works such as 'Guldhornene' (1803), 'Hakon Jarl' (1807), 'Baldur hin Gode' (1808), 'Helge' (1814), and the longer 'Nordens Guder: et episk digte' (1819), presented a Scandinavian heroic age alongside appropriately modern nationalist sentiment.<sup>358</sup> Patriotic visions of the Danish homeland were bound with elements of the saga-age past: '*Jeg fiender her paa Jorden ingen bedre, / End Kløvret i din Saga, / End Balder, Thor og Braga*' he mused in the poem 'Til Fædrelandet' ('To the Fatherland').<sup>359</sup> Oehlenschläger's patriotism was

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<sup>352</sup> George Clayton Atkinson, *Journal of an Expedition to the Faroe and Westmann Islands and Iceland 1833*, ed. by A. V. Seaton (Newcastle upon Tyne: The Bewick-Beaufort Press, 1989). See also the work of German ornithologist Friedrich August Ludwig Thienemann, *Reise im Norden Europas vorzüglich in Island in den Jahren 1820 bis 1821* (Leipzig: C. H. Reclam, 1824-27).

<sup>353</sup> Hooker (1813).

<sup>354</sup> Ebenezer Henderson, *Iceland; or The journal of a residence in that island, during the Years 1814 and 1815. Containing observations on the natural phenomena, history, literature, and antiquities of the island; and the religion, manners, and customs of its inhabitants*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Waugh and Innes; London: T. Hamilton, J. Hatchard and L. B. Seeley, 1818).

<sup>355</sup> Barrow (1835).

<sup>356</sup> Mackenzie (1812).

<sup>357</sup> Even so, Pliny Miles, writing in 1854, still felt that there were 'no accessible books of a late date in our language that give either an intelligible or a faithful account of Iceland;' Miles further commented, 'previous to the present century, the learned world seemed to consider the writings of the Icelanders as almost unworthy of notice', Pliny Miles, *Norðurfari: or, Rambles in Iceland* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1854), pp. xv and 205.

<sup>358</sup> On Oehlenschläger's poetry with regards to Old Norse and nationalism, see in particular Adam Gottlob Oehlenschläger, *Samlede Digte*, 5 vols (Copenhagen: Universitetsboghandler Andr. Fred. Höst., 1853), vol. 1, pp. 14-18; 152-58; vol. 2, pp. 58-63; 102; 160-62; Mjöberg (1967-68), vol. 1, pp. 128-42; and Kathryn Shailer Hanson, 'Adam Oehlenschläger's "Eric og Roller" and Danish Romanticism', *Scandinavian Studies*, 65, 2 (Spring 1993), 180-95, at p. 182.

<sup>359</sup> 'I can find nothing better here on earth, than is in your sagas, than Balder, Thor, and Bragi', Oehlenschläger (1853), vol. 2, p. 160.

not limited to his own country, but included Iceland as an intrinsic element.<sup>360</sup> In his 1805 poem ‘Island’, revised and re-published in 1823 and forming the basis for Jónas Hallgrímsson’s work of the same name, Oehlenschläger embedded an otherwise typical praise poem for the sculptor Albert Thorvaldsen (1768-1844) with the same Old Norse imagery he had used in his earlier ‘Guldhornene’.<sup>361</sup>

Martin Arnold has commented that a potential reading of ‘Island’ is as a self-serving advertisement of artistic purpose, Oehlenschläger’s description of the sculptor being a ‘hyperbolization of the role he had defined for himself: the guardian and champion of Scandinavian historical integrity, charged with the recovery of Danish pride.’<sup>362</sup> Yet one can also read the poem as an early attempt to ground what were seen to Oehlenschläger as essential elements of Danish folk-culture in a historic setting: namely, medieval Iceland. An open advocate for the authenticity of James Macpherson’s *Ossian* poetry, Oehlenschläger realised that the success of the Scotsman’s poems lay less in their ability to be verified and more in their adherence to a popular concept of the heroic past.<sup>363</sup> As Susan Manning has argued, ‘the immediate (and lacking) European success of Ossian was a result of Macpherson’s acute perception of the Romantic needs of an age to have its own ideas legitimated by the past.’<sup>364</sup> Oehlenschläger was both a dupe and a creator of such tailored history. The Iceland depicted by his poetry was more a product of early nineteenth-century Danish taste than Old Norse literature.

The Icelandic answer to Oehlenschläger’s eddaic picture of the northern isle, the 1835 poem ‘Ísland’ by Jónas Hallgrímsson (1807-1845), was arguably in a separate class of poetic dexterity. Considered by many of his countrymen to be *ástmögur þjóðarinnar* (‘the nation’s darling’), Jónas Hallgrímsson was a major contributor to the journal *Fjölnir* (named after one of Óðinn’s alter egos and meaning ‘multitudinous’), which ran intermittently between 1835 and 1847. The journal’s motto, *nytsemi, fegurð, sannleikur*, (‘usefulness, beauty, truth’) was

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<sup>360</sup> He lectured on both Ewald and Schiller, see Thomas Bredsdorff, ‘Oehlenschläger’s Aesthetics: Allegory and Symbolism in “The Golden Horns”’, *Edda*, 99 (1999), 211-21, at p. 212.

<sup>361</sup> Oehlenschläger (1853), vol. 2, p. 102.

<sup>362</sup> Arnold (2007), p. 41.

<sup>363</sup> On the contemporary arguments for Ossian’s authenticity see Susan Manning, ‘Ossian, Scott, and Nineteenth-Century Scottish Literary Nationalism’, *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 17 (1982), 39-54, at p. 40. Celenza argues that Denmark’s fascination with Ossian was short and its relevance has been overestimated (allowing Oehlenschläger as an exception) but freely admits that German writers such as Goethe and Klopstock were besotted; that the Scandinavian literati came to Macpherson’s work via German romanticism surely did not detract from its power to influence and inspire, see Anna H. Harwell Celenza, ‘Efterklage af Ossian: The Reception of James Macpherson’s “Poems of Ossian” in Denmark’s Literature, Art, and Music’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 70/3 (Fall 1998), 359-96, at pp. 362-68.

<sup>364</sup> Manning (1982), p. 42.

both a standard for its literary input and for the concurrent debates on Iceland's national image.<sup>365</sup> Jónas's early influences comprised of the Icelandic literati of the previous generation: the scientist, patriot, and poet Eggert Ólafsson; Jón Þorláksson (1744-1819), writer of such works as the Icelandic translation of *Paradise Lost* in *fornyrðislag*; and Bjarni Thorarensen (1786-1841), who is generally credited with helping Jónas found the Icelandic 'Age of Romanticism' in Icelandic poetry.<sup>366</sup> Bjarni's verse had already combined both a love of the land itself (as in poems such as 'Ísland') and a return to Old Norse texts (for example 'Freyjukettirnir').<sup>367</sup> Jónas supplemented Bjarni's model of poetry with readings of Schiller, Chamisso, Oehlenschläger, and Heine, while additionally forming an understanding of the nation he wished to depict in such poetry from the writings of Herder and Fichte.<sup>368</sup>

Nevertheless, Jónas's medievalism was intended to be progressively and characteristically Icelandic: his ideal Icelander was both widely-read in European literature while preserving a sense of Iceland's Norse heritage. *Nytsemi, fegurð, sannleikur* was thus as much about local knowledge, Old Norse literature, and a heartfelt understanding of one's own nation as it was about scientific progress, contemporary European writers, and German philosophy.

In 'Ísland', Jónas sought to apply such standards to a revitalised portrait of the country, a portrait which prised both the rural beauty of Iceland's landscape and the literary-historical significance of its chief landmarks:

Ísland! farsældafrón og hagsælda hrímhvíta móðir!  
 Hvar er þín fornaldarfrægð, frelsið og manndáðin best?  
 Allt er í heiminum hverfult, og stund þíns fegursta frama  
 lýsir, sem leiftur um nótt, langt fram á horfinni öld.  
 Landið var fagurt og frítt, og fannhvítir jöklanna tindar,  
 himinninn heiður og blár, hafið var skínandi bjart.  
 Þá komu feðurnir frægu og frjálsræðishetjurnar góðu,  
 austan um hyldýpishaf, hingað í sælunnar reit.  
 Reistu sér byggðir og bú í blómgugu dalanna skauti;  
 ukust að íþrótt og frægð, undu svo glaðir við sitt.  
 Hátt á eldhrauni upp, þar sem enn þá Öxará rennur

<sup>365</sup> Brynjólfur Pétursson, Jónas Hallgrímsson, Konráð Gíslason, and Tómas Sæmundsson, *Fjölnir*, vol. 1. (Copenhagen: J. D. Kvisti, 1835); Ringler (2002), p. 29.

<sup>366</sup> See Bjarni Thorarensen, *Ljóðmæli*, ed. by Jón Helgason, 2 vols (Copenhagen: Hið Íslenszka Fræðafélag, 1935). Bjarni's taste for the Gothic 'Sublime' is discussed in Gylfi Gunnlaugsson (2011), p. 134.

<sup>367</sup> In Sir Edmund William Gosse and William A. Craigie (eds.), *The Oxford Book of Scandinavian Verse. XVIIth Century – XXth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), pp. 355-62. Bjarni's poetry involved a hands-on national sentiment: he fought in the 1807 defence of Copenhagen against the English and wrote two poems on his involvement in the battle, see Gylfi Gunnlaugsson (2011), p. 142.

<sup>368</sup> Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, "Leirskáldunum á ekki að vera vært": Um þjóðlega menningu og íslenska endurreisn, *Skírnir*, 181 (Autumn 2007), 327-40, at p. 334.

ofan í Almannagjá, alþingið feðranna stóð.  
 Þar stóð hann Þorgeir á þingi er við trúnni var tekið af lýði.  
 Þar komu Gissur og Geir, Gunnar og Héðinn og Njáll.  
 Þá riðu hetjur um héröð, og skrautbúin skip fyrir landi  
 flutu með fríðasta lið, færandi varninginn heim.  
 Það er svo bágð að standa í stað, og mönnunum munar  
 annaðhvort aftur á bak ellegar nokkuð á leið.  
 Hvað er þá orðið okkart starf í sex hundruð sumur?  
 Höfum við gengið til góðs götuna fram eftir veg?  
 Landið er fagurt og frítt, og fannhvítir jöklanna tindar,  
 himininn heiður og blár, hafið er skínandi bjart.  
 En á eldhrauni upp, þar sem enn þá Öxará rennur  
 ofan í Almannagjá, alþing er horfið á braut.  
 Nú er hún Snorrabúð stekkur, og lyngið á lögbergi helga  
 bláan af berjum hvort ár, börnum og hröfnum að leik.  
 Ó þér unglingafjöld og Íslands fullorðnu synir!  
 Svona er feðranna frægð fallin í gleymsku og dá!<sup>369</sup>

Jónas's verse was calculated as nothing short of a cultural wake-up call, a demand to his countrymen to remember both the literary heritage and historical reality of figures from the *Íslendingasögur* such as 'Gissur og Geir, Gunnar og Héðinn og Njáll.' In contrast to the Baldurs and Thors of eddaic antiquity, such figures had genuinely walked the island's trails and fathered

<sup>369</sup> Iceland, fortunate isle! Our beautiful, bountiful mother!  
 Where are your fortune and fame, freedom and virtue of old?  
 All things on earth are transient: the days of your greatness and glory  
 flicker like flames in the night, far in the depths of the past.  
 Comely and fair was the country, crested with snow-covered glaciers,  
 azure and empty the sky, ocean resplendently bright.  
 Here came our famous forebears, the freedom-worshipping heroes,  
 over the sea from the east, eager to settle the land.  
 Raising their families on farms in the flowering laps of the valleys,  
 hearty and happy they lived, hugely content with their lot.  
 Up on the outcrops of lava where Axe River plummets forever  
 into the Almannagjá, Althing convened every year.  
 There lay old Þorgeir, thoughtfully charting our change of religion.  
 There strode Gissur and Geir, Gunnar and Héðinn and Njáll.  
 Heroes rode through the regions, and under the crags on the coastline  
 floated their fabulous ships, ferrying wealth from abroad.  
 O it is bitter to stand here stalled and penned in the present!  
 Men full of sloth and asleep simply drop out of the race!  
 How have we treated our treasure during these six hundred summers?  
 Have we trod promising paths, progress and virtue our goal?  
 Comely and fair is the country, crested with snow-covered glaciers,  
 azure and empty the sky, ocean resplendently bright.  
 Ah! but up on the lava where Axe River plummets forever  
 into the Almannagjá, Althing is vanished and gone.  
 Snorri's old site is a sheep-pen; the Law Rock is hidden in heather,  
 blue with the berries that make boys — and the ravens — a feast.  
 Oh you children of Iceland, old and young men together!  
 See how your forefathers' fame faltered — and passed from the earth!

Jónas Hallgrímsson, in Brynjólfur Pétursson *et al.* (1835), pp. 21-22; trans. by Ringler (2002), p. 101 – a translation which has several critics, see Willson (2008), pp. 320-22.



its ancestral lines. The recession of these characters into a body of forgotten tradition, the disconnection of sagas and land, was for Jónas the deciding factor in Iceland's present state of degradation; '*Svona er feðranna frægð fallin í gleysku og dá,*' he warned his countrymen. Forget it at your peril, the poem implied.

Iceland, and its nineteenth-century revival via literary awareness, was also on the minds of the period's British writers. Unlike the natives of Iceland and Denmark, these travellers and thinkers were often quite literally seeing the land for the first time, but they were also re-discovering it in the context of British history. A later poetic expression of this process can be found in 'Iceland First Seen', composed by William Morris (1834-1896) on his first trip to Iceland in 1871, which referred to both the impressions of a traveller who had engaged with Old Norse literature for several years, and one who had never set foot in the country. It was also a moment of reflection for Morris, an analysis of his previously-held ideas of Britain's northern neighbour:

Ah! what came we forth for to see that our hearts are so hot with desire?  
 Is it enough for our rest, the sight of this desolate strand,  
 And the mountain-waste voiceless as death but for winds that may sleep not nor tire?  
 Why do we long to wend forth through the length and breadth of a land,  
 Dreadful with grinding of ice, and record of scarce hidden fire,  
 But that there 'mid the grey grassy dales sore scarred by the ruining streams  
 Lives the tale of the Northland of old and the undying glory of dreams?<sup>370</sup>

Morris's concept of Iceland as a treasure trove of Northern antiquity was a direct product of the literature he had read on the subject; the real-life Iceland became a topography of antiquarian tomes such as Thorpe's *Northern Mythology*. Here dwelt the 'Northland of old' and its enticing promise of the 'undying glory of dreams.'<sup>371</sup>

Once negotiating the tempestuous shoreline of Iceland's south coast, though, Morris questioned if this antiquarian interest was not a fragile excuse for a maritime expedition, something better engaged with from the comfort of one of his Kelmscott Manor armchairs. And although Morris was by this point deeply involved in the translation of the *Íslendingasögur*, even he could not help but use an eddaic metaphor in his depiction of Iceland's future revival. As far as the poet could make out from his ship, Iceland languished in a geological and cultural *ragnarök*, awaiting the return of societal norms:

<sup>370</sup> Morris (1911b), pp. 125-26.

<sup>371</sup> The longevity of this reading is demonstrated by the Icelandic writer Jón Stefánsson, who a decade after Morris's death wrote: '[Iceland] is to-day a living Pompeii where the northmen races can read their past', Jón Stefánsson (1907), p. 294; cited Wawn (2002), p. 283.

Ah! when thy Balder comes back, and bears from the heart of the Sun  
 Peace and the healing of pain, and the wisdom that waiteth no more;  
 And the lilies are laid on thy brow 'mid the crown of the deeds thou hast done;  
 And the roses spring up by thy feet that the rocks of the wilderness wore.  
 Ah! when thy Balder comes back and we gather the gains he hath won,  
 Shall we not linger a little to talk of thy sweetness of old,  
 Yea, turn back awhile to thy travail whence the Gods stood aloof to behold?<sup>372</sup>

Morris would return to consider questions of Old Norse literature and its implicit connection to the Icelandic land and people in his own *Eyrbyggja saga* translation, published as part of the larger 'Saga Library' project in 1892. By this time his impressions of Iceland's land, literature, and historical legacy had become irretrievably bound with his understanding of their British counterparts. *Eyrbyggja saga* was no ruined wasteland awaiting resuscitation; it was a cultural gem of great importance for British and Icelandic readers alike.

Although Morris's work was the first full translation of *Eyrbyggja saga*, English readers did not have to wait until the 1890s to explore its intricacies. In Eggert Ólafsson's and Bjarni Pálsson's *Reise igiennem Island*, translated into English as *Travels in Iceland* in 1805, the authors related tales of Thorolf, Helgafell, and the 'Berserkia Hraun' as part of a sociological explanation of Iceland's manners and customs.<sup>373</sup> Their coverage of 'Eyrboggia Saga' was admittedly problematic, not least in that they simply did not know the narrative at times. On the tale of Stýr and his path through the lava, constructed by two troublesome berserkr, the pair wrote: 'History relates, that this rampart owes its origin to two brothers, on one of whom was imposed the task of building it, as a condition of obtaining the hand of a young woman with whom he was in love; but before the marriage could take place, the young couple were destroyed by a fire.'<sup>374</sup> This version of the tale was undoubtedly more romantic than *Eyrbyggja saga*'s, in which the brothers are trapped in a suffocating bath-house by Stýr and then run through with a spear when they try to escape, but it hardly conveyed an expert knowledge of the original Old Norse text.

Henry Holland's 1812 'Preliminary Dissertation' was a different matter. Holland may have relied chiefly on Latin sources, but he showed considerable interest and wide reading on the topic of northern literature. Holland certainly knew the settlement story in detail and knew

<sup>372</sup> Morris (1911b), pp. 125-26.

<sup>373</sup> Eggert Ólafsson and Bjarni Pálsson, *Travels in Iceland: Performed by Order of his Danish Majesty* (London: Richard Phillips, 1805), pp. 83-85.

<sup>374</sup> Eggert Ólafsson and Bjarni Pálsson (1805), p. 85. The berserkr of *Eyrbyggja saga* are also mentioned in *Heiðarvíga saga*, in *Borgfirðinga sögur, Íslenzk fornrit III.*, ed. by Siguður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1938), 213-328, at ch. 3-4, p. 216. Their deaths are spoken of in a far more critical manner, as is their killer Stýrr, see (1938), ch. 4-5, p. 224.

his Mallet, describing the Swiss writer's work as 'elegant and ingenious.'<sup>375</sup> He referenced the Latin translation of '*The Eyrbyggja Saga*' published in 1787, and provided commentary on its contents.<sup>376</sup> The literature of Iceland was, for Holland, a clear record of the traits of the northern nations, with the sagas in particular key to preserving instances of northern pride and resilience. 'The Sagas, or tales of the country,' Holland wrote, 'afford many striking pictures of that high feeling of honour, and of those deeds of personal prowess, which were cherished by the disposition of the northern nations, and which refused not to exist even in this remote and desolate region.'<sup>377</sup>

The practical application of this saga knowledge in terms of situating it within the land itself was some way off however. From their initial base on the Reykjanes peninsula, Holland's group travelled north and west to Snæfellsnes (or 'Snæfield's Syssel' as Holland named it on his fantastical map of the peninsula) into an unknown region for British travellers, where they met numerous Icelanders who 'had never before seen Englishmen.'<sup>378</sup> They called at Stappen (Arnistappi), Ólafsvík, and 'Stikkesholm' but failed to mention *Eyrbyggja saga* at any point – a passing comment on the 'superstitious ideas and usages' connected to Helgafell in ancient times was the closest they got to literary analysis.<sup>379</sup> A return visit to 'Reikholt' did provide George Mackenzie with the opportunity to discuss the 'celebrated Snorro Sturleson,' although no one in the party seemed confident as to what he was celebrated for, and were more interested in the workings of his geothermal pool.<sup>380</sup> All in all, the group accumulated some 776 miles around Iceland without the slightest suggestion of a saga.<sup>381</sup>

Ebenezer Henderson (1784-1858) was more open to discussing history, sagas, and local superstitions than his predecessors.<sup>382</sup> Among other topics, he wrote on funerary traditions as shown in *Eyrbyggja saga*, and at the berserks's road in Snæfellsnes he demonstrated an in-depth knowledge of Walter Scott's translations: 'We encountered the famous arm called the *Bersekia lava*, from the path and fence that were laid across it by two Swedes of gigantic

<sup>375</sup> Holland, in Mackenzie (1812), pp. 5-11.

<sup>376</sup> Holland, in Mackenzie (1812), p. 47. Mackenzie's *Travels* would later provide Scott with many of his footnotes for his 1814 (and 1847) 'Abstract', including his knowledge of the local geography of Snæfellsnes.

<sup>377</sup> Holland, in Mackenzie (1812), p. 16. Cowan suggests that Finnur Magnússon may have in fact been the local knowledge behind Holland's 'Dissertation', Edward J. Cowan, 'Icelandic Studies in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Scotland', *Studia Islandica*, 31 (1972), 107-51, at p. 131.

<sup>378</sup> Lbs. 3875 4to.

<sup>379</sup> Mackenzie (1812), p. 185.

<sup>380</sup> Mackenzie (1812), p. 196; see Holland in Lbs. 3876 4to.

<sup>381</sup> Lbs. 3876 4to.

<sup>382</sup> J. W. Clarke is informed by local Icelanders, during his 1860 voyage, that Henderson's volume is the single greatest work written on their country; see J. W. Clarke, 'Journal of a Yacht Voyage to the Faroe Islands and Iceland', in *Vacation Tourists and Notes of Travels in 1860*, ed. by Francis Galton (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1861), 318-61, at p. 361.

prowess, towards the close of the tenth century.<sup>383</sup> For the interested reader wanting more information, Henderson recommended Walter Scott's excerpts from Robert Jamieson's *Illustrations of Northern Antiquities*, but he also included Scott's translation plus his own emendations, 'in order to render it more comfortable to the original.'<sup>384</sup> Henderson's changes were not necessarily for the better (he frequently departed from standardised spelling, made unnecessary additions to the text, omitted sections, or simply copied Scott word-for-word and claimed the translation for himself) but they certainly provided more literary engagement than his contemporary countrymen.<sup>385</sup> Combined with visits to several other saga sites and a discussion of 'Snorro Goda,' Henderson displayed an extensive knowledge of *Eyrbyggja saga*, albeit one still relying entirely on Latin sources or on the partially-credited Scott.<sup>386</sup>

Scott's extracts and Henderson's edited reissue of them evidently had a long-lasting influence on northern scholarship. Henry Wheaton's 1831 *History of the Northmen* included complimentary nods to both texts.<sup>387</sup> Similarly, James Nicol's *Historical and Descriptive Account of Iceland* displayed familiarity with a number of sagas alongside both the translations of Mallet's *Northern Antiquities* and Scott's extracts.<sup>388</sup> Nicol did not side with Henderson's partiality for the sagas, viewing them rather as objects of distraction for the otherwise luckless Icelanders, through which they could forget their current state of degradation; 'They more than any of the continental nations live in the past,' Nicol states.<sup>389</sup>

The Reverend Frederick Metcalfe was another British traveller drawn to the 'Berserker causeway' via Scott's initial scholarship, travelling to Snæfellsnes in September of 1860, and providing the tale for his readers along with archaeological details.<sup>390</sup> Metcalfe reflected on the

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<sup>383</sup> Henderson (1818), vol. 2, p. 59. The respect Henderson showed to the Icelandic literary scene was mutual. The same year his book was published, Henderson was appointed an honorary fellow of the Icelandic Literary Society, and in a letter from Finnur Magnússon, Grímur Thomsen, Jón Sigurðsson, and numerous others, he was told: 'No doubt, your nation is much mightier among the nations of earth than ours, but still we think that there is some resemblance in the national character, as there is some similarity in respect to soil and climate', (Lbs. 962 fol.).

<sup>384</sup> Henderson (1818), vol. 2, pp. 59-63.

<sup>385</sup> Compare Scott, in Percy (1847), pp. 525-27; and in Jamieson, Weber, and Scott (1814), pp. 489-93.

<sup>386</sup> Henderson (1818), vol. 2, pp. 64, 69.

<sup>387</sup> Henry Wheaton and Andrew Crichton, *History of the Northmen; Or, Danes and Normans: From the Earliest Times to the Conquest of England by William of Normandy* (London: John Murray, 1831), pp. 96, 139-40 (on the sagas in general see also pp. 16-32, 94-109, and 133-42).

<sup>388</sup> James Nicol, *An Historical and Descriptive Account of Iceland, Greenland, and the Faroe Islands*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1841), pp. 105 and 107. Nicol's work bore all the hallmarks of armchair geography, including the warning to nineteenth-century travellers that colliding icebergs in Icelandic waters were prone to spontaneous combustion, see Nicol (1841), p. 69.

<sup>389</sup> Nicol (1841), p. 190

<sup>390</sup> Rev. Frederick Metcalfe, *The Oxonian in Iceland; or, Notes of Travel in that Island in the Summer of 1860, with Glances at Icelandic Folklore and Sagas* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861), pp. 295-97. Metcalfe, like Carlyle, viewed Scott and the *Íslendingasögur*'s composers as kindred spirits, and commented on Iceland's medieval literary wave, 'Why, it is as if a Walter Scott or a greater than he in the

permanence of the popular myth surrounding the site: ‘Most Icelanders, I understand, believe the story of the road-making. It must have been man’s handiwork. Whoever was the author of it, the Berserker-path will last for ever, and the Berserkers will always have the credit for it.’<sup>391</sup> In a twist of fate, Metcalfe’s comment was oddly applicable to the reception of the saga itself. As far as the Old Norse enthusiasts of the first half of the eighteen-hundreds were concerned, the anonymously composed *Eyrbyggja saga* only had one author, and he retained credit for its charms until the end of the century.<sup>392</sup>

#### 4.2. Walter Scott’s Saga

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) is known today for works of literature such as his monumental *Waverley* novels and for epitomising (some would argue inventing) the concept of the historical novelist. Perhaps even more so than his literary career, however, Scott is remembered for representing a particular cultural nation-branding – notably in novels such as *Ivanhoe* or *Rob Roy* – where readers are presented with romanticised images of a free and independent historic land. An unfamiliar visitor to Scott’s hometown of Edinburgh, with no prior knowledge of Scotland, might well assume the land was named after him. The extent to which Scott is viewed as a national icon is perhaps best shown by the publication in 2010 of a new edition of his poem ‘The Lady in the Lake’ complete with foreword by the then first-minister for Scotland and leader of the Scottish National Party, Alex Salmond. According to Salmond, Scott’s work was ‘revolutionary, instigating a profound and lasting effect which crystallised a distinctive identity of Scotland, generating national pride.’<sup>393</sup>

This focus on questions of Scottish identity of both past and present is only one side to the cultural phenomenon that is Walter Scott; the writer is also known for his wider literary

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portraiture of bygone days, had arisen in the twelfth century and made the men and the women of an earlier generation [...] play their parts over again before us as they played them of yore’, Metcalfe (1880), p. 328.

<sup>391</sup> Metcalfe (1861), p. 298. The enthusiasm for berserkr was held by the medieval Icelanders too. Benjamin Blaney notes that instances of the *berserkr*-suitor form something of a trope in the *Íslendingasögur*, see Benjamin Blaney, ‘The Berserk Suitor: The Literary Application of a Stereotyped Theme’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 54/4 (Autumn 1982), 279-94.

<sup>392</sup> Frederick Howell too visited the ‘Bearsark’s lava’ at the close of the century, but by this time William Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon’s translation had become the go-to resource; ‘We are entering into the territory of the ‘Ere Dwellers’, and almost every creek and headland has its story in the *Eyrbyggja Saga*. Here, for instance, under Drápuhlitharfjall, is the Bearsark’s lava’, Frederick W. W. Howell, *Icelandic Pictures Drawn with Pen and Pencil* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1893), p. 145. Howell quoted from Morris’s and Eiríkur’s translation on pp. 22-23 and 145-46.

<sup>393</sup> Sir Walter Scott, *The Lady of the Lake*, ed. by Thomas Crawford (Glasgow: The Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2010), p. vii.

engagement with European literature, including that of Iceland.<sup>394</sup> Scott's works on or inspired by the (Scandinavian or Old Norse) North include the narrative poems 'Harold the Dauntless' (1817) and 'Rokeby' (1813), novels *The Pirate* (1821) and *Count Robert of Paris* (1831), and his extracts of *Eyrbyggja saga* (completed late in 1813, and published in 1814).<sup>395</sup> A number of Scott's works also draw on wider notions of medievalism as applied to the British Isles.<sup>396</sup> It is therefore not as bold a claim as it initially appears when Fell asserts that of the turn-of-the-century writers and historians, 'it was Sir Walter Scott who had the firmest grasp of the realities of Norse life or Viking life or indeed of the medieval period in general.'<sup>397</sup> Scott's engagement with northern antiquity had begun at an early age, clearly before his time as a student, and covered both the literary and sociological aspects of discussion; his public lectures, such as those delivered at Edinburgh's 'Oyster Club' bore titles such as 'The Manners and Customs of the Northern Nations' and 'The Origins of the Scandinavian Mythology.'<sup>398</sup> These early exercises in northern antiquity were vessels for his thoughts on Britain's national origins.<sup>399</sup>

Scott's translated 'Abstract' of *Eyrbyggja saga* was completed in 1813 and published in the following year as part of the antiquarian anthology *Illustrations of Northern*

<sup>394</sup> Ingi Sigurðsson notes that although Scottish trading with Iceland had resumed in earnest around 1863, Walter Scott's works had already provided a means of cultural exchange between the two lands for half a century, see Ingi Sigurðsson, 'Icelandic Impressions of Scotland and the Scots in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', *Northern Studies*, 19 (1982), 3-22, at pp. 5-7.

<sup>395</sup> On 'Harold the Dauntless' see O'Donoghue (2014), pp. 125-28. On 'Rokeby' in general see Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 186-94; and on its particularly poor reviews (by Scott's standards) see Isamu Takahashi, 'Walter Scott's Poetry and Romantic Medievalism', *Studies in English Literature*, 46 (2005), 19-36, at p. 28. A Mr. Gordon, encouraged by Scott to translate La Motte-Fouqué's *Thiodolf the Iclander* into English, remarked that the work bore striking resemblances to *Count Robert of Paris*; Baron Friedrich de la Motte-Fouqué, *Thiodolf the Iclander: from the German, [trans. by Mr. Gordon]* (London: J. Burns, 1845), pp. ii-iv. Gordon's translation (an early point of contact with the Old North for several nineteenth-century writers, including Mary Leith – see Gunnar F. Guðmundsson, 'Frú Disney Leith og Ísland', *Árbók Landsbókasafns Íslands – Nýr flokkur*, 18 (1993), 27-40, at p. 29) contains characteristic Northern European nationalist rhetoric: "Ay, ay," said Jonas, shaking his head, "you Icelanders assuredly belong to that German race from which we Englishmen are proud of having come", La Motte-Fouqué (1845), p. 55.

<sup>396</sup> There are several studies on this. See in particular David Matthews, "'Quaint Inglis': Walter Scott and the Rise of Middle English Studies", in *Medievalism in England II*, ed. by Leslie J. Workman and Kathleen Verduin (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), 33-48.

<sup>397</sup> Fell (1993), p. 90.

<sup>398</sup> Julian Meldon D'Arcy and Kirsten Wolf, 'Sir Walter Scott and *Eyrbyggja Saga*', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 22 (1987), 30-43, at p. 30 (republished in Icelandic as Julian Meldon D'Arcy and Kirsten Wolf, 'Sir Walter Scott og *Eyrbyggja*', *Skírnir*, 162 (Autumn 1988), 256-72. See also Wawn (2002), p. 47; and Wawn (1981), p. 56.

<sup>399</sup> Scott has been variably described as a Scottish nationalist, English nationalist, British nationalist, and internationalist; see Kate Trumpener, 'National Character, Nationalist Plots: National Tale and Historical Novel in the Age of Waverley, 1806-1830', *ELH*, 60 (1993), 685-731, at pp. 685-86. In fact, Scott's opinions on the characterisation of the northern nations were mutable and subject to his continued scholarly activities. For example, although his novels displayed a variable approach to national identities, in Scott's essays on the nature of Chivalry and Romance (1814 and 1824 respectively), he 'Labels all Northern European culture as "German"' Oergel (2012), p. 127.

*Antiquities*.<sup>400</sup> The ‘Abstract’ was the product of both his earlier personal reading and recent publications in the field of Icelandic travel journals; Scott had been ‘drawing on Anglo-Saxon and Norse material as early as 1789 or 1790’ and was also aware of the work of Holland and Mackenzie.<sup>401</sup> A letter from 1812 demonstrates that alongside his efforts on the partial *Eyrbyggja saga* translation, Scott also attempted an (unpublished) extract of the poetry in *Hervarar saga*.<sup>402</sup> Furthermore, Scott subscribed to the Danish editions of the Icelandic sagas published by the Arna-Magnæen Commission, and it was in this series that he found his source: the 1787 edition of *Eyrbyggja saga* by Grímur Jónsson Thorkelín (1752-1829), who provided a modernised Icelandic text alongside a Latin translation.<sup>403</sup> Nor were these the only eighteenth-century volumes on northern antiquity at Scott’s disposal; he enthusiastically read from such writers as Olaus Magnus, Thomas Bartholin, Thomas Percy, and Torfaeus, and kept correspondence with several contemporary Scandinavian scholars.<sup>404</sup>

This wealth of sources did not mean that Scott necessarily had any knowledge of the Old Norse language itself. Scott was beholden to both Latin histories and editions, and a number of later scholars, such as Conrad Hjalmar Nordby, viewed this continued adherence to Latin scholarship as a burden on the developing British understanding of Old Norse. In Scott’s Old Norse writings, Nordby wrote, one observed ‘the lengthening out of the influence of the antiquarians who wrote of a dead past in a dead language. The time was at hand when that past

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<sup>400</sup> See Nordby (1901), pp. 20-22; Simpson (1973b), pp. 376-83. North Ludlow Beamish included a small extract from *Eyrbyggja saga* in his work *The Discovery of America by the Northmen, In the Tenth Century, with Notices of the Early Settlements of the Irish in the Western Hemisphere* (London: T. and W. Boone, 1841), pp. 184-202, but this was taken from Rafn’s Danish and Latin edition and, in any case, is specifically focused on Ireland. On Jamieson’s, Weber’s, and Scott’s *Illustrations of Northern Antiquities* see Harriet Harvey Wood, ‘Scott and Jamieson: The Relationship Between Two Ballad Collectors’, *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 9/2-3 (Oct.-Jan. 1971-72), 71-96, at pp. 83-84.

<sup>401</sup> Scott, in Jamieson, Weber, and Scott (1814), pp. 478-79; see John M. Simpson, ‘Scott and Old Norse Literature’, in *Scott Bicentenary Essays: Selected Papers read at the Sir Walter Scott Bicentenary Conference*, ed. by Alan Bell (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press Ltd., 1973a), 300-13, at p. 302.

<sup>402</sup> See Cowan (1972), p. 121.

<sup>403</sup> See Scott, in Jamieson, Weber, and Scott (1814), p. 478; Clunies Ross (2010), p. 159; D’Arcy and Wolf (1988), p. 257; and D’Arcy and Wolf (1987), p. 30. On the negative reviews of Thorkelín’s edition of *Eyrbyggja saga* see Magnús Fjalldal, ‘To Fall by Ambition – Grímur Thorkelín and His *Beowulf* Edition’, *Neophilologus*, 92/2 (April 2008), 321-32, at pp. 325-26.

<sup>404</sup> D’Arcy and Wolf (1987), p. 31. On Scott’s indebtedness to Percy’s *Reliques* see Alice Chandler, ‘Sir Walter Scott and the Medieval Revival’, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 19/4 (1965), 315-32, at pp. 317-18. Scott is still using Bartholin and Magnus by the time he writes *The Pirate*, see for example Sir Walter Scott, *The Pirate*, foreword by Andrew Wawn (Shetland: The Shetland Times Ltd., 1996), pp. 354-56. It is useful to keep in mind the previously noted saw of translation studies, aptly worded by John Kennedy (2007), pp. 4-5. Although Scott was writing in the early nineteenth century, and published long after, his sources for his Old Norse-derived works and translations were very much the eighteenth-century Latinate tomes of the previous generation. Scott’s work cannot really be considered an example of innovative research, but it does provide a window onto established British perceptions of saga literature.

was to live again, painted in the living words of living men.’<sup>405</sup> By the time Scott’s abstracts were republished by Blackwell this period was pressingly at hand, but in the early years of the nineteenth century one could get alarmingly far with limited knowledge of Old Norse.<sup>406</sup> In a period where few British scholars could demonstrate a genuine understanding of the language, peer review was a distant prospect.

Scott’s source text was one such example of dubious scholarship. As Magnús Fjalldal has remarked, ‘Thorkelín was essentially a fraud as a scholar, a fact not lost on many of his countrymen.’<sup>407</sup> Thorkelín had travelled to England in 1785, with financial backing from the Danish crown and the *Fonden ad usus publicos*, on a mission to uncover documents relating to Danish antiquity.<sup>408</sup> Whether or not Thorkelín had prior knowledge of the existence of the *Beowulf* manuscript (through Humphrey Wanley’s 1705 *Catalogue of Anglo-Saxon Poetry* for example) is debated, but his personal assurance of a shared heroic past inhabited by the ancestors of the British and the Scandinavians was evident.<sup>409</sup> Thorkelín, an Icelander but self-identifying as a Dane, was certain from the outset that the literature would confirm his already strongly-held beliefs regarding Danish and British national composition: ‘Our northern heritage, which brought us and the British together in friendship, enticed me to travel to Britain in 1786 to examine the treasures of Albion’s libraries.’<sup>410</sup> Thorkelín’s actual discovery, in the manner in which he presented it, appeared to place the Old English epic poem firmly in the hands of his Danish patrons. Thorkelín referred to Old English as ‘The Old Danish language’

<sup>405</sup> Nordby (1901), p. 22; Nordby chiefly had Morris in mind. Clunies Ross also notes that Scott’s Old Norse translations were, ‘Indubitably based on Thorkelin’s Latin translation and not on the study of the Icelandic text’, Clunies Ross (1998), p. 199.

<sup>406</sup> Clunies Ross notes that Scott’s efforts were not strictly even in keeping with the scholarly demands of his own period: ‘What had changed [between Percy’s time and Scott’s] was an awareness that professionalism in Icelandic studies was needed, and that a knowledge of the language from which one was to translate was desirable’, Clunies Ross (1998), p. 202.

<sup>407</sup> Fjalldal (2008), p. 321. Cooley concisely captures the general opinion of contemporary scholars on Thorkelín’s editorial work: ‘Thorkelín’s text is very bad’, Franklin Cooley, ‘Early Danish Criticism of *Beowulf*’, *ELH*, 7 (1940), 45-67, at p. 47. Scott, meanwhile, provided a simple (and incorrect) assessment of Thorkelín’s edition of *Eyrbyggja saga* as: ‘Correct’, Scott, in Jamieson, Weber, and Scott (1814), p. 478. For a good biography of Grímur Jónsson Thorkelín see B. S. Benedikz, ‘Grímur Thorkelín, The University of Saint Andrews, and *Codex Scardensis*’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 42/4 (Nov. 1970), 385-93.

<sup>408</sup> Robert E. Bjork, Taylor Corse, and Grímur Jónsson Thorkelín, ‘Grímur Jónsson Thorkelín’s Preface to the First Edition of “Beowulf”, 1815’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 68/3 (Summer 1996), 291-320, at p. 295. Thorkelín evidently expected the poem now known as *Beowulf* to be a work on the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Viking paragon Ragnar Loðbrok, as is mentioned in one of Scott’s footnotes in *Illustrations of Northern Antiquities*; see Scott (1814), p. 7; and Edith C. Batho, ‘Sir Walter Scott and the Sagas: Some Notes’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 24/4 (Oct. 1929), 409-15, p. 409. Batho posits that this is the first reference to *Beowulf* in English.

<sup>409</sup> Fjalldal (2008), p. 323.

<sup>410</sup> Grímur Jónsson Thorkelín, in Bjork, Corse, and Grímur Jónsson Thorkelín (1996), p. 301. Fjalldal comments on Thorkelín’s assumed nationality: ‘He thought of himself as a *bone fide* Dane, and seldom, if ever, has an Icelander appeared to have been more ashamed of his real nationality’, Fjalldal (2008), p. 324.



in his edition's introduction, and moreover made claims to Old Norse literary heritage.<sup>411</sup> The languages of northern Europe could all be traced back to his much-admired, adopted monarchy; 'Our epic plainly teaches that the Anglo-Saxon idiom is actually Danish,' Thorkelín tried to persuade his readers, 'a language cultivated and kept pure even to this day by the inhabitants of Iceland, who dwell almost beyond the path of the sun.'<sup>412</sup>

Nor was Scott merely beholden to Thorkelín's ill-thought-out theories through his source text; his ideas were championed abroad by Scott's collaborators. Robert Jamieson, in whose 1814 *Illustrations of Northern Antiquities* Scott's abstract was first published, was a correspondent with Grímur, and regularly requested books from Denmark on Old Norse and related interests.<sup>413</sup> Jamieson had an abiding interest in folktales, particularly ones with a national relevance to Scotland, and wrote works intended for 'his expatriated countrymen' in order that they envisioned Scottish history within the framework of Scandinavian cultural influence.<sup>414</sup> As Kidd writes, 'Jamieson directly challenged the view that Scots was a branch of Saxon English. Under the influence of the visiting Scandinavian scholar, Grímur Thorkelín, Professor of Antiquities at Copenhagen, he associated the history of Scots with a broader Gothic identity.'<sup>415</sup>

Jamieson's Danish contacts did not just influence the manner in which he viewed Old Norse literature, they also directed his attention towards specific works, providing him with access to several important volumes of Scandinavian scholarship, not least Björner's *Kæmpe Viser*.<sup>416</sup> According to Jamieson this material was important not just because of its relevance to the British nation, but because of the comparative racial "purity" of the populations through which it was currently preserved:

Of the many ballads of this kind which existed a century ago, it is to be hoped, that some may still remain, if not in Denmark, at least among the mountains of Norway,

<sup>411</sup> Grímur Jónsson Thorkelín, in Bjork, Corse, and Grímur Jónsson Thorkelín (1996), p. 315.

<sup>412</sup> Grímur Jónsson Thorkelín, in Bjork, Corse, and Grímur Jónsson Thorkelín (1996), p. 303. In fact, this was the general custom of Danish academia of the period. On Thorkelín's reverence for the Danish crown see Fjalldal (2008), pp. 324-25.

<sup>413</sup> Cowan (1972), p. 120; see also Edinburgh University Library, Thorkelin MS, La. III. 379 16/11/1784. The confusingly similar title to Percy's has been noted by more than one reader; Clunies Ross suggests that it was chosen 'to resonate with Percy's', Clunies Ross (1998), p. 198. For later readers of Blackwell's *Northern Antiquities*, the new inclusion of Scott's abstract may have appeared more of a re-inclusion.

<sup>414</sup> Jamieson (1806), vol. I, p. ii; see also Jamieson, in Jamieson, Weber, and Scott (1814), p. 246.

<sup>415</sup> Colin Kidd, 'Race, Theology and Revival: Scots Philology and its Contexts in the Age of Pinkerton and Jamieson', *Scottish Studies Review*, 3/2 (Autumn 2002), 20-33, at p. 26.

<sup>416</sup> Jamieson took up a position in Riga in 1805, where he remained for four years and worked on his German and Scandinavian languages: 'On the journey to Riga, he called in Copenhagen on the Icelandic scholar G. J. Thorkelín and received from him a present of books, "a foundation for my Northern Library," as he described it to Scott, and this included a copy of old Danish heroic ballads generally known as *Kæmpe Viser*', Wood (1972), p. 75.

and in the more remote parts of Sweden, where the inhabitants are more unmixed and uncorrupted people, and where the hopeless listlessness of torpid inactivity, and the baneful spirit of Germanizing affectation, have hitherto had but a partial influence.<sup>417</sup>

Although Jamieson appears to have lost all of these source volumes on his return to Scotland, he retained the impression of the importance of constructing a similar collection for the history and literature of northern Britain.<sup>418</sup> For Jamieson an anthology of such pieces would be invaluable for British antiquity. He wrote to Scott on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May, 1806, outlining his plans for their future project: ‘My Runic lore might enable me to do somewhat towards ascertaining how far the language, manners, superstitions, &c. of the Highlanders have been influenced by their subjection to & intercourse with, the Danes and other Nor-men.’<sup>419</sup>

In the 1814 *Illustrations of Northern Antiquity*, Jamieson attempted such a project, pitching his thoughts on comparative literature to an intended readership ‘fond of tracing human nature through those darker paths of history’ with the aid of ancient texts.<sup>420</sup> Just as blunt rocks could be used to light a spark, so Jamieson argued the rude portraits of an earlier age could depict something relevant to his own. As with the approach to history championed by Mallet and Percy, and later continued by Blackwell, Jamieson believed that one could draw useful connections between the literature and the national character of a traditionally-defined group of people: ‘The legends of a rude people are, it is true, when first produced, wild and strange, like themselves; and when preserved only by tradition, soon become extravagant and confused, furnishing but very insufficient data for establishing the certainty of political events.’<sup>421</sup> Nevertheless, the benefits of studying both the ancient and current Scandinavians for the purpose of uncovering common ancestral traits of the English or Scottish nation were evident to Jamieson. As far as he was concerned, others, such as Thorkelín, had been mining the self-same deposits for decades with notable success. ‘We come late in time,’ noted the co-editor, ‘and are only gleaners in a wide field, the harvest of which has already been gathered into the barns of the learned.’<sup>422</sup> Jamieson’s only fear (albeit probably a literary conceit) was that the modern readers would find the old texts incompatible with their own construction of

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<sup>417</sup> Jamieson (1806), vol. II, p. 86; as with George Stephens (see next chapter), Jamieson was highly suspicious of German involvement in characterising the north. He viewed Tacitus’s ‘unfinished’ image of the Germans to be a problematic distraction for the British, (1806), vol. II, p. 90.

<sup>418</sup> Wood (1972), p. 82.

<sup>419</sup> Jamieson (1806), from NLS, MS. 3875, f. 190, cited in Wood (1972), pp. 80-81; Jamieson and Scott had first met in 1800, while their collaborator Henry Weber had first met Scott in 1807, and thereafter became his research assistant until 1814, see Clunies Ross (1998), p. 198.

<sup>420</sup> Jamieson, in Jamieson, Weber, and Scott (1814), p. 234.

<sup>421</sup> Jamieson, in Jamieson, Weber, and Scott (1814), p. 234.

<sup>422</sup> Jamieson, in Jamieson, Weber, and Scott (1814), p. 237.

national character, partly due to the antiquarian nature of the overall volume. *Illustrations of Northern Antiquities* was a work, Jamieson lamented, ‘which relishes too much of pure antiquity to be generally popular.’<sup>423</sup> While this point could arguably be a genuine editorial concern in other works, it is unlikely that Jamieson was unaware that he had secured the services of the early nineteenth-century’s chief producer of popular antiquarian fiction.

What Scott did provide, with the 1814 *Eyrbyggja saga* abstract, was, on first glance, a relatively restrained depiction of the Icelandic sagas in a readily-accessible format for the English reader.<sup>424</sup> Agreeing with the respected academic stance of the period, Scott argued that the Icelandic sagas (of which, there were ‘none more interesting than the Eyrbyggja-Saga’) deserved to be studied as comparatively reliable works of history.<sup>425</sup> The saga author, as had been presented in Percy’s *Northern Antiquities*, was a writer with an eye for historical detail and a fundamental love of truth: ‘The simplicity of his annals,’ Scott remarked, ‘seems a sufficient warrant for their fidelity.’<sup>426</sup> Yet even when the saga author strayed into non-simplistic terrain, Scott was willing to defend the text in terms of historical accuracy:

Our annalist has not left the scene altogether unvaried. Wars and prosecutions before the assembly of the people are indeed the groundwork; but such spells and supernatural incidents, as the superstition of the age believed in, are introduced like the omens and miracles of classic history. Such incidents, indeed, make an invariable part of the history of a rude age, and the chronicles which do not afford these marks of human credulity, may be grievously suspected as deficient in authenticity.<sup>427</sup>

It was a bold concept; the absence of scenes of supernatural occurrences in an early history, Scott argued, spoke against its historical accuracy, and not the other way around.

Scott’s style of translation was neither successful by modern tastes nor in terms of setting a nineteenth-century template, relying as it did heavily on Thorkelín’s Latin translation and favouring Latin-derived terms in English to more commonly used vocabulary. The exact

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<sup>423</sup> Jamieson, in Jamieson, Weber, and Scott (1814), p. vi.

<sup>424</sup> Scott’s extracts can be found in Jamieson, Weber, and Scott (1814), pp. 475-513, and were republished in Percy (1847), pp. 517-40. Batho notes that Scott was not merely a passive receiver of academic tradition: ‘Scott was far too acute a judge of evidence, and far too well acquainted with humanity, not to see that the Icelandic sagas implied a very different background from the highly coloured suggestions of Mallet’, Batho (1929), p. 410. Nevertheless, this (largely common) antipathy to Mallet’s theories did not afford Scott the same level of scrutiny with his own source material.

<sup>425</sup> Scott, in Jamieson, Weber, and Scott (1814), p. 477.

<sup>426</sup> Scott, in Jamieson, Weber, and Scott (1814), p. 477.

<sup>427</sup> Scott, in Jamieson, Weber, and Scott (1814), p. 483. As Hermann notes, the perceived historical authority of the sagas has repeatedly proven to be their most endearing feature, see (amongst others) Pernille Hermann, ‘Saga Literature, Cultural Memory, and Storage’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 85/3, (Fall 2013), 332-54, at p. 351; and Walter Scheps, ‘Historiocity and Oral Narrative in *Njáls Saga*’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 46/2 (Spring 1974), 120-33.

approach has been reviewed in great detail by several scholars over the last century, but an extract of Scott's abstract will serve to elucidate their arguments:

The death of Thorolf, however, led the way to internal dissention. A patriarch, called, from the number of his family, Barna-Kiallak (rich in children), was tempted to dispute the sanctity of the territory of Thorsness, which had been sedulously stipulated. His tribe, confident in their numbers, openly disputed the power of Thorstein, who had succeeded his father as pontiff, and announced that when occasion pressed they would pay no more respect to the soil of the sacred territory than to unconsecrated ground, nor would they take the trouble to secede to the rock appointed for such purposes. With this foul intent they marched towards Thorsness, and were met by Thorstein at the head of his tribe, servants, and allies, who, after a sharp skirmish, was fortunately able to prevent the intended profanation of the sacred soil.<sup>428</sup>

The language of the target text, even removed from the stylistic limitations of the source text, is markedly awkward, and has none of the linguistic fluidity of the Old Norse. Scott's was not a close translation, and frequently slipped into paraphrase or omitted details entirely. Few earlier devotees of Old Norse eddaic poetry would expect to fire their imaginations with the internal dispute and dissention of patriarchs and pontiffs over sedulously stipulated sacred soil (with or without profanation). Even Scott's highly-influential passage on the trial and comeuppance of the 'Berserkir' read like an extract from a medical text: 'They were extremely exhausted, as was common with persons of their condition, whose profuse expenditure of strength and spirits induced a proportional degree of relaxation after severe labour.' Yet something of the approach clearly struck Scott as appropriate; he used almost the exact same wording for a passage of his novel *The Pirate* some seven years later.<sup>429</sup>

Scott's selection of episodes from the saga was not entirely logical, but the sections favoured with an appearance in his 'Abstract' were certainly presented to appeal to his contemporary British readers. Scott was attracted by passages which appeared to demonstrate the Icelanders's love for their land, such as his rewriting of the revenge and exile of 'Thorarin Black'.<sup>430</sup> After Thorarin's wife 'Add' loses a hand while trying to intervene during a fight, Thorarin takes the defamatory accusations of his opponents to heart and assaults and kills several of them. As a consequence, he is tried and outlawed. Scott rewrote Thorarin's thoughts in a revised translation of skaldic verse, here rewritten as a 'rollicking Border ballad':<sup>431</sup>

<sup>428</sup> Scott, in Jamieson, Weber, and Scott (1814), p. 480.

<sup>429</sup> Scott (1996), p. 16.

<sup>430</sup> Scott's translation of Old Norse names was not only peculiar but was also highly irregular; see the criticism below.

<sup>431</sup> D'Arcy and Wolf (1987), p. 40.

The ceremony being peaceably performed, Thorarin, observing the strong party in attendance upon Snorro, broke forth into a poetical rhapsody:

No feeble force, no female hand,  
 Compels me from my native land;  
 O'er-match'd in numbers and in might,  
 By banded hosts in armour bright,  
 In vain attesting laws and gods,  
 A guiltless man, I yield to odds.<sup>432</sup>

Scott clearly considered Thorarin's words (or at least his own version of them) to be of a rousing sentiment; in the face of otherwise certain death, the bondsman Thorarin is forced to leave Iceland for three years. A similar passage from the later-translated *Njáls saga* would pick up favour with nationalist poets and writers in the second half of the century. In Scott's abstract, the attachment of the Iclander to his personally-maintained plot of land is representative of overarching demonstrations of love for the country as a whole. Thorarin is set up as a prototype of Gunnarr of Hlíðarendi, an early model for a kind of national hero-worship; he is forcibly torn from his homeland against his wishes.

Scott displayed a similar affection for 'Arntill', the rival *goði* to the cunning Snorri, and all-round exemplary role-model:

[The death of] Arntill is regretted by the annalist as a model of the qualities most valued in an Icelandic chief. He excelled in accurate observance of ancient rites and customs, was stout-hearted and brave in enterprise, and so prudent and eloquent, that he was always successful in the causes which he prosecuted in the popular assemblies – qualities which drew upon him the envy that occasioned his death.<sup>433</sup>

This can be seen as an early model for the idolisation of saga characters, propagated by Iceland's Romantic Nationalist poets and British writers alike, which in subsequent decades would come to find paragons in Gunnarr of Hlíðarendi of *Njáls saga* and Grettir Ásmundarson of *Grettis saga*. In Scott's abstract, Arntill's last stand atop a hay-stack became a fundamental defence of Iceland's most-prized national values, the small space of land representative of a wider concept of Iceland as a whole. In Scott's depictions of Thorarin and Arntill one can witness the early attempts at a character-based form of idealised national traits.

Scott tentatively tried to apply the intellectual aspect of this idealised ancestral portrait, which would later find a champion in Njáll Þorgeirsson, to the central figure of *Eyrbyggja saga*, 'Snorro' (Þorgrímsson, known generally in the text as Snorri goði). As Scott viewed the saga, Snorro represented a societal sub-group which praised mental agility, consultation,

<sup>432</sup> Scott, in Jamieson, Weber, and Scott (1814), p. 488. Clunies Ross comments, 'The complexities of Old Icelandic skaldic diction and syntax were simply beyond his ken', Clunies Ross (1998), p. 200.

<sup>433</sup> Scott, in Jamieson, Weber, and Scott (1814), p. 500.

negotiation, and diplomacy over the violent impulses on offer elsewhere in old literature. ‘That such as character, partaking more of the jurisconsult or statesman than the warrior, should have risen so high in such an early period, argues the preference over which the Icelanders already assigned to mental superiority over the rude attributes of strength and courage,’ remarked Scott; the author counted this tendency as ‘another strong proof of their extraordinary commonwealth.’<sup>434</sup> Scott found himself able to look past Snorro’s dubious moral stance in several episodes of the saga by arguing that the *goði*’s actions were part of a greater communal good; ‘His selfish conduct seems to have been of more service to the settlement in which he swayed,’ Scott commented.<sup>435</sup> Snorro may have ordered one or two immoral assassination attempts, and murdered some of the region’s more promising farmers, but this could be seen as part of a wider tendency towards strengthening the population and ensuring a stable future for Iceland as a nation.

A similar concept of the homeland can be found in Scott’s ‘song’ of ‘Styr’, which the tempestuous farmer sings after having killed off his amorous *berserkr*-tennants (or as Scott rendered it, after ‘the presumption of Halli’ had ‘discomposed their union’).<sup>436</sup> As with Thorarin’s strophe, Scott’s rendition of skaldic poetry combines the dashing excitement of the Romantic spirit with the brave sentiments of national unity:

These champions from beyond the main  
 Of Iceland’s sons I deem’d the bane,  
 Nor fear’d I to endure the harm  
 And frantic fury of their arm,  
 But, conqueror, gave this valley’s gloom  
 To be the grim Berserkir’s tomb.<sup>437</sup>

Styr’s sentiment is not at all convincing, but is a vivid image of Romantic ideals compressed into a mere six lines. He claims to have removed the ‘Berserkir’ out of a communal duty, protecting ‘Iceland’s sons’ from any harm that might come from these untrustworthy (and unmarriageable) foreigners. He paints a picture of himself as bravely putting his body between national youth and a dangerous intruding element, braving the ‘frantic fury of their arm’ at his own peril. And finally, as a parting gift, he imbues the local landscape with the language of the ‘Sublime’ North – affording his workers a plot of land (a “joke” that Gunnarr’s mother

<sup>434</sup> Scott, in Jamieson, Weber, and Scott (1814), p. 512.

<sup>435</sup> Scott, in Jamieson, Weber, and Scott (1814), p. 512.

<sup>436</sup> Scott, in Jamieson, Weber, and Scott (1814), p. 491.

<sup>437</sup> Scott, in Jamieson, Weber, and Scott (1814), p. 493.

Rannveig would make in *Njáls saga* on the death of her son) and simultaneously gifting the land a lasting folk-tale, one which Scott's readers assimilated with aplomb.

Evidently Scott's abstract of *Eyrbyggja saga* was not without ideological subtext, whether intended or otherwise. Above all, while he saw the sagas as being rather trivial with regards to much of their subject matter, Scott nevertheless placed great value on their exhibition of shared Northern traits, common to both Scandinavia and Britain. In Scott's mind, this was the chief value of the sagas: 'If the events which are commemorated in these provincial annals are not in themselves of great importance, the reader may, in recompense, derive, from the minuteness with which they are detailed, an acquaintance with the manners of the northern nations, not to be acquired from the perusal of more general history.'<sup>438</sup> As the century progressed, this notion gained momentum with other British writers. Icelanders were after all (linguistically speaking) an offshoot of the same Germanic branch as the British. With the populace removed geographically and their deeds recorded in manuscripts, the history and tales of Iceland came to be considered as a northern ancestral petri-dish, an agar plate of Germanic genealogy. Here was a picture of early British character distilled.

Blackwell was not blinded by Scott's reputation, and ardently pointed out the errors in his analysis (particularly in terms of Scott's knowledge of Icelandic history), but he still happily used the translation elsewhere in *Northern Antiquities* in order to support his own arguments on Old Norse sagas.<sup>439</sup> More recent assessments of the value of Scott's extracts have differed widely in opinion. Theodore Andersson saw Scott as not so much championing the genre as much as he 'downgraded the non-realistic features of the sagas,' placing value on personally selected elements while ignoring others completely, much as Laxness's Tumi Jónsen does with his telling of Þórgunna's undead, nocturnal baking.<sup>440</sup> Edith Batho, in her 1929 analysis of Scott and the sagas, thought *Northern Antiquities* an 'amusing though unscholarly work' in which Scott had helped cultivate a picture of the Viking as 'half ogre, half-noble savage' which would confuse and inconvenience scholars for decades to come.<sup>441</sup>

Not all reviews have been so negative. John Simpson, commenting on Scott's interaction with *Eyrbyggja saga*, remarks that while Scott was undoubtedly 'a prisoner of the

<sup>438</sup> Scott, in Jamieson, Weber, and Scott (1814), p. 477. Scott's extract, entitled 'Abstract of the Eyrbyggja-Saga,' and dated to 1813, is found in pp. 475-513.

<sup>439</sup> Blackwell pointed out, for example, that 1264 was the year in which Iceland fully came under Norwegian control; Scott had stated that the saga was composed 'before the year 1264, when Iceland was still subject to the dominion of Norway', Blackwell and Scott, in Percy (1847), p. 517. For Blackwell's use of Scott's translation in his own writing see, for example, Percy (1847), p. 288.

<sup>440</sup> Theodore M. Andersson (1997), p. 417.

<sup>441</sup> Batho (1929), p. 409.

very one-sided view of Old Norse literature that seems now to have been almost a historical necessity for the writers of the Romantic revival,' nevertheless the writer was 'equipped, if anyone was, to gain glimpses of the larger reality of Old Norse literature.'<sup>442</sup> Fell is also willing to credit Scott with a certain positive influence on Old Norse scholarship in Britain, and underlines the importance of the inclusion of the 'Abstract' in *Northern Antiquities*. The translations provided readers with a realistic sample of Old Norse literature not solely based on the dramatic imagery of Norse myth; 'After Scott's sensible extract of *Eyrbyggja saga* we have to wait for Icelandic prose to make its impact on the English imagination, which it slowly does,' Fell comments, 'The sober world of *Íslendinga sögur* does eventually take over from the wild world of runic bards.'<sup>443</sup> Scott went some way towards dethroning Ossianic and eddaic verse, and recommending the family sagas to a British readership.

D'Arcy and Wolf to some extent concur with Fell; they remark that 'many of Scott's interpolations in his 'Abstract' are indeed astute comments on various aspects of early medieval Iceland.'<sup>444</sup> Nevertheless, for all its editorial insight, Scott's work as a translator does not go uncriticised: 'To the twentieth-century reader familiar with Old Norse sagas in general and *Eyrbyggja* in particular, Scott's *Abstract* will almost certainly be a disappointment. It has many careless and sometimes crass errors and the general narrative of the saga is distorted by Scott's somewhat arbitrary selection of material.'<sup>445</sup> His translation style they describe as 'ponderous and over-elaborate,' and drawing too markedly from the Latin translation.<sup>446</sup> Furthermore, even aside from mistakes of over-reliance on the Latin source material (Scott copied at least one error straight from Thorkelin's edition) D'Arcy and Wolf list an alarming selection of mistakes, both in Scott's contextual knowledge of the geography and history of Iceland, and in continuity errors and changes to the narrative itself. The end work can only have been a product, D'Arcy and Wolf surmise, of 'extreme haste in composition and a complete lack of revision.'<sup>447</sup> In short, from an Old Norse scholar's point of view: 'Scott's *Abstract* is not as convincing, representative, or accurate as it might have been.'<sup>448</sup> D'Arcy and Wolf's in-depth close-reading of Scott's translation uncovers a wealth of anomalies in Scott's translation process, but it remains fundamentally a review of the quality of Scott's translation and his aptitude in Old Norse rather than an appraisal of the literary influence and political implications of Scott's

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<sup>442</sup> Simpson (1973a), p. 300.

<sup>443</sup> Fell (1993), p. 94.

<sup>444</sup> D'Arcy and Wolf (1987), p. 33.

<sup>445</sup> D'Arcy and Wolf (1987), p. 34.

<sup>446</sup> D'Arcy and Wolf (1987), p. 34.

<sup>447</sup> D'Arcy and Wolf (1987), pp. 34-36, 39

<sup>448</sup> D'Arcy and Wolf (1987), p. 38.



involvement with the sagas. It is right to make an example of Scott's failures as a translator, but doing so may denigrate the significance of his work in a wider cultural context.

### 4.3. Romance and Beyond: Constructions of Northern History after Scott

Walter Scott's interaction with the sagas did not end with his 1814 abstract. In letter three of his *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* he related the tale of Gunnar Helming, once more taken from Old Norse sources; if his work on *Eyrbyggja saga* had showcased Scott's 'genius for getting to the heart of the matter,' Batho suggests, his later work demonstrated both a 'glorious carelessness' and a 'persistent intellectual curiosity.'<sup>449</sup> While this combination may not have found Scott favourable reviewers among present-day scholars, it was ideal for his subsequent literary works on northern themes. Indeed, for some scholars, even Scott's transition from the realm of poetry to the novel was a move inspired by the detached, omnipresent narration of the Old Norse sagas.<sup>450</sup> While this theory runs into problems when one considers the timeline of Scott's publications (the *Waverley* novels were well underway as writing projects by the time Scott was working on his *Eyrbyggja saga* abstract, and his last poems were, by his standards, disastrous), it is certainly fruitful to bear in mind the writer's continuing interest in Old Norse sagas when reviewing his wider portfolio.

#### 4.3.1. The Pirate

Walter Scott's pinnacle of Northern engagement is his 1821 novel *The Pirate*.<sup>451</sup> The plot concerns the fortunes of four young islanders: Minna and Brenda, the daughters of community

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<sup>449</sup> See Batho (1929), pp. 412-15. D'Arcy and Wolf seem to be responding to this judgement when they conclude that 'interest and enthusiasm are always commendable, but, unfortunately, they are no substitute for knowledge and precision', D'Arcy and Wolf (1987), pp. 42-43.

<sup>450</sup> See Batho (1929), p. 411 for example.

<sup>451</sup> Scott's novel was published in December 1821, although it is commonly listed as published in 1822. In 1912 William A. Craigie recommended the novel, along with several other works by Scott, to his long-term correspondent Jón Porvaldsson (Lbs. 2692 8vo). This was typical of Craigie, who sought to promote Scottish-Icelandic relations with his numerous Icelandic contacts; he wrote in a letter to Benedikt Gröndal (undated), 'In some points the Scots are much closer to the Scandinavian peoples than they are to the Southern English', (Lbs. 2395 4to, i). The concurrent rise of the novel alongside the availability of Old Norse texts in English translation undoubtedly affected the final form of the latter, as discussed in Wawn (2002). Durrenberger for one sees the unintended conflation of literary forms as being misleading: 'Sagas are not novels. Sagas were written for Icelanders of the thirteenth century, not for Americans or Icelanders of the twentieth', E. Paul Durrenberger, *Icelandic Essays: Explorations in the Anthropology of Modern Life* (Iowa City: Rudi Publishing, 1995), p. 96.

leader Magnus Troil; their childhood friend Mordaunt Mertoun, raised by the dour and enigmatic Basil Mertoun; and a shipwrecked pirate by the name of captain Clement Cleveland with ‘less of the core of devil about him, than his trade requires.’<sup>452</sup> Here Scott demonstrated knowledge of a wide range of texts of northern antiquity, including Old Norse sagas such as *Eyrbyggja saga*. In 1814, the same year his abstract was first published, Scott had travelled in Orkney and Shetland, and had perused works on local history and folklore with typical enthusiasm.<sup>453</sup> Although on paper the trip was a scouting exercise to uncover material for the poem *Lord of the Isles*, Scott was soon taken by tales of the islands’s Norwegian ancestry, and in particular the now fortune-diminished ‘Udallers’:

I was induced to go a generation or two further back, to find materials from which I might trace the features of the old Norwegian Udaller, the Scottish gentry having in general occupied the place of that primitive race, and their language and peculiarities of manner having entirely disappeared. The only difference now to be observed betwixt the gentry of these islands and those of Scotland in general is, that the wealth and property is more equally divided among our more northern countrymen, and that there exist among the resident proprietors no men of very great wealth.<sup>454</sup>

Scott noted that the islands in general were in possession of a general ‘equality of fortunes’ quite separate from the tiers of society to be found in Edinburgh and London.<sup>455</sup> Indeed, in writing home to his intrigued friends, Scott fully adopted the mantle of the Romantic Nationalist traveller: ‘Scott responded by playing the part of Romantic tourist to the hilt, searching out and moralizing upon spots of historic interest, penetrating the interiors of labyrinthine caverns, deciding whether a scene was “sublime”, “terrific”, or “beautiful.”’<sup>456</sup>

Scott’s implementation of his saga lore is perhaps best demonstrated in the adaption of the violent childhood of Egill Skallagrímsson of *Egils saga*, supplemented with his own *Eyrbyggja* extracts and rewritten as the erratic parenting of the ‘retired and gloomy’ Basil Mertoun.<sup>457</sup> The melancholy Mertoun goes into a violent rage when he finds his housekeeper arguing with a fisherman over the price of his wares, with the end result that he fires the former

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<sup>452</sup> Scott (1996), p. 324.

<sup>453</sup> ‘This brief preface may begin like the tale of the Ancient Mariner, since it was on shipboard that the Author acquired the very moderate degree of local knowledge and information, both of the people and scenery, which he had endeavoured to embody in the romance of the *Pirate*’, – so Scott began his preface to the 1831 second edition of *The Pirate*, see Scott (1996), p. 1. On Scott’s time in the northern isles and the development of *The Pirate* see George G. Dekker, *The Fictions of Romantic Tourism: Radcliffe, Scott, and Mary Shelley* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), pp. 155-59, and Penny Fielding, “‘All that is curious on continent and isle’: Time, Place, and Modernity in Scott’s *Vacation 1814* and *The Pirate*”, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 47 (2017), 243-62, at pp. 245-52 and 252-62.

<sup>454</sup> Scott (1996), p. 3; from the 1831 preface.

<sup>455</sup> Scott (1996), p. 3.

<sup>456</sup> Dekker (2005), p. 156.

<sup>457</sup> Later revealed to be Basil Vaughan, see Scott (1996), p. 10.

and chases the latter out of the house, battering him around the head with his own fish. His now ex-housekeeper, Swertha, runs to his son Mordaunt for help. Mordaunt has evidently been brought up on a diet of *Íslendingasögur*, and spots a literary comparison when he sees it:

“Swertha,” said the youth, “I can do but little for you, but you may do something for yourself. My father’s passion resembles the fury of those ancient champions, those Berserkars, you sing about.”

“Ay, ay, fish of my heart,” replied the old woman, with a pathetic whine; “the Berserkars were champions who lived before the blessed days of Saint Olave and who used to run like madmen on swords, and spears, and harpoons, and muskats, and snap them all to pieces, as a finner would go through a herring-net, and then, when the fury went off, they were as weak and unstable as water.”<sup>458</sup>

Mordaunt explains that his father is of a similar temperament, and the son himself spends the majority of his time away from the family house in order to avoid his father’s rages. The events of the sagas play out for a second time, relocated to the upper-class dining rooms of British Shetland.<sup>459</sup>

In Scott’s fiery, saga-derived Shetlanders, attentive readers could readily perceive a host of nationalisms, each as firmly-advocated as the last; almost every character seemed to have some unique notion of the correct national portrait of northern Britain. Many of Scott’s readers took this spirit to heart, notably those of the Udal League, a collection of Orcadian and Shetland activists based in London and intent on realising the romantic notions espoused by *The Pirate*’s cast, particularly those regarding the rightful dominance of Norse-derived elements in British society.<sup>460</sup> In the fictional sphere, Scott’s saga-inspired nationalists run out of steam, and are ultimately proven to be shallow and ineffectual; Scott’s implied moral lay not in a divisive localism but rather in a world-wise respect for opposing cultural values. As Wawn remarks, ‘In achieving its ultimate sense of harmony out of contrast, *The Pirate* lies

<sup>458</sup> Scott (1996), p. 16.

<sup>459</sup> Wawn comments that ‘in *The Pirate* [Scott] created a late seventeenth-century fictional work in which the islands’ Viking past still resonated powerfully amongst the locals. Several of Scott’s characters became the imaginary companions of successive generations of Victorian readers as *The Pirate* became the first and remained the favourite old northern novel written in English during the nineteenth century’, Wawn (2002), p. 61.

<sup>460</sup> Wawn, in Scott (1996), p. ix. The more general popularity of Scott’s novel can be measured in the numerous mentions in travel literature of Orkney and Shetland in the Victorian period. See [Anonymous], *A Walk in Shetland by Two Eccentrics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Edinburgh: Stillies Brothers, 1831), pp. 2-3; Andrew James Symington, *Pen and Pencil Sketches of Farøe and Iceland* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, & Roberts, 1862), p. 8; and Bayard Taylor, *Egypt and Iceland in the Year 1874* (London: Low, Marston, Low, & Searle, 1875), p. 178. Perhaps most striking is the episode in Metcalfe’s account, in which he encounters a proud Norwegian priest who had named his son ‘Walter Scott’ in honour of the writer, Rev. Frederick Metcalfe, *The Oxonian in Norway; or, Notes of Excursions in that Country in 1854-55*, 2 vols (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1856), vol. 1, pp. 78-79.

comfortably along the grains of Scott's sense of one nationhood.<sup>461</sup> The characters too besotted with the Norse past come to melancholy, if not sticky, ends; their 'romantic dreams ultimately run into the sand unless allied with some sense of practical futurity.'<sup>462</sup>

Characters such as the respected but naïve Magnus Troil ('but a plain old Norseman') are of the opinion that the Norse natives of Shetland are inherently better than the Scottish or southern British interlopers.<sup>463</sup> In a perceptive provocation aimed at the proponents of notions of true race, Scott has Magnus bemoan the passing of Shetland's old family lines:

"No, sir, the ancient days and the genuine manners of these Islands are no more; for our ancient possessors – our Patersons, our Feas, our Schlagbrenners, our Thorbiorns, have given place to Giffords, Scotts, Mouats, men whose names bespeak them or their ancestors strangers to the soil which we the Troils have inhabited long before the days of Turf-Einar..."<sup>464</sup>

Scott's critique is multi-faceted and subtle. Even the translator of the obscurely-anglicised names of his *Eyrbyggja saga* abstract would have recognised the process at work in the contemporary spellings of Paterson (Pétursson) and Thorbiorn (Þórbjörn, in any case not a patronym), but how many readers contemplated the inclusion of the author's own name in the list of foreign undesirables? Moreover, readers of *The Pirate* were encouraged to ponder who best represented the interests and values of the modern north: the anglicised, cosmopolitan Scotts, or the Norwegian, blood-eagle-practising Einars.

Not that Scott blamed such backward-looking philosophy on character defect; *The Pirate*'s Shetlanders were people of their age, surrounded by the antiquarian trappings which Scott himself had consulted as a child. Thus, in a moment of speechlessness, Magnus sits down next to a conveniently placed Latin copy of Olaus Magnus's *Compendious History*, a work distinguished by its fantastical depictions of the northern nations.<sup>465</sup> This real-life latter-day Magnus, sometime Bishop of Uppsala, was responsible for many widely-held popular myths about Iceland and the north. Across chapters titled 'Of Brazen Horses that vomited out Fire', 'Of the Stones of Giants', and the ominous 'Of Passages in the Dark,' Magnus produced a winningly fantastical image of Scandinavia. He described encounters with gruesome whales ('hairy, and of four acres in bigness'), 'White Crows' large enough to carry away pigs, and

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<sup>461</sup> Wawn, in Scott (1996), p. x.

<sup>462</sup> Wawn, in Scott (1996), p. xviii.

<sup>463</sup> Scott (1996), p. 237.

<sup>464</sup> Scott (1996), pp. 11-12.

<sup>465</sup> Scott (1996), p. 237. Olaus Magnus, *A Compendious History of the Goths, Svvedes, & Vandals and Other Northern Nations* (London: J. Streater, 1658).

coastlines festooned with ferocious monsters.<sup>466</sup> Magnus Troil is happy to recognise it as the ‘fine edition published in 1555, which contains representations of war-chariots, fishing exploits, warlike exercises, and domestic employments of the Scandinavians.’<sup>467</sup>

Perhaps understandably, the overthrow of these attractive (or at least engaging) images and the realisation of his own folly does not come easily to Magnus. Even at the wedding of his daughter Brenda to the falsely-vilified Mordaunt, he cannot without effort shake himself from his strongly held tenets. It is only at length that ‘his Norse blood gave way to the natural feeling of the heart.’<sup>468</sup> Note that Scott does not completely dismantle the values of nationalism. National sentiment, Scott appears to suggest, is an intrinsic quality as much as it is taught; it is in the high-fantasy of Magnus Troil’s northern education, but it is also explicitly in his blood.

Scott himself wrote in his preface to the 1831 edition that *The Pirate*’s most popular character, the enigmatic and formidable Norna of the Fitful Head – comparable to ‘the Fateful Virgins’ or ‘*Valkyriur*’ – was a figure with a mind ‘Flooded with all the wild heritage and extravagant superstitions of the north.’<sup>469</sup> Norna, the theatrical alias for Ulla Troil, is a self-deceiving player: ‘The victim of remorse and insanity, and the dupe of her own imposture.’<sup>470</sup> Norna is a personification of fifty years of British reception tradition, clearly channelling

<sup>466</sup> Magnus (1658), pp. 226, 62, and 19. One of the notable passages in this highly-interesting work is an early description of Iceland, described as the cultural home of the Norse literary tradition: ‘It is an Island to be praised, for the extraordinary Miracles in it; for there is a Rock or Promontory on it, that boyls like to Mount Ætna, with perpetual fires; and there it is supposed that the place of Hell is, and of Purgatory, to purge foul souls’, Magnus (1658), p. 16.

<sup>467</sup> Scott (1996), p. 237. Scott noted the similarities between the fantastic elements in the previous centuries’ antiquarian studies and the strongly held folk-customs of Britain’s extremities, mentioning in particular the tale of an Orcadian clergyman: ‘When Gray’s Ode, entitled the “Fatal Sisters,” was first published, or at least first reached that remote island [North Ronaldsay, one of the North Isles of Orkney, named ‘Ronaldshaw’ by Scott], the reverend gentleman had the well-judged curiosity to read it to some of the old persons of the isle, as a poem which regarded the history of their own country. They listened with great attention to the preliminary stanzas: -

Now the storm begins to lour,  
Haste the loom of hell prepare;  
Iron sleet of arrowy shower  
Hurtles in the darken’d air.

‘But when they heard a verse or two more, they interrupted the reader, telling him they knew the song well in the Norse language, and had often sung it to him when he asked them for an old song. They called it the Magicians, or the Enchantresses. It would have been singular news to the elegant translator, when executing his version from the text of Bartholine, to have learned that the Norse original was still preserved by tradition in a remote corner of British dominions’, Scott (1996), pp. 345-46.

<sup>468</sup> Scott (1996), p. 342.

<sup>469</sup> Scott (1996), pp. 84 and 4. Truten classifies Norna as one of Scott’s fake folk-characters, essentially a fraud, Jack Truten, ‘Sir Walter Scott: Folklore and Fiction’, *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 26 (1991), 226-34, at p. 231. Norna’s title ‘of the Fitful Head’ jokingly suggests as much from the start, referring simultaneously to her storm-wracked (or perhaps seabird-covered) abode on the peninsula and to her troubled mind.

<sup>470</sup> Scott (1996), p. 4. Scott’s comment, in explanation of Norna’s character, that ‘amid a very credulous and ignorant population, it is astonishing what success may be attained by an imposter, who is, at the same time, an enthusiast’, seems a curious meta-commentary on saga reception; it foreshadows D’Arcy and Wolf’s own conclusions on Scott’s antiquarian work some one hundred and fifty years later.

Gray's Fatal Sisters as much as she plays the part of her Old Norse namesakes. This theatrical, Gothic aspect of Old Norse does not appear feigned to Norna, she sees herself as a faithful continuation of the Norse spirit of the northern isles.

In addition, these notions have an equally important biological element for Norna, as she explains to her (supposed) son Mordaunt, who finds himself troubled by his prospective marriage chances:

"Alas!" said Mordaunt, with a sigh, "you remember not the difference betwixt our situation – her father is wealthy and of ancient birth."

"Not more wealthy than will be the heir of Norna of Fitful Head," answered the Pythoness – "not of better or more ancient blood than that which flows in thy veins, derived from thy mother, the descendant of the same Yarls and Sea-Kings from whom Magnus boasts his origin. Or dost thou think, like the pedant and fanatic strangers who have come amongst us, that thy blood is dishonoured because my union with thy father did not receive the sanction of a priest? Know, that we were wedded after the ancient manner of the Norse – our hands were clasped within the circle of Odin."<sup>471</sup>

Norna's fantasy is uncovered at the book's close as she discovers that her real son is in fact Cleveland, whose downfall she has been plotting all along.<sup>472</sup>

Scott felt the need to provide a note clarifying the personality of his most theatrical character, explaining that he had written her as a mentally-unstable victim of self-delusion:

The character of Norna is meant to be an instance of that singular kind of insanity, during which the patient, while she or he retains much subtlety and address for the power of imposing upon others, is still more ingenious in endeavouring to impose upon themselves. Indeed, maniacs of this kind may be often observed to possess a sort of double character, in one of which they are the being whom their distempered imagination shapes out, and in the other, their own natural self, as seen to exist by other people. This species of double consciousness makes wild work with the patient's imagination, and judiciously used, is perhaps a frequent means of restoring sanity of intellect. Exterior circumstances striking the senses, often have a powerful effect in undermining or battering the airy castles which the disorder had excited.<sup>473</sup>

Scott had already underlined the insanity clause to his Norse nationalist with her rapid deterioration towards the novel's close. Norna becomes a silent guest of the house, a much-diminished form of her former theatrical persona: 'Norna, then beginning to recover from her temporary alienation of mind, was a guest in the family, and Minna, who was sedulous in her attention upon this unfortunate victim of mental delusion, was seated with her, watching her every symptom of returning reason.'<sup>474</sup>

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<sup>471</sup> Scott (1996), p. 271.

<sup>472</sup> Had Mordaunt actually been her son she would be setting him up for a marriage with his own cousin.

<sup>473</sup> Scott (1996), p. 358.

<sup>474</sup> Scott (1996), p. 341.

Even more damning, in the minds of Scott's readers, was the authorial treatment of the spirited and independent Minna Troil, whose long-held visions of Shetland's Norse heritage are painfully dismantled, leaving her without aspiration. Minna's very image was drawn from the rich eddaic poetry of the previous century; 'If we hold to the circles of Gothic and Scandinavian origin,' comments Scott's narrator, 'she might have seemed a descended Vision of Freya, the spouse of the Thundering Deity, before whom some bold Sea King or Champion bent with an awe, which no mere mortal terror could have inflicted upon him.'<sup>475</sup> Minna is a self-proclaimed island nationalist ("Hjaltaland is the land of my deceased ancestors, and of my living father; and in Hjaltaland will I live and die") who resolves to stay in Shetland and Orkney rather than travel the world with her dashing suitor, the pirate Cleveland.<sup>476</sup>

As Norna is a victim of self-deception, so Minna is shown to be a misled child of saga-based nationalism, mistakenly equating her sweetheart's modern-day piracy for the romanticised nineteenth-century image of the Norse Sea-King. As she explains to her sister Brenda, Cleveland is the only suitable suitor on offer:

"I am the daughter of the old dames of Norway, who could send their lovers into battle with a smile, and slay them with their own hands, if they returned with dishonour. My lover must scorn the mockeries by which our degraded race strive for distinction, or must practice them only in sport, and in earnest of nobler dangers. No whale-striking, bird-nesting favourite for me; my lover must be a Sea-king, or what else modern times may give that draws near to that lofty character."

"Alas, my sister!" said Brenda, "it is now that I must in earnest begin to believe the force of smells and charms. You remember the Spanish story which you took from me long since, because I said, in your admiration of the older times of Scandinavia, you rivalled the extravagance of the hero. Ah, Minna! your colour shows that your conscience checks you, and reminds you of the book I mean; - is it more wise, think you to mistake a windmill for a giant, or the commander of a paltry corsair for a Kiempa, or a Vi-king?"<sup>477</sup>

Brenda holds up a mirror to Minna's construction; conflating violent piracy with saga-age heroism is as absurd as mistaking windmills for giants. Scott's parallel is playful both in its comparison of northern and southern brands of medievalism, and in the portrayal of the hardened, 'imaginative' nationalist mindset which can brook no criticism. Minna cannot abide Brenda's well-read counter-arguments; she censors her sister's reading material to protect her

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<sup>475</sup> Scott (1996), p. 328.

<sup>476</sup> Scott (1996), p. 187.

<sup>477</sup> Scott (1996), p. 170; the book to which Brenda refers is of course Miguel de Cervantes's *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha*, published in two parts from 1605-15, and available in complete English translation from 1620.

own worldview. Cleveland is no Norseman of old; he is a pirate, but Minna will take the span of the narrative to see that.

Even Cleveland himself seeks to dispel Minna's opinions of him, arguing that her medievalist nationalism has no grounds in reality:

"The enemy – such I will call them – are now divided amongst themselves, and every vessel from their coast brings intelligence of fresh commotions – the Highlands against the Lowlands – the Williamites against the Jacobites – the Whigs against the Tories, and, to sum the whole, the kingdom of England against that of Scotland. What is there, as Claud Halcro well hinted, to prevent our availing ourselves of the quarrels of these robbers, to assert the independence of which we are deprived?"

"To hoist the raven standard on the Castle of Scalloway," said Cleveland, in imitation of her tone and manner, "and proclaim your father Earl Magnus the First!"

"Earl Magnus the Seventh, if it please you," replied Minna; "for six of his ancestors have worn, or were entitled to wear, the coronet before him. You laugh at my ardour – but what *is* there to prevent all this?"

"Nothing *will* prevent it," replied Cleveland, "because it will never be attempted – Anything *might* prevent it, that is equal in strength to the long-boat of a British man-of-war."

If Minna's speech encapsulates the divided notion of her contemporary Britain it also reveals the tenuous nature of its supposed order, and concurrently the sheer impossibility of one faction alone practising military subjugation without the alliance of some other party. Singular bullish localism cannot possibly hope to defeat such an assembly, as Cleveland, with his military realism, attempts to convince her. The proponents of the aggrandisement of a Scandinavian strand in the northern British spiritual and bodily composition paid little heed to wider contemporary European politics:

"Denmark has been cut down into a second-rate kingdom, incapable of exchanging a single broadside with England; Norway is a starving wilderness; and in these islands, the love of independence has been suppressed by a long term of subjection, or shows itself but in a few muttered growls over a bowl and bottle. And were your men as willing warriors as their ancestors, what could the unarmed crews of a few fishing boats do against the British navy?"<sup>478</sup>

Explaining Minna's misapprehension to one of his shipmates, Cleveland states: "She has been bred in such remote simplicity, and utter ignorance of what is evil, that she compares our occupation with that of the old Norsemen who swept sea and haven with their victorious

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<sup>478</sup> Scott (1996), p. 186. One wonders if anyone thought of Cleveland's question in the period 1958-76, as the unarmed crews of a few Icelandic fishing boats won three successive 'Cod Wars' (*þorskastríð*) against the British Navy (although significantly with the aid of international pressure from NATO), increasing Iceland's fishing area to 200 nautical miles from the coastline.



galleys, established colonies, conquered countries, and took the name of Sea Kings.”<sup>479</sup> Minna’s eventual realisation is accompanied by a casting off of all that she previously held to be true; amongst the former heathen landmarks of Orkney she undergoes a ceremony of reversion:

“Here,” she said, “in heathen times (if we may believe legends, which have cost me but too dear) our ancestors offered sacrifices to heathen deities – and here will I, from my soul, renounce, abjure, and offer up to a better and more merciful God than was known to them, the vain ideas with which my youthful imagination has been seduced.”<sup>480</sup>

Scott made sure to underline his thoughts on isolated communities’s tendency towards degenerative nationalist sentiment. In her final parting message to Cleveland, Minna writes: ‘The delusions which a solitary education and limited acquaintance with the modern world had spread around me, are gone and dissipated for ever.’<sup>481</sup> Scott’s narrator concurs: ‘With the inexperience of a disposition equally romantic and ignorant,’ he writes, ‘she had built the fabric of her happiness on a quicksand instead of a rock.’<sup>482</sup> Yet Scott was determined to convince readers that Minna had found a brand of happiness in rejecting her saga-inspired philosophy, and that such an approach was the healthier option. ‘Like Norna, but under a more regulated judgement,’ Scott’s narrator continued, ‘she learned to exchange the visions of wild enthusiasm which had exerted and misled her imagination, for a truer and purer connection with the world beyond us, than could be learned from the sagas of heathen bards, or the visions of later rhymers.’<sup>483</sup>

Wawn has argued that Scott’s treatment of Norse nationalism in the novel allowed a critical depiction of the author’s ‘twin narrative themes of pride in cultural continuity of the ancient north, and the inevitability and desirability of cultural evolution’, yet it is debatable whether the writer succeeded in tackling both at once; if, as Wawn suspects, Scott’s concluding moral was that ‘change need not mean degeneracy; nostalgic pig-headedness certainly could do,’ then there was implicitly a required reading attached to the work.<sup>484</sup> The fact that Scott felt the necessity to explain his positions regarding Norna and Minna suggests that he did not expect all of his readers to agree with him. In a way, *The Pirate* neither satisfactorily supports the casting off of Norse tradition, nor satisfactorily provides examples of the alternative progressive society (other than tongue-in-cheek commentary on agricultural reform).

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<sup>479</sup> Scott (1996), p. 259.

<sup>480</sup> Scott (1996), p. 327.

<sup>481</sup> Scott (1996), p. 340.

<sup>482</sup> Scott (1996), p. 343.

<sup>483</sup> Scott (1996), p. 343.

<sup>484</sup> Wawn, in Scott (1996), p. x.

Nationalist sentiment in Scott's Norse medievalism was 'largely kept in check by a realization of the advantages of modern society.'<sup>485</sup> As Wawn notes, 'the future of Orkney and Shetland' offered by Scott's novel 'lies with Mertoun and Brenda, that is, with a still proud Norse localism tempered by practical domesticity and some prospect of agrarian progress.'<sup>486</sup> This is a notable factor, as it clearly required arbitration on Scott's part. The modern advances in society, particularly the improvements in travel between Britain and Scandinavia, if anything increased Scott's exposure to nationalist discourse, albeit the varied and intellectually stimulating nationalisms of various northern European scholars. The British expansion into new lands and cultures, alongside the rise in literacy back home, nourished both an interest in the exotic and speculative racism.<sup>487</sup> Jamieson and Thorkelín were representative examples of the enthusiastic approaches to nationalism provoked by international scholarly research.

#### 4.3.2. The Historians

Scott's approach to Old Norse literature had a notable effect on British and Scandinavian scholars alike. While *The Pirate* was increasing in popularity, with imitations, translations, stage adaptations, and artistic depictions, British-based academics such as Þorleifur Guðmundsson Repp (1794-1857) assumed the task of bringing the sources of Scott's literature to an increasingly-eager readership.<sup>488</sup> Originally from Iceland, and educated in Copenhagen, Repp had arrived in Edinburgh in 1826 and subsequently became the Assistant Keeper of Books in the Advocates Library. He knew some two dozen languages, gave lectures on the relevance of Tacitus to the history of the Angles, and provided Old Norse etymologies for Scots phrases.<sup>489</sup> Repp was an enthusiastic fan of Scott's writing, and was incredibly complimentary of his works of saga-derived medievalism, particularly *The Pirate*.<sup>490</sup> The two writers were

<sup>485</sup> P. D. Garside, 'Scott, the Romantic Past, and the Nineteenth Century', *The Review of English Studies*, 23 (1972), 147-61, at p. 161.

<sup>486</sup> Wawn, in Scott (1996), p. xviii.

<sup>487</sup> See Bolt (1971), p. 217.

<sup>488</sup> Wawn writes: '[Repp's] own involvement with the old north was just as passionate and a good deal better informed than Scott's, and had a significant influence within and beyond educated society in Edinburgh. As a[n] innovative and enterprising lecturer and teacher, as a collector and curator of Icelandic manuscripts, and as a pioneering runologist, Repp won a loyal following amongst the early nineteenth-century Edinburgh intellectuals [...]. He attached great importance to improving British access to old Icelandic texts and traditions', Wawn (2002), p. 62. Pliny Miles was one notable fan of Scott's *The Pirate*, and viewed the novel as a reliable source of northern folk-superstition; Miles (1854), p. 145.

<sup>489</sup> Wawn (2002), p. 85; Lbs. ÍB 89c fol.; Lbs. ÍB 89b fol.

<sup>490</sup> In Lbs. ÍB. 90c fol. Repp refers to Scott in an undated letter as '*denne beromte Forfatter*'; see also Wawn (1991), pp. 136-37.

alike in many ways, notably in their approach to the issue of text-based notions of nationalism; Repp too recognised the dangers of a worldview constructed solely from the pages of the Icelandic sagas. The real-life Magnus Troils were the petty lords of diminishing kingdoms: ‘Domestic history it seems is left by some mysterious but kind management of providence to nations that are in the last stage of decay or utterly ruined. The recollection of former glory is welcome to them and they usually brood over it.’<sup>491</sup> A national focus in history, as opposed to an international one, was not only disastrous in Repp’s view; it was terminal. Far from the later views of scholars such as George Dasent, who would claim a nation which ignored its history was doomed to fail, Repp declared any nation taken to self-absorption was a lost cause. Omphaloskepsis denoted obsolescence.

Yet there was hope for literary scholars of a nationalist persuasion. Antiquarianism had an international mission as well as a national, and it was in this former field that Repp believed the most productive research could take place. Unsurprisingly, given Repp’s higher education, it was the Danish, and by extension the Icelanders, who had the most to gain. ‘The Danes,’ wrote Repp, ‘are the only one of the Northern nations who possess in their ancient northern tongue credible records of their ancestors and neighbouring nations, which extend beyond the tenth century.’<sup>492</sup> Repp proposed a shifting of focus, away from the philological emphasis on Indo-European language groups and toward an individual appreciation of the northern tongues (again, particularly Danish and Icelandic). This was a model of internationalism which strongly resembled a selective northernism.

Repp’s vision of academia was polarised; one could either study southern or northern literature, and any British or Scandinavian scholars who indulged in the former were, in his view, mistaken. ‘Is Sanscrit then more akin to our language than ancient Danish?’ Repp wrote on contemporary research into Indo-European philology; ‘Are the *Vedas* more important or more sacred to us than the *Eddas* which contain the first germs to history and philosophy, the mythic traditions and religious tenets of our forefathers?’<sup>493</sup> Repp answered his own question through a program of partial translations, including work on the eddaic *Gylfaginning*,<sup>494</sup> and the *fornaldarsaga*, *Hrólfs saga kraka*.<sup>495</sup> The *Íslendingasögur* and their contemporary historical sagas also received due attention; he produced a partial translation, or more precisely

<sup>491</sup> Lbs. Repp. Acc. 6.7.1989 fol.

<sup>492</sup> Lbs. Repp. Acc. 6.7.1989 fol.

<sup>493</sup> Lbs. ÍB. 88a fol. The *Vedas*, ancient texts in Sanskrit which were studied in detail and held in high regard by numerous eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europeans, are the oldest of the Hindu scriptures.

<sup>494</sup> Lbs. ÍB. 90b fol.; see also Lbs. ÍB. 89c fol.

<sup>495</sup> Lbs. ÍB. 88a fol.

a paraphrase of chapters four to seven, of *Færeyinga saga* in around 1832.<sup>496</sup> In Repp's journalism and papers, alongside further works such as his 1826 (again, partial) Latin translation of *Laxdæla saga*, he put into practice many of Scott's ideas regarding the relationship between the British people and their Old Norse heritage. In both 1834 and 1846 Repp offered to translate *Orkneyinga saga* to English, writing, 'It would be highly gratifying to me to see an Icelandic saga published in Scotland: and I am sure that most of my fellow countrymen here think as I in this respect and that they [...] would like a British edition much better than a Danish.'<sup>497</sup> In this instance a translation was a distant reality; it would be 1894 before Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Sir George Dasent produced the first English translation of *Orkneyinga saga*.<sup>498</sup> Like Scott, Repp even produced a partial translation of *Eyrbyggja saga*, although as with many of his works it remained unpublished. In particular Repp translated chapter four of the saga, on Þórólfr Mostrarskég's settlement of Snæfellsnes. True to common modern popular impressions of nineteenth-century sensibilities, Repp was uncomfortable with anything sexually explicit or of an otherwise unsavoury nature: he purposefully omitted the passage about Icelanders not being allowed to defecate or urinate on the hallowed ground at Helgafell.<sup>499</sup> The campaign for northern philology had its limits.

Repp's goals at the time were self-explanatory: the previous approaches to British history had repressed and falsified the relation between the North and Britain's own people. This misinterpretation and misrepresentation had largely been possible because of the poor levels of knowledge of Old Norse found amongst British academia:

It is to be lamented, that through ignorance of the ancient Norse language, and the consequent inaccessibleness of true records, and the confinement of modern historians to the very partial chronicles of timid monks, as their only source of information for the middle ages, history has never been so thoroughly falsified, that it will now require the labour of learned and enlightened men for some centuries to come [...] to reconquer for the Scandinavians that lofty place which they ought to occupy in the annals of the world. There is no remedy [...] but an attentive study of the Icelandic, and a thorough perusal of ancient Northern literature, the vast extent of which is even unknown among the leading nations of modern Europe.<sup>500</sup>

<sup>496</sup> Andrew Wawn, 'The Silk-Clad Varangian: Þorleifur Repp and *Færeyinga saga*', *Saga Book*, 23 (1990), 46-72, at p. 48. See Lbs. ÍB. 90a fol. Wawn argues that Repp translated this passage on autobiographical grounds, his own plight mirroring that of the saga characters (1990), pp. 60-61.

<sup>497</sup> Lbs. ÍB 89c fol.; cited Wawn (2002), p. 87.

<sup>498</sup> Repp was clearly a man ahead of his time; where he experienced only disinterest, Dasent and Guðbrandur received praise alike to military honours: 'The interest of the government in Icelandic annals connected with English history is indicated in these last publications, and England is fortunate to have had such enthusiastic scholars as Vigfússon and Dasent to do the work', Nordby (1901), pp. 32-33.

<sup>499</sup> Lbs. ÍB 89c fol.

<sup>500</sup> Repp 1832, p. 163; see also Wawn (2002), p. 84.

Thus, when in 1832 Repp published *A Historical Treatise on Trial by Jury, Wager of Law, and Other Co-Ordinate Forensic Institutions formerly in Use in Scandinavia and Iceland*, he used the opportunity to argue (in a similar manner to Mallet, Percy, and Blackwell) that British liberty was a product of the original Scandinavian and Icelandic legal system. The Norse invaders, traders, and settlers had not been a destructive influence, as Anglo-Saxon monks and contemporary English Classics professors would have the public believe. Rather they had shaped the fundamental systems of British society. Consequently, Repp argued, an accurate appreciation of the British system could only be attained through a mastery of the Icelandic language – the parent tongue of the Gothic nations.<sup>501</sup>

Samuel Laing (1780-1868) combined Repp's concern for the education of the British public with a far more successful publishing record. Although chiefly known for his popular 1844 three-volume translation of *The Heimskringla; or Chronicle of the Kings of Norway*, Laing was also an outspoken contributor to British politics, and an ardent reader of *The Pirate* to boot. He published pro-Orcadian pamphlets under the pseudonym 'Magnus Troil'; argued for a return to a Northern model of farmer-centric society; and looked very favourably on the Norwegians (particularly the rural class), after travelling through the country for three years.<sup>502</sup> In the preliminary dissertation to his *Heimskringla* translation, 'modern bonder virtues are represented as domestications of ancient Viking-age values;' the peasant of nineteenth-century Scandinavia was heir to the noble attributes of the saga characters.<sup>503</sup> Moreover, this preserved spirit of the Northmen (Laing's term of choice) and its Norwegian locales could be productively analysed in parallel with the highlands of Scotland, as well as the islands of Scott's novel.<sup>504</sup>

When Laing's *Heimskringla* translation was released in 1844 it 'quickly established itself as one of a handful of canonical texts of Victorian old northernism.'<sup>505</sup> *Heimskringla* was something of an antiquarian tide mark from which subsequent writers would work, presented

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<sup>501</sup> Like many modern-day scholars, Repp was cautious in his use of culturally loaded terms such 'Goths' when discussing the Old Norse eddas and sagas, but was equally uneasy about 'Scandinavian', 'Northern', 'Swedish', 'Norwegian', 'Danish', or even 'Icelandic'; in the end, he went back to 'Gothic' (see Lbs. ÍB 89c fol.).

<sup>502</sup> Wawn (2002), p. 87.

<sup>503</sup> Wawn (2002), p. 98; and Andrew Wawn, 'Samuel Laing, *Heimskringla* and the Victorian 'Berserker School'', in *Anglo-Saxon Cross-Currents*, ed. by Inga-Stina Ewbank, Olav Lausund and Bjørn Tysdahl (Norwich: Norvik Press, 1999a), 29-59, at pp. 40-41. Laing was less fond of this independence of spirit when it meant being kept up all night by inebriated Norwegian farmers loudly challenging Swedes to demonstrate their agricultural heritage, see Laing (1839), p. 26. On Laing's translation see Kennedy (1997), pp. 348-50.

<sup>504</sup> See Laing (1859), pp. 32-38.

<sup>505</sup> Wawn (2002), p. 92. Parallels to Laing's approach found their way into a number of nineteenth-century works on these two sagas, including Oscar Baker's 1841 translation of Esaias Tegnér's *Frithiofs Saga*, see Wawn (1999a), p. 48.

as an accumulation of objective research from which readers could make their own theories on Britain's connection to Snorri Sturluson's text of the 'deeds of bold and bloody sea-kings.'<sup>506</sup> Laing's supposedly objective didactics suggested that the connection was undoubtedly extant, and that reader could really only decide questions of magnitude for themselves; 'It is doing good service in the fields of literature to place the English reader in a position to judge for himself of the influence which the social arrangements and spirit of these Northmen may have had on the national character,' wrote Laing, 'and the free institutions which have grown up among us from elements planted by them.'<sup>507</sup> As with previous British antiquarians, Laing knew very little Old Norse ('the translator can lay claim to no considerable knowledge of Icelandic') and used Swedish and Danish translations alongside Latin in order to produce his translation, but the sheer scope of his scholarship would have engendered a certain familiarity with the language.<sup>508</sup> Besides, even if his word choice might not have captured the precise grammatical intricacies of the original, as Laing himself said, 'any translation is better than none.'<sup>509</sup>

Aside from the early abstracts of Old Norse provided by Scott, Laing considered his contemporary historians as hopelessly mistaken regarding the influence of the Northmen on the British nation. As a group they had no grasp of the significance of the revitalising transmissible input of the medieval Norwegians and Danes:

They do not sufficiently consider the powerful moral influence of this fresh infusion, in the tenth century, of the same spirit, from the same original source, upon their character, ideas, and even forms of government and social arrangements of the whole English population in the subsequent generations, and through them upon the whole of modern society.<sup>510</sup>

Laing was familiar with the Malthusian theory of population, a model which would later be adapted by Charles Darwin and other natural scientists for the field of evolutionary biology, and spurned the widely-held belief that Malthus's concepts supported a form of governmental non-intervention where the lower classes were concerned.<sup>511</sup> The history of Norsemen in Britain, he felt, demonstrated that a guiding hand was a necessary element of national character;

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<sup>506</sup> Laing (1844b), vol. 1, p. 2.

<sup>507</sup> Laing (1844b), vol. 1, p. iv.

<sup>508</sup> On Laing's source material and aptitude in northern languages see Diana Whaley, *Heimskringla: An Introduction* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, 1991), pp. 49-51 and 147-150; and Wawn (2002), p. 101. Laing was a fan of Grundtvig's Danish translation of the Old Norse work, but felt the Dane was more of a poet than a translator; see Laing (1844b), pp. 208-09.

<sup>509</sup> Laing (1844b), vol. 1, p. vi.

<sup>510</sup> Laing (1844b), vol. 1, p. 4; see also p. 6. Compare with Gibbons (potentially via Percy) (2005), p. 64.

<sup>511</sup> Samuel Laing, *National Distress; Its Causes and Remedies*, reprint of 1842 original (London: Longman, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1844a), pp. 64-74.

the growth of the British nation required well-informed biological-engineering. With these thoughts in mind, Laing proposed a dualistic approach to British ancestry: Anglo-Saxon and Norseman. The Norsemen, Laing argued, ‘undoubtedly must be the forefathers of as large a proportion of the present English nation as the Anglo-Saxons themselves, and of a much larger proportion than the Normans.’<sup>512</sup> Laing dismissed the ‘silly vanity’ and ‘party feeling’ of contemporary scholarship, which held the Anglo-Saxons as foremost of the modern races.<sup>513</sup> In Laing’s mind, the arguments for such a racial hierarchy popular amongst public-oriented Anglo-Saxonists and American patriots lacked a critical understanding of inter-racial interaction:

If the superiority they claim were true [which, in any case, Laing strongly disputed], it would be found not to belong at all to that branch of the one great northern race which is called Teutonic, Gothic, Germanic, or Anglo-Saxon – for that branch in England was, previous to the settlements of the Danes or the Northmen in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and is this day throughout all Germany, morally and socially degenerate, and all distinct and distinguishing spirit or nationality in it dead; but to the small cognate branch of the Northman or Danes who, between the ninth and twelfth centuries brought their paganism, energy, and social institutions, to bear against, conquer, mingle with, and invigorate the priest-ridden, inert descendants of the old Anglo-Saxon race.<sup>514</sup>

Laing posited that since the major Anglo-Saxon races of the present day had failed to further the international prospects of freedom and liberty (slavery being a fact of life for numerous residents of the British Empire in the decades before the translated *Heimskringla*’s publication) one could hardly look to the Anglo-Saxon branch of the ancestral tree for such progressive values.<sup>515</sup>

Laing believed that the contemporary Scandinavian agricultural classes – the Norwegian *bondi* – were the evidential embodiment of his own corresponding theories of race relations.<sup>516</sup> These members of the present-day Icelandic and Norwegian peasant class

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<sup>512</sup> Laing (1844b), vol. 1, p. iii, a view adopted by Frederick Metcalfe (1880). ‘A spark will set fire to a city, if it finds the right stuff to kindle. This stuff was in human nature; and these Northmen, a handful as they were of mere barbarians, did kindle it with their spark of free social existence’, Laing (1844b), vol. 1, pp. 10-11.

<sup>513</sup> Laing (1844b), vol. 1, p. 9.

<sup>514</sup> Laing (1844b), vol. 1, p. 10. See Gibbons again (2005), pp. 62-64.

<sup>515</sup> See Laing (1844b), vol. 1, p. 106.

<sup>516</sup> In his *Journal of a Residence in Norway* Laing called the Norwegian agricultural classes ‘the most interesting and singular group of people in Europe’, Laing (1859), p. 7. Laing’s enthusiasm for Scandinavia and the North was largely focused on Norway, which he viewed as having received the best outcome from the turn of the century’s political upheavals: ‘Norway received a new and liberal constitution, and has started with the freshness of youth, - a new nation, as it were, called suddenly into life from among the slumbering feudal populations of the north. Sweden received a new dynasty, - and slumbers on amidst ancient institutions and social arrangements of darker ages’, Laing (1839), pp. iv-v. Laing viewed the Swedish nation as being demoralized by heavy-handed legislation and restrictive measures imposed on certain classes of society, see Laing (1839), p. 430. On the figure of the farmer in the reception of Old Norse see Mjöberg (1967-68), vol. 1, pp. 271-75.

encompassed a symbolic northern stereotype indicative of all that was best about the northern nations. Nor did such an ethnographic subject have to be constrained to the lower classes; Laing was by no means a republican, and viewed the Norwegian monarchy as an intrinsic part of the same value system.<sup>517</sup> After all, Laing reminded readers, ‘the right to the crown of Norway itself was udal-born right in a certain family or race, traced from Odin down to Harald Haarfager through the Yngling dynasty.’<sup>518</sup> The sagas could function as something of an intermediary cultural unifier between the two distinct groups; a work such as the *Heimskringla* was envisioned as ‘a household book read at the fireside of almost every peasant in Norway’ – Laing incorporated the tales of Norwegian monarchs into his preferred setting, the familial spaces of the common *bondi*.<sup>519</sup> In fact, the very constitution of the northern societies was a lesson in multi-class political ideology, as far as Laing was concerned. He presented Iceland as a gated community of the upper echelons of Norwegian society: ‘Iceland was originally colonised by the most cultivated and peaceful of the mother country; the nobility and people of the highest civilisation then in the north.’<sup>520</sup> Such romantic origin myths were commonplace in Laing’s time (and indeed in modern popular histories of the country). They fostered the concept of an “emigration from principle”, an attractive prospect for writers from across the political spectrum. Unusually, Laing held the reverse to be true too. Just as the moral and wealthy were naturally drawn to Iceland, so Laing (ominously) believed the immoral, the poor, and the unintelligent were simply not allowed access: ‘The very poor and ignorant, and those who merely sought gain without any higher motive for their emigration, could not go to Iceland.’<sup>521</sup> Laing did not provide any evidence for his theory.

Scott’s writing, for Laing, embodied something of a paradigm shift for the literary reception of Old Norse, establishing a ‘new field [...] in which the labours of the historian, the antiquary, and the poet are combined.’<sup>522</sup> Moreover, Laing viewed Scott’s method of portraying a Northern British heritage as a strand of the same northern muse originally responsible for the sagas themselves; the Scottish novelist and Icelandic saga-man were part of the same literary movement. Of Snorri’s literary legacy, for example, Laing commented: ‘His true seat in the Valhalla of European literature is on the same bench – however great the distance between –

<sup>517</sup> Laing (1859), p. 140; see also Wawn (1999a), p. 42;

<sup>518</sup> Laing (1844b), vol. 1, p. 101.

<sup>519</sup> Laing (1844b), vol. 1, p. v.

<sup>520</sup> Laing (1844b), vol. 1, p. 56.

<sup>521</sup> Laing (1844b), vol. 1, p. 56.

<sup>522</sup> Samuel Laing, *Observations on the Social and Political State of Denmark, and the Duchies of Sleswick and Holstein in 1851* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1852), p. 371.



on the same bench with Shakespeare, Carlyle [sic] and Scott, as a *dramatic historian*.<sup>523</sup> The seating plan was appropriate. In Laing's reading, the Icelandic sagas were both historical and national – an apt description of the prose pioneered by Scott and Carlyle in the nineteenth century, and thus a natural consolidation:

This body of literature may surely be called a national literature; for on looking over the subjects it treats of, it will be found to consist almost entirely of historical events, or of the achievements of individuals, which, whether real or fabulous, were calculated to sustain a national spirit among the people for whom they were composed.<sup>524</sup>

Laing did not believe that the sagas themselves had the potential to somehow influence the character of a race, but this was a moot point; he was certain they could perform a preservative function. 'A nation's literature is its breath of life,' he argued, 'without which a nation has no existence, is but a congregation of individuals.'<sup>525</sup> Even if sagas could not shape national traits, they could certainly maintain them, and prevent national degradation. Additionally, Laing believed that the Old Norse element to the British character was essential to its wider campaign of global emigration. America and Australia offered the Empire a second chance at instilling new lands with the genetic potential of the North:

The appointed mission of this nation evidently is to people the boundless regions of America and Australia with a race of men professing the purest religion, inheriting the richest literature and proudest history, and endowed by nature with the largest share of personal energy, perseverance, moral courage, self-command, habits of order and industry, and in a word, possessing the highest degree of aptitude for practical civilisation, of any race which the world has yet seen.<sup>526</sup>

British antiquarian interest in localised Norwegian peasantry thus had implications within a considerably wider colonial worldview.

Many scholars, writers, and translators drew inspiration from Laing. John Sephton and the pair William Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon both released translations of *Heimskringla* in 1895, but it is debateable whether either had a broader impact on British readers, and certainly

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<sup>523</sup> Laing (1844b), vol. 1, p. 3 (emphasis is my own); see also vol. 3, p. 393.

<sup>524</sup> Laing (1844b), vol. 1, pp. 26-27.

<sup>525</sup> Laing (1844b), vol. 1, p. 17. One is reminded of James Joyce's often-quoted, concurrently playful and sinister deconstruction of the concept of the nation in his 1922 novel *Ulysses*:

-- A nation? says Bloom. A nation is the same people living in the same place.

-- By God, then, says Ned, laughing, if that's so I'm a nation for I'm living in the same place for the last five years.

James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Bodley Head, 1986), pp. 271-72.

<sup>526</sup> Laing (1844a), pp. 121-22.

neither matched Laing's translation on literary criticism. Thanks to the 1844 *Chronicles*, the sagas of Snorri Sturluson were on everyone's minds. Charles Kingsley and Robert M. Ballantyne were two evident readers, their works both crediting and continuing the theories of Laing.<sup>527</sup> In Ballantyne's novel *Erling the Bold: A Tale of the Norse Sea-Kings*, the author took pains to stress the academic aspects of his fictional text, both within the narrative itself and in the preface; 'The spirit of the age, and the germs of the British Constitution' preserved in the Icelandic sagas, wrote Ballantyne, 'may be traced to the Norsemen of old; those sturdy Vikings or Sea-rovers.'<sup>528</sup> British travellers to Norway such as Metcalfe, H. F. Tozer, and Thomas Forester were also evidently readers of Laing's works.<sup>529</sup> In Tozer's travel journal he stressed the racial similarities between the Norwegian and British nations, remarking, 'In their general physiognomy they are far more like the English than any other European nation.'<sup>530</sup> Forester similarly cited the 'ingenious' Mr. Laing, and ruminated on the potential advantages of a united Scandinavian kingdom.<sup>531</sup>

Sitting beside Scott at the high-table of Laing's 'Valhalla of European literature,' another major figure in rewriting notions of history in the nineteenth century was Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) – 'the Scottish prophet of doom' – whose eclectic works included several considerations of northern antiquity, alongside musings on the significance of Scott's writing.<sup>532</sup> Carlyle's understanding of the literary north was aided by his personal heroes

<sup>527</sup> Charles Kingsley (1819-75) was, among other things, a popular novelist and supporter of Charles Darwin. On Kingsley's popular brand of nationalism and its relation to the notions of history espoused by Carlyle and Arnold see Stanwood S. Walker, "'Backwards and backwards ever': Charles Kingsley's Racial-Historical Allegory and the Liberal Anglican Revisioning of Britain", *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 62/3 (2007), 339-79. On Kingsley's engagement with Darwin's *Origin* see Lionel Stevenson, 'Darwin and the Novel', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 15/1 (1960), 29-38. Ballantyne directly referenced both Laing and George Dasent in his preface, see Ballantyne (1874), p. iv.

<sup>528</sup> Ballantyne (1874), p. iii. Another fan was Ralph Waldo Emerson, who viewed the sagas as representative of the English race, see Emerson (1856), pp. 32-34.

<sup>529</sup> Metcalfe (1856), vol. 1, p. iv.

<sup>530</sup> Tozer (1861), p. 382. Tozer was slightly alarmed by the 'roughness' of Norway's lower classes, but ascribed this to a slight degeneration of that same 'independence, which is the chief national characteristic,' as was found in the bold youth of Tegnér's North, see Tozer (1861), pp. 382-83. He took particular pleasure in the fact that both Britain and Norway used an elderly familiar name for their respective nations (Old England and *Gamle Norge*): 'For the northern nations, it would seem, in seeking for a term of endearment for their fatherland, have looked rather to its old associations and institutions', Tozer (1861), p. 384.

<sup>531</sup> 'Nationality, race, language, habits, all concur to facilitate such an amalgamation; and the soundest policy dictates the imposition of a consolidated power on the shores of the Baltic, between the German states (or empire?) on the one hand, and the dominions of the great northern potentate, on the other', Thomas Forester, *Rambles in Norway, among the Fjelds and Fjords of the Central and Western Districts* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longman, 1855), pp. 103 and 146.

<sup>532</sup> Anne Varty, 'Carlyle and Odin', in *Anglo-Saxon Cross-Currents*, ed. by Inga-Stina Ewbank, Olav Lausund and Bjørn Tysdahl (Norwich: Norvik Press, 1999), 60-70, at p. 60. See for example Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1888), pp. 3-37. Carlyle's 1838 essay on Walter Scott and Hero-worship is particularly notable: 'In this generation there was no literary man

Schiller and Goethe, two of a larger assembly of German writers to whom he would frequently turn for inspiration.<sup>533</sup> Chiefly shaped through such wider European reading, Carlyle's thoughts on the correct approach to history were discussed in his 1830 *On History* and the 1833 *On History Again*, but they were also discernible throughout his wider corpus. These views were on occasion contradictory. As Frye writes, in Carlyle's impression of historiography 'every reconstruction of the past is a reduction of the past, [...] every statement on the nature of man is a distortion.'<sup>534</sup> His approach was not only inconsistent, it was also highly idiosyncratic. He nurtured a model of history which 'did not distinguish between primary and secondary documents, cared little or nothing for original research, and barely concealed [...] disdain for the realist goal of impartial narrative histories.'<sup>535</sup>

The Old North as depicted by Walter Scott and Samuel Laing had a constructive role in Carlyle's concepts of both Britain's own identity in relation to its neighbours and the appropriate approach to historiography. Wawn writes that Carlyle 'devoured Laing's three volumes enthusiastically when they first appeared, and he was still dining off their contents in his valedictory *Lives of the Norse Kings*' in 1875.<sup>536</sup> Yet it was not merely historical data which he and like-minded readers were extracting. Carlyle read Laing's translation of *Heimskringla* as first and foremost the historical contextualisation of the heroic figures of Old Norse literature, and particularly of Óðinn.<sup>537</sup> Thus, in Carlyle's depiction of the Old North he railed against the previous century's depictions of a 'square-built gloomy palace of black ashlar marble, shrouded in awe and horror,' as Gray had evoked in his poetry; closer to Scott's stylistic approach, Carlyle envisioned a literature 'rough as the North rocks, as the Iceland deserts.'<sup>538</sup>

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with such a popularity in any country', Thomas Carlyle, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, original 1839, 6 vols (London: Chapman & Hall, 1869), vol. 5, p. 216.

<sup>533</sup> Frohwalte Küchler, 'Carlyle und Schiller', *Anglia. Zeitschrift für Englische Philologie*, 26 (1903), 1-93.

Carlyle published two works on the former, the *Life of Schiller* (1825) and *Schiller* (1831), the former reissued in 1873. Carlyle had travelled out to Germany in 1852 and been on literary pilgrimages to the sites from the lives of Goethe, Schiller, and Luther; see Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle & Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1834-1872*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, 2 vols, ed. by C. E. Norton (Boston: Osgood & Co. & Emerson, 1883), vol. 2, p. 224. On Carlyle and German literature see Carlyle (1869), vols 1, 3, and 4.

<sup>534</sup> Lowell T. Frye, 'Chaos and Cosmos: Carlyle's Idea of History', *The Victorian Newsletter*, 65 (Spring 1984), 19-21, at p. 21.

<sup>535</sup> Richard W. Schoch, "'We Do Nothing but Enact History": Thomas Carlyle Stages the Past', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 54/1 (1999), 27-52, at p. 27. Schoch elaborates, 'Carlyle's histories are lively and colourful in their detailed narratives yet plagued by speculative and unverified judgements', Schoch (1999), p. 29. In a similar manner to the form Grundtvig championed in Denmark, Carlyle's writings placed considerable value on personal engagement with a text, figure, or historical period; they functioned on the understanding that objects of study should be exposed to the author's personal feelings as much as they should be exposed to the scalpel of scientific reasoning.

<sup>536</sup> Wawn (2002), p. 95.

<sup>537</sup> Carlyle (1888), p. 21.

<sup>538</sup> Carlyle (1888), p. 31. George Dasent may have been another critic of Gray's vision of the Old North; that is certainly the impression given by Charles Clifford's recollections of their 1861 tour of Iceland, where Dasent's

‘The strong old Norse hearts did not go upon theatrical sublimities,’ he wrote, ‘they had not time to tremble.’<sup>539</sup> Romantic sentiment and Gothic architecture were props of eighteenth-century imagination.

Instead, as Varty has demonstrated, Carlyle championed the ‘manliness’ of Old Norse literature; ‘a term which in the lecture series on ‘Great Men’ acquires definition and resonance.’<sup>540</sup> The renewed appreciation of such figures of steadfast masculine values was central to his call for cultural reawakening:

We, on the whole, do our Hero-worship worse than any Nation in this world ever did it before: [...] the Burns an Exciseman, the Byron a Literary Lion, are intrinsically, all things considered, a baser and falser phenomenon than the Odin a God, the Mahomet a Prophet of God. [...] It is this Editor’s clear opinion, accordingly, that we must learn to do our Hero-worship better; that to do it better and better, means the awakening of the Nation’s soul from its asphyxia, and the return of blessed life to us.<sup>541</sup>

Just as previous antiquarians had viewed the Anglo-Saxon monks as personifications of a national lethargy, so Carlyle cautioned the modern society against a state of complete unconsciousness, the only remedy being a return to the ethics of hero-worship espoused by Britain’s ancestors.

As Carlyle saw it, in Iceland (‘The waste chaotic battle-field of Frost and Fire’) and its sagas, such hero-worship had been afforded its own literary culture.<sup>542</sup> The saga authors (themselves figures worthy of reverence, in Carlyle’s mind) were drawn from the freedom-loving stock of the original settlers: ‘These were the times of Norse colonisation; proud Norsemen flying into other lands, to freer scenes, - to Iceland.’<sup>543</sup> Carlyle supported Blackwell’s reading of the sagas’s authenticity; the Icelanders of old were ‘laudably observant and desirous of accuracy.’<sup>544</sup> In these reliable texts, Carlyle identified two key reasons why English readers should brush up on their saga lore. Firstly, they had ‘been preserved so well.’<sup>545</sup> Carlyle pointed to the sagas’s ‘robust simplicity’ as a commendable feature – much as Scott

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literary-alias introduces his *Burnt Njal* to a fellow traveller: ‘In it you will find, for the first time adequately rendered into English, the song of the Valkyries, that is, the Cor[p]se Choosers, or, as some term them, the Fatal Sisters’, Charles Cavendish Clifford, *Travels by ‘Umbra’* (Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas, 1865), p. 23.

<sup>539</sup> Carlyle (1888), p. 31.

<sup>540</sup> Varty (1999), p. 62.

<sup>541</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1843; reprinted 1870), p. 42.

<sup>542</sup> Carlyle (1888), p. 15.

<sup>543</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *The Early Kings of Norway; also, An Essay on the Portraits of John Knox* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1875), p. 6.

<sup>544</sup> Carlyle (1875), p. 1.

<sup>545</sup> Carlyle (1888), p. 14.

had with his *Eyrbyggja* abstract.<sup>546</sup> ‘These old Norse songs have a truth in them,’ Carlyle wrote, ‘an inward perennial truth and greatness.’<sup>547</sup> Secondly, Carlyle argued, the details of Old Norse religion as exemplified through both the eddaic material and through the descriptions of belief in the sagas themselves were interesting ‘as the creed of our fathers; the men whose blood still runs in our veins, whom doubtless we still resemble in so many ways.’<sup>548</sup> The genealogical connection between the present-day Britons and the saga-age Icelanders (a given) afforded the cultural disparities between the two societies an academic and philosophical importance.

Moreover, this ancestral connection engendered thoughts of nations and politics. Carlyle found that his own consideration of the sagas was inescapably political: ‘The History of those Haarfagrs has awakened in me many thoughts: Of Despotism and Democracy, arbitrary government by one, and self-government (which means no government, or anarchy) by all; of Dictatorship with many faults, and Universal Suffrage with little possibility of any virtue.’<sup>549</sup> Similarly, while the early episodes of feudal conflict prevalent in the sagas may not have suited Carlyle’s taste, he nevertheless found the idea of a historical development from the violence of Old Norse literature to the respectability of the Victorian novel to be illuminating: something of a teleological revelation:

But here, at any rate, in this poor Norse theatre, one looks with interest on the first transformation, so mysterious and abstruse, of human Chaos into something of articulate Cosmos; witnesses the wild and strange birth-pangs of Human Society and reflects that without something similar (little as men expect such now), no Cosmos of human society ever was got into existence, nor can ever again be.<sup>550</sup>

Notably, Carlyle did not attempt to remove military aspects from Britain’s history; his own notion of societal evolution revolved around a transition from the elements of residual barbarity as shown in the sagas, through a form of heroism, to a present day which had forgotten its own history.<sup>551</sup>

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<sup>546</sup> Carlyle (1888), p. 31.

<sup>547</sup> Carlyle (1888), p. 33.

<sup>548</sup> ‘Strange they did believe that, while we believe so differently’, Carlyle (1888), p. 14. As with the tenets of comparative philology, Carlyle believed that ‘history, as it lies at the root of all science, is also the first distinct product of the man’s spiritual nature’ – that is, the study of the Old Norse literature’s depictions of faith was simultaneously a study of the early history of Iceland and Scandinavia (and by extension Britain) and a fundamental *scientific* understanding of these nations, Carlyle (1888), p. 14.

<sup>549</sup> Carlyle (1875), p. 198.

<sup>550</sup> Carlyle (1875), pp. 199-200.

<sup>551</sup> ‘As they [the Victorians] see it, they are not rejecting heroism but redefining it; instead of dropping the word from their vocabulary, they use it with an almost obsessive frequency that no other age in English culture has ever come close to rivalling’, Ian Ousby, ‘Carlyle, Thackeray, and Victorian Heroism’, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 12 (1982), 152-68, at pp. 152-53.

Regardless of the strength of its imagery, Carlyle viewed Iceland's history and the deeds portrayed in the sagas as perfectly perishable without the intervention of men or considerable literary prowess. It was the Scotts of the North as much as the Snorri Stulusons who had ensured the narratives's continuing popularity: 'The transience of the fame of the early heroes of Iceland's sagas demanded a poetic intervention from the modern writer; history alone, in the form of cultural memory, would not prolong the records of such forefathers's deeds.'<sup>552</sup> Rather the sagas's popular survival required the efforts of men of deeds as much as men of words, and depended on requisite talent and innate compatibility from the receiving nations.<sup>553</sup>

That Britain had the potential to revive and reinstall the narratives of the sagas's heroes was apparent to Carlyle, but in its current state any number of social problems could prevent it. 'England is dying of inanition,' he warned readers – it was suffering from the same national lethargy which had confined the bookish Anglo-Saxons to monasticism before their violent genetic overhaul.<sup>554</sup> 'England must learn to recognise its heroes,' Carlyle stressed, 'or England will also cease to exist among Nations.'<sup>555</sup> Unlike the later notion of a since-passed Golden Age which would be artistically rendered by writers such as Charles Kingsley and Mary Leith, Carlyle did not believe that England's heroic age of history and the potential for heroic countrymen had ended with the Norman invasion, but as he saw it the dangers of inactive governance and a stagnating population might strike in the middle of the nineteenth century as easily as in the middle of the eleventh.<sup>556</sup>

In the northmen ('spiritually as well as bodily [...] our progenitors') and their early construction of faith, then, modern Britain had a model for societal evaluation.<sup>557</sup> The Norse religion, Carlyle posited, had attempted to perfect a 'consecration of valour' which was

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<sup>552</sup> Carlyle (1870), pp. 165-66. See Carlyle (1888), p. 27: 'The History of the world is but the Bibliography of great men.'

<sup>553</sup> 'This light, kindled in the great dark vortex of the Norse mind, dark but living, waiting only for light; this to me is the centre of the whole. How such light will then shine out, and with wondrous thousand-fold expansion spread itself, in forms and colours, depends not on it, so much as on the National Mind recipient of it', Carlyle (1888), p. 24.

<sup>554</sup> Carlyle (1870), p. 3.

<sup>555</sup> Carlyle (1870), p. 273. Part of recognition involved an active participation in values, as far as Carlyle was concerned; he wrote to the budding writer James Stirling in 1842 that 'a man can first speak when he has got to know something; and knowledge comes from experience alone', Thomas Carlyle and James Hutchison Stirling, *Thomas Carlyle's Counsels to a Literary Aspirant and What Came of Them: A Hitherto Unpublished Letter of 1842* (Edinburgh: James Thine, 1886), pp. 14-15.

<sup>556</sup> Carlyle (1870), p. 83. Carlyle was firmly against notions of racial equality, a viewpoint publicised in numerous works, such as his 1853 *Occasional Discourse Upon the Nigger Question*; see Thomas Carlyle, *Occasional Discourse Upon the Nigger Question*, reprinted, with additions, from *Fraser's Magazine* (London: Thomas Bosworth, 1853), pp. 5-14 and 37-41; and also Bolt (1971), p. 88.

<sup>557</sup> Carlyle (1888), p. 18.

decidedly lacking in Britain yet lay buried somewhere within the genetic code of the Victorian gentleman:

Unconsciously, and combined with higher things, it is in us yet, that Old Faith withal! To know it consciously, brings us into closer and clearer relation with the Past, – with our own possessions in the Past. For the whole Past, as I keep repeating, is the possession of the present; the Past has always been something true, and is a precious possession.<sup>558</sup>

Through the sagas, one could thus find the source of such concepts, and reinstall ancestral values in the present population. Carlyle's notion was an abstract concept, to say the least, but he believed that the consequences of ignoring the problem would be national degradation of the severest order.<sup>559</sup> The solution, for Carlyle, was contained in Walter Scott's examples of antiquarian fiction – reintroducing the past to the public in an amalgamation of lost and desirable societal values. As Carlyle saw it, Scott's works 'taught all men this truth, which looks like a truism, and yet was as good as unknown to writers of history and others, till so taught: that the bygone ages of the world were actually filled by living men, not by protocols, state-papers, controversies, and abstractions of men.'<sup>560</sup> Living men such as 'Snorro' and 'Arnkil', as well as fictional (but perhaps equally 'real') men as Magnus Troil and Mordaunt Mertoun provided a didactic link to a past reserve of ancestral values.<sup>561</sup>

It is arguable that many northern historians of the nineteenth century – and not just Repp, Laing, and Carlyle – owed a good deal to Scott's concept of history, and that Scott's historical models were in part stimulated, if not inspired, by the sagas with which Scott had worked from an early age.<sup>562</sup> Yoon Sun Lee writes of Scott's adoption of the role of national antiquarian helmsman that the chosen approach 'served to question the notion of historical agency: a default that aligned Scott's historical novel less with political conservatism than with a skepticism about the nature of the British nation distinctly unwelcome in the social context

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<sup>558</sup> Carlyle (1888), p. 37.

<sup>559</sup> 'A ruined man staggers down to ruin because there was not wisdom enough in him; so clearly also, may Twenty-Seven Million collective men! – But indeed one of the infallible fruits of Unwisdom in a Nation is that it cannot get the use of what wisdom is actually in it: that it is not governed by the wisest it has, who alone have a divine right to govern all Nations; but by the sham-wisest, or even by the openly not-so-wise if they are handiest otherwise!' Carlyle (1870), p. 39.

<sup>560</sup> Carlyle (1869), vol. 5, p. 275.

<sup>561</sup> As Mike Goode succinctly puts it, 'The Victorian science of history was always already an art of history', Mike Goode, *Sentimental Masculinity and the Rise of History, 1790-1890* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 153.

<sup>562</sup> Simpson argues that Scott and the saga writers had much in common – 'Both were social realists', (1973b), p. 377, while Alice Chandler argues that the "'New feudalism" of Scott is at the base of all following medieval writings except for those of William Morris', (1965), p. 329.

of this form's genesis.<sup>563</sup> But the versions and adaptations of Scott's texts (both his *Eyrbyggja saga* translation and his Old Norse-inspired medievalism) which continued to be popularised into the nineteenth century could display anything from staunch monarchism to radical republicanism, and could be employed by everyone from Bible-distributing bibliophiles to liqueur-imbibing lords. Peculiarly, Scott's material could even be cited as established scholarship by Scott himself. In his notes to *The Pirate*, Scott commented on the salient spiritual significance of the standing stones of Stenness, Orkney. He posited that the circle bore joint religious and secular social activities, a claim backed by the depiction of a similar scene in the informative *Northern Antiquities* of 1814: 'The *Northern Popular Antiquities* contain, in an abstract of the *Eyrbyggja Saga*, a particular account of the manner in which the Helga Fels, or Holy Rock, was set apart by the Pontiff Thorolf for solemn occasions.'<sup>564</sup> Scott fails to mention that *he himself* translated said extracts and provided the accompanying commentary, neither does he mention that the episode is given weighted significance over other equally-relevant saga episodes by its selection in a fairly arbitrary group, also chosen by Walter Scott.

Numerous scholars have attempted, as Carlyle did, to pinpoint the characteristic element of Scott's historical writing.<sup>565</sup> Reductively, one might say that Scott's model presents a version of history in which the past is more important to the present than the future is. Past events and characters seem comfortable in transition to a modern idiom, whether that be in the national political reasoning in the depiction of Snorri goði or the Romantic love of the fatherland in the exile of Thorarin the Black.<sup>566</sup> A key aspect to this portrayal is that the Old Norse literature is intrinsically understandable to a British reader; the ease with which the reader can associate elements of saga literature with aspects of their own society is a function

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<sup>563</sup> Yoon Sun Lee, 'A Divided Inheritance: Scott's Antiquarian Novel and the British Nation', *ELH*, 64 (1997), 537-67, at p. 538.

<sup>564</sup> Scott (1996), p. 359.

<sup>565</sup> Charles Swann's approach, in comparing Scott's model of history to Darwin's model of evolution as an intellectual paradigm shift, is particularly fascinating: 'The shock Darwin gave to the conventional religious mind is taken for granted – as is the way in which social Darwinism could be used to provide an ideology for capitalism – but it is equally important to see how reassuring the theory of history which can be derived from Darwin's work could be for the liberal progressive' – as Swann suggests, much the same could be said of Scott's influence on subsequent strands of medievalism, see Charles Swann, 'Past into Present: Scott, Galt, and the Historical Novel', *Literature and History*, 3 (March 1976), 65-82, at p. 67.

<sup>566</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche was one reader who found Scott's portrayal of a simplistic compatible history, complete with contemporary stereotypes and poetic romanticisms, as thoroughly unfaithful: 'Winckelmann's and Goethe's Greeks, Victor Hugo's orientals, Wagner's Edda characters, Walter Scott's Englishmen of the thirteenth century – some day the whole comedy will be exposed! it was all history false beyond measure, but – modern, true', Nietzsche, in 'The Will to Power', 830 (Nov. 1887 – March 1888), trans. by Walter Kaufmann, ed. by R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, Vintage, 1967), p. 438; cited Richard Maxwell, 'Inundations of Time: A Definition of Scott's Originality', *ELH*, 68 (2001), 419-68, p. 420.



of Schleiermacher's normalising process of translation.<sup>567</sup> Scott invites the reader to view medieval life on Snæfellsnes as they would life in the highlands of mainland Scotland, or the isles of Shetland and Orkney. As Maxwell writes, the key function of Scott's historical fiction (and, the writer would add, of his Old Norse translation) is to 'universalize simultaneously, [...] to make many times and places available to our gaze.'<sup>568</sup> Yet this universalizing process, on a comparative level, is one in which a variety of alternate societal models are also on display. Kate Trumpener touches on this related aspect of Scott's historicism when she writes, 'what the historical novel [under Scott] presents is a violent struggle between different possible worlds derivable from the same past.'<sup>569</sup> The multifaceted nature of Scott's constructed communities (indeed, of Scott's conception of humanity) is an intrinsic aspect of his nationalism; the Norse character of Scott's Shetland and Snæfellsnes, as with the Norse heritage of his Teesdale and Weardale, is one part of a highly complex algorithm, one with several possible futures.

Ultimately, and with the aid of hindsight, the shortcomings of Scott's system become more apparent than the refinements. The form of northern British community envisioned by later writers would more often be the bombastic spirit of fantasy combined with Laing's and Carlyle's national-historic model of writing the past, as with the form on offer in Ballantyne's prose:

Yes, there is perhaps more of Norse blood in your veins than you wot of, reader, whether you be English or Scotch, for those sturdy sea-rovers invaded our land from the north, south, east, and west many a time in days gone by, and held it in possession for centuries at a time, leaving a lasting and beneficial impress on our customs and characters. We have good reason to regard their memory with respect and gratitude, despite their faults and sins, for much of what is good and true in our laws and social customs, much of what is manly and vigorous in the British Constitution, and much of our intense love of freedom and fair-play, is due to the pith, pluck, enterprise, and sense of justice that dwelt in the breasts of the rugged old Sea-Kings of Norway!<sup>570</sup>

If Scott's notions on the Old Norse sagas, notions refined and redistributed through the work of Laing and Carlyle, had a notable effect on the academia of nineteenth-century Britain, this was only a fraction of the influence on popular culture. One or two well-placed mentions of the sagas in the prefaces of novels such as *Erling the Bold*, or in the texts of Britain's

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<sup>567</sup> See footnote 46, above.

<sup>568</sup> Maxwell (2001), p. 459. Maxwell continues: 'On the one hand, each is unique, a sort of imaginary present enveloping readers; on the other, each must be seen as part of a larger world of memory, synchronically presented as a collection or as a set of institutions, culminating in the moment of reader and writer', p. 459.

<sup>569</sup> Trumpener (1993), p. 709.

<sup>570</sup> Ballantyne (1874), p. 437.

burgeoning Icelandic travelogue scene, could reach numbers of readers on a previously unattainable scale. The common view of the nineteenth-century reader was that Scott alone had opened the door for a British appreciation of the *Íslendingasögur*: ‘Scarcely a page of Icelandic literature ever put on an English dress [or a Scottish kilt] and found its way among the Anglo-Saxons,’ wrote Pliny Miles, ‘until the pen that gave us *Waverley* and *Rob Roy* furnished us with a translation of some of the more important of the Icelandic sagas.’<sup>571</sup>

#### 4.3.3. The Adventurer

Perhaps one of the clearest signs of the influence of Scott’s ‘Abstract’ on British impressions of Old Norse literature was its inclusion (in a modified format) in the 1857 *Letters from High Latitudes* – a book which was immensely popular with readers.<sup>572</sup> The Marquess of Dufferin, then simply Frederick Blackwood, introduced the narrative of his 1856 tour of Iceland and Norway with a dedication to the tantalisingly abstract entity ‘THAT TRUE NORTH’ and composed a short poem introducing his central topic:<sup>573</sup>

Witness too, the silent cry,  
 The prayer of many a race, and creed, and clime,  
 Thunderless lightnings striking under sea  
 From sunset to sunrise of all thy realm,  
 And that true North.<sup>574</sup>

<sup>571</sup> Miles (1854), p. 28. On Miles’s comparison of the Icelanders to the ‘Anglo-Saxon race’ see p. 35.

<sup>572</sup> Lord Dufferin [Frederick William Hamilton Temple Blackwood], *Letters from High Latitudes: being some account of a voyage in 1856 in the schooner yacht “Foam” to Iceland, Jan Meyen, and Spitzbergen* (London: John Murray, 1857); see also Andrew Wawn, ‘The Cult of “Stalwart Frith-thjof” in Victorian Britain’, in *Northern Antiquity: The Post-Medieval Reception of Edda and Saga*, ed. by Andrew Wawn (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1994c), 211-54, at p. 218. Its popularity might be measured by the fact that by the early years of the 1900s it was in its eleventh edition. Dufferin’s work was popular enough to attract the attention of several satirists, not least his own mother, who published a parodic travel narrative in response; see Eve Patten, ‘From Ireland to Iceland: Lord Dufferin’s *Letters from High Latitudes* (1857)’, *Studies in Travel Writing*, 20/2 (June 2016), 126-34, at p. 127.

<sup>573</sup> The Marquess of Dufferin [Frederick William Hamilton Temple Blackwood], *Letters from High Latitudes: being some account of a voyage in 1856 in the schooner yacht “Foam” to Iceland, Jan Meyen, and Spitzbergen*, 11<sup>th</sup> edn (London: John Murray, 1903), p. vii; for more on Dufferin in Iceland see Sir Alfred Comyn Lyall, *The Life of the Marquis of Dufferin & Ava*, 2 vols (London: J. Murray, 1905), vol. 1, pp. 88-91; Erla María Marteinsdóttir, *On Top of the World: Colonialism and the Conquest of the Past in British Travel Narratives of Iceland*, PhD Thesis (Riverside, California: University of California, 2001), pp. 65-94; Heidi Hansson, ‘The Gentleman’s North: Lord Dufferin and the Beginnings of Arctic Tourism’, *Studies in Travel Writing*, 13/1 (2009), 61-73; Anka Ryall (2014), pp. 123-24; and Kathryn Walchester, ‘The Servant as Narrative Vehicle in Nineteenth-Century Travel Texts about Norway and Iceland’, *Studies in Travel Writing*, 21/2 (2017), 156-72, at p. 159.

<sup>574</sup> Dufferin (1903), p. viii.

Dufferin was no nameless traveller; he was of Irish nobility, and would later become a British diplomat whose career would entail positions in Canada, Russia, France, the Ottoman empire, and India.<sup>575</sup> At this early stage of his life of global success, Dufferin described himself in his *dramatis personæ* as ‘Navigator; Sagaman; Artist’ among a list of crew members including a surgeon, a gardener, a watchmaker, a butcher, a bird-stuffer and several cape colonists.<sup>576</sup> (The supporting cast was even more surreal, including a ‘German Gnat-catcher’, a polar bear, and a goat.)<sup>577</sup> Dufferin’s companions appeared more like the crew of Lewis Carroll’s *The Hunting of the Snark* than that of the diplomatic assemblies on tour in the earlier accounts of Banks and Mackenzie.<sup>578</sup>

Dufferin’s goal in seeking out Iceland was clearly nothing short of adventure. From his fourth letter home to his mother he expectantly wrote of the approaching landfall, in a country he imagined to be full of diverse perils: ‘My next letter will be from Iceland; and, please God, before I see English land again, I hope to have many a story to tell you of the islands that are washed by the chill waters of the Arctic sea.’<sup>579</sup> The ‘Sagaman’ goes out of his way to provide hyperbolic accounts of Northern dangers. On the voyage over, the cockerel the crew had brought along to keep time went insane at the complete loss of nocturnal darkness and threw itself overboard.<sup>580</sup> As in *Macbeth*, here was a North in which the fundamentals of nature were seemingly out of their preordained cycles.

The modern northerners, Dufferin hastened to add, were of a civilised and amenable cast – the sort of circles he would frequent for the rest of his career. Dufferin may have been playing to the crowd with his use of Northern stereotype, but he was also deconstructing some notions of Scandinavian backwardness as he did so. ‘As most educated English people believe the Icelanders to be a “Squawmuck,” blubber-eating, seal-skin-clad race,’ remarked Dufferin en route to Iceland in the company of a fellow ship-passenger and Icelander, ‘I think it right to tell you that Sigurdr is apparelled in good broadcloth, and all the inconveniences of civilisation.’<sup>581</sup> Indeed, with Dufferin at the (narrational) helm, Sigurdr is taught a thing or two about northern story-telling; the tales of the old Scottish families became works such as ‘The

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<sup>575</sup> Hansson (2009), p. 62.

<sup>576</sup> Dufferin (1903), p. xxiv.

<sup>577</sup> Dufferin (1903), p. xxiv.

<sup>578</sup> See Spray (2017).

<sup>579</sup> Dufferin (1903), p. 12. On Dufferin’s style see Hansson (2009), pp. 61–63. See also the works of Bayard Taylor, who like Dufferin worked with a pre-existing model of the masculine, physically-demanding North in his travels, Taylor (1875); and Heidi Hansson, ‘Bayard Taylor’s Northern Travel and the Genders of the North’, *Edda*, 1 (2006), 18–33.

<sup>580</sup> Dufferin (1903), p. 16.

<sup>581</sup> Dufferin (1903), p. 2.

Saga of Clan Campbell.’<sup>582</sup> Dufferin demonstrated great enthusiasm, at Inveraray, in educating Sigurdr (Dufferin uses the term ‘indoctrinated’) in the ‘sagas of the family.’<sup>583</sup> Nor was the Anglo-Icelandic cultural fusion limited to the sea-lochs of Scotland; diplomatic integration was the name of Dufferin’s game both at home and abroad. British and Icelandic cultural traditions were traded aplenty in a particularly alcoholic evening in Reykjavík, where Dufferin attempted to drink twenty Icelandic dignitaries under the table.<sup>584</sup> Nineteenth-century Iceland, it seemed, had all the sophistications of modern Britain.

For Dufferin, Sigurdr’s saga-age ancestors were the pride of this integrated North. In the face of Haraldr’s campaign, the first settlers of Iceland, ‘animated with that love of liberty innate in the race of the noble Northmen, rather than submit to his oppressions, determined to look for a new home amid the desolate regions of the icy sea.’<sup>585</sup> Dufferin’s settlers were more figures of Gothic embellishment than bleak stoicism, and would undoubtedly have infuriated Carlyle; they commanded a ‘dragon-shaped galley’ and were driven by Victorian ideals.<sup>586</sup>

Regardless of the Latin volumes available to him, the selection of sagas to which Dufferin alluded provides a clear indication that it was only the limited number of English translations which had truly caught popular imagination in the English-speaking world.<sup>587</sup> Thus, the Westmann Isles were briefly mentioned on the way to Reykjavík, but there was no mention of their historical significance, nor that of the surrounding regions.<sup>588</sup> Dufferin did make an attempt at literary engagement, such as proposing ‘Bessestad’ as the home of ‘Snorro Sturleson’ (he even names his horse ‘Snorro’ in reverence) and discussing the artistic merits of *The Heimskringla*, drawn into the English canon through literary analysis:<sup>589</sup>

[The narrative is] detailed by the old Sagaman with so much art and cleverness as almost to combine the dramatic power of Macaulay with Clarendon’s delicate delineation of character, and the charming loquacity of Mr. Pepys. His stirring sea-

<sup>582</sup> Dufferin (1903), p. 4.

<sup>583</sup> Dufferin (1903), p. 7.

<sup>584</sup> Dufferin (1903), pp. 41-42. Dufferin was hazy on who actually “won” this diplomatic drinking contest, but the evidence spoke for itself; the ship’s doctor and he spend the rest of the night trying to catch flying rabbits, which they discovered in the morning on closer inspection to be puffs.

<sup>585</sup> Dufferin (1903), p. 18; this is almost as humorously poetic as Eiríkur Magnússon, who terms the early settlers of Iceland ‘Buoyant-minded graduates from the University of danger and peril’, (Lbs. 2196, 4to).

<sup>586</sup> Dufferin (1903), p. 18.

<sup>587</sup> Dufferin’s book enjoyed a degree of popularity (although not universally) in Iceland, with Grímur Thompsen and Sigurður L. Jónasson being among its admirers, see Lbs. 367 fol. and Lbs. 1484a-d 4to. Sigurður was very fond of Dufferin’s ship, and was very happy to hear of its safe return; he acted as Dufferin’s literary scout in Iceland, acquiring manuscripts for him and passing on Icelandic reviews of his work (see Lbs. 1484d 4to). In terms of the sagas themselves, Dufferin placed great importance on those detailing the Northmen’s exploits in Greenland and America, see Dufferin (1903), p. 32.

<sup>588</sup> Dufferin (1903), p. 19.

<sup>589</sup> Dufferin (1903), p. 28.

fights, his tender love-stories, and delightful bits of domestic gossip, are really inimitable; - you actually live with the people he brings upon the stage, as intimately as you do with Falstaff, Percy, or Prince Hal.<sup>590</sup>

Laing's work was evidently reaching a traditionally-minded readership, but again, it was the texts in readily-accessible English translation which were making the journey out of academia and into the wider public sphere.

Dufferin was amongst the first British travellers to attempt a literary tour of the island, or at least to connect the anecdotes from the Old Norse sagas to the physical landscape he saw before him.<sup>591</sup> For the first time, a British traveller was less impressed by the geothermal spectacles of Geysir ('of which everyone has heard so much') than they were by the historical and tectonic phenomena of Þingvellir ('of which no one has heard anything').<sup>592</sup> Dufferin found that previous writers had thoroughly failed in their efforts to convey the majesty and awe of Iceland's historic scenery. The answer to this unfortunate state of affairs was Scott's saga translation, summoned up as the party passed by Snæfellsnes on their way north:

On the north-western side of the mountain stretches the famous Eyrbyggja district, the most classic ground in Iceland, with the towns, or rather farmsteads, of Froda, Helgafell, and Biarnarhaf.

This last place was the scene of one of the most curious and characteristic Sagas to be found in the whole catalogue of Icelandic chronicles.<sup>593</sup>

Dufferin proceeded to relate the story of the unfortunate berserkr in his own words, although in fact his account was largely plagiarised from Scott's extract, with no reference to the original.<sup>594</sup> Dufferin copied certain phrases of Scott's translation verbatim but omitted the verses altogether, resulting in a rather diminished version of the tale. Scott's abstracts thus found their way into one of the century's most popular travel books.

The abstract was not supplied without editorial comment from Dufferin. The writer, like a number of his predecessors, felt Old Norse literature had a national significance for

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<sup>590</sup> Dufferin (1903), p. 31.

<sup>591</sup> As with previous travellers, Dufferin had to some extent sought out Iceland as a modern-day source for such texts but was disappointed at the scarcity of manuscripts on offer: 'I have been very anxious to obtain some specimens of ancient Icelandic manuscripts, but the island has long since been ransacked of its literary treasures', Dufferin (1903), p. 43.

<sup>592</sup> Dufferin (1903), p. 45. At the former site Dufferin took part in the customary nineteenth-century tourist activity of throwing mud into Strokkur to encourage it to erupt: 'Strokr – or the churn – you must know, is an unfortunate Geysir, with so little command over his temper and his stomach that you can get a rise out of him whenever you like. All that is necessary is to collect a quantity of sods, and throw them down his funnel', Dufferin (1903), p. 68.

<sup>593</sup> Dufferin (1903), p. 96.

<sup>594</sup> Dufferin (1903), pp. 96-98. Dufferin does a similar thing with Thorpe's and Howitt's versions of the *Edda*, see p. 103.

Britain, reflecting features of modern northern racial composition. His example of this may have struck readers as rather odd, as it replaced the common northern stereotype of essential violence and presented instead an Old Norse canon full of ‘homely imagery’ through which, ‘there ran a vein of tender humour, such as still characterises the warm-hearted laughter-loving northern races.’<sup>595</sup> In this, as with everything that Dufferin wrote about Iceland in his *Letters from High Latitudes*, it may well be that there was more than a hint of sarcasm, but he does seem to have possessed a knowledge of the contemporary arguments of Old Norse antiquarianism: Scott’s abstracts, Tegnér’s poetry, Blackwell’s theories on northern nations. Dufferin may, as Percy and Carlyle, have discussed ‘Odin’ as a genuine historical figure, but he also fostered a more general concept of Scandinavia as the birthplace of the noble values of Europe’s northern nations:

Year after year, amid the savage scenery of its Scandinavian nursery, that great race was maturing whose genial heartiness was destined to invigorate the sickly civilisation of the Saxon with inexhaustible energy, and to preserve to the world, even in the nineteenth century, one glorious example of a free European people.<sup>596</sup>

The problem with such sentiment is attempting to assess how much of it is the satirical narrator, and how much is the genuine nineteenth-century view of ethnic-nationalism.

Iceland was only one brief stop on a long tour for Dufferin, and he perhaps did not spend enough time there (either in pages or days) for his humour to be supported by anything but a superficial understanding of the landscape and culture. His next destination was Norway, where he continued his voyage into northern antiquity with a visit to ‘Throndeim,’ ‘the capital of the ancient sea-kings of Norway.’<sup>597</sup> Here he demonstrated the superiority of his *Heimskringla* knowledge over his knowledge of the sagas, recalling the deeds of ‘Harald Haarfager’, the death of King Hacon, and ‘Olaf Tryggvesson’.<sup>598</sup> Of the latter’s life he remarked that its telling, ‘Savours little of the odour of sanctity, but has rather that “ancient and fish-like smell” which characterised the doings of the Vikings, his ancestors.’<sup>599</sup> In taking his leave of the town, Dufferin mused that the region was ‘so intimately associated in my mind with all the brilliant episodes of ancient Norwegian History,’ through his perusal of Old Norse

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<sup>595</sup> Dufferin (1903), p. 103.

<sup>596</sup> Dufferin (1903), p. 219; Lady Dufferin writes to Sveinbjörn Sveinbjörnsson on 6 March 1902 that Lord Dufferin had been deeply touched by his Icelandic voyage, and harboured ‘a warm and affectionate feeling for her people’, Lbs. 631 fol. (i).

<sup>597</sup> Dufferin (1903), p. 193.

<sup>598</sup> Dufferin (1903), pp. 195-203. On the rich history of Trondheim, he asked his reader, ‘What picture shall I try to conjure from the past, to live in your fancy, as it does in mine?’ Dufferin (1903), p. 195.

<sup>599</sup> Dufferin (1903), p. 203.

texts such as Laing's, 'that I feel as if I were taking leave of all those noble Haralds, and Olafs, and Hacons, among whom I have been living in such pleasant intimacy for some time past.'<sup>600</sup> As with his brief tour of Iceland, Norway's fjords were populated by the figures from the new generation of English translations.

As may be seen from the texts reviewed in this chapter, although the Icelandicsagas were certainly known of in the early nineteenth century, the knowledge was largely restricted to readers of Latin (a group which, although it consisted of almost all educated males, was still a limited portion of the population) with wealth to spare and those who had read translated extracts or summaries. It is not surprising that Dufferin's travel accounts draw chiefly on *Heimskringla* and eddaic material. Aside from Walter Scott's small but much-copied episodes, there simply was no established body of reliable literature on the sagas for an English-readership to consult. Dufferin is a classic example of a writer doing what he can with very limited resources. Staying in the town of Alten and being rather enamoured with the wife of their host, Dufferin revealed the only other saga he had read before his journey by comparing his hostess to 'Frithiof's Ingeborg.'<sup>601</sup> The allusion may seem obscure to a modern reader but to the Victorians it would have been clear. Frithiof of Sognefjord and his love for the princess Ingeborg was a common narrative of northern European literature in the mid-eighteen-hundreds. The remarkable reception of the saga from which his story was taken is the subject of the next chapter.

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<sup>600</sup> Dufferin (1903), p. 216.

<sup>601</sup> Dufferin (1903), p. 155; see Hansson (2009), p. 69.

## 5. Sognefjord, Sweden, and Sleswig-Holsten: *Friðþjófs Saga* and Nineteenth-Century Nationalist Conflict

“Uncle! uncle! what shocking pronunciation! You must not put in an English ‘th’. Did you never hear of the Frithiof Saga? You must say it quickly, like this – Freet-Yoff.”  
 “A most romantic name,” said Mr. Morgan.<sup>602</sup>

As Blanche Morgan explains to her uncle in Lady Edna Lyall’s 1889 romance of Anglo-Norwegian matrimonial cohesion *A Hardy Norseman*, any respectable Victorian knew the correct pronunciation of ‘Frithiof’ and the saga that accompanied the ‘romantic name.’<sup>603</sup> *Friðþjófs saga ins frækna* has a unique place in the history of the reception and translation of the Old Norse sagas. In nineteenth-century Britain the saga saw four independent English translations in the space of just under sixty years. In 1839, the year that Chartist riots were capturing the attention and political sensibilities of the British public, the Stockholm-based historian and antiquarian George Stephens published *Frithiof’s Saga, A Legend of the North*, a work containing the first complete English translation of an Icelandic saga.<sup>604</sup> Three decades later, the translating-pair William Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon produced their own edition, first published in the journal *Dark Blue* for March and April of 1871.<sup>605</sup> This went on to be republished as part of a collection in 1875 alongside *Víglundar saga* (itself heavily influenced by *Friðþjófs saga*) and *Gunnlaugs saga Ormstungu* as *Three Northern Love Stories*, a work reissued in 1900 and again in 1910-15. Stephens’s version was also reprinted and revised several times, with his translation of Esaias Tegnér’s poetic version appearing in Rasmus Björn Anderson and Jón Bjarnason’s book *Viking Tales of the North* in 1877 alongside the tale of ‘Thorstein, Viking’s son’ and a third translation of *Friðþjófs saga*.<sup>606</sup> Finally, at the close of

<sup>602</sup> Edna Lyall, *A Hardy Norseman: A Novel* (New York: A. L. Burt, 1889), p. 5.

<sup>603</sup> The title for Lyall’s novel came from a popular nineteenth-century Norwegian folk tune, see Tozer (1861), p. 376.

<sup>604</sup> George Stephens (trans.), *Frithiof’s Saga, a Legend of Norway. Translated from the Swedish of Esaias Tegnér, and the Icelandic Friðþjófs saga* (London: Black and Armstrong; Stockholm: Bonnier, 1839).

<sup>605</sup> William Morris [and Eiríkur Magnússon], ‘The Story of Frithiof the Bold’, *Dark Blue*, 1 (1871), 42-58 and 176-82; reprinted in Morris (1911f), pp. 48-80.

<sup>606</sup> Rasmus Björn Anderson and Jón Bjarnason (trans.), *Viking Tales of the North. The Sagas of Thorstein, Viking’s Son, and Frithiof the Bold, Also, Tegnér’s Frithiof’s Saga, Translated into English by George Stephens* (Chicago: Griggs, 1877), pp. 75-111. Anderson claimed that this compilation of saga translations was the first of its kind to be published in the United States, which would make *Friðþjófs saga* the first translated saga on both sides of the Atlantic, see Rasmus Björn Anderson (trans.), *Viking Tales of the North: The Sagas of Thorstein, Viking’s Son, and Frithiof the Bold; also, Tegnér’s Frithiof’s Saga, translated into English by George Stephens*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1901), p. ix. The style of translation is extremely antiquated, particularly in direct speech where Anderson opts to preserve the original’s lack of



the century, the saga was translated by the Reverend John Sephton in a paper presented to Liverpool's Literary and Philosophical Society in 1894.<sup>607</sup>

Alongside these translations, the saga inspired a poetic adaptation in Swedish which soared in popularity across Europe, and which in turn spawned numerous musical pieces, operatic works, paintings, engravings, and works of children's literature. Bishop Esaias Tegnér's 1825 *Frithiofs Saga* saw some fifteen separate English translations in the nineteenth century alone, and was equally popular abroad, being translated into almost every major European language.<sup>608</sup> Tegnér took the relatively short text of the original saga and turned it into an epic poem of twenty-four cantos – a fully realised vision of the ancient North. The poem offered readers an extended conception of the saga, complete with social detail, moral reasoning, and a noble Viking hero. Frithiof the Bold was the poster boy of the Viking North, the embodiment of all that was dashing about northern Europe's heroic past.

*Friðþjófs saga* is not an *Íslendingasaga* but rather one of the *Fornaldarsögur*, or sagas of ancient times, with the original thought to date back to around the start of the fourteenth century.<sup>609</sup> It was clearly not imagined as a lone work; the saga bears literary connections to *Gautreks saga*, which relates the highly unsuccessful careers of Friðþjófr's sons and grandsons, and to *Hrómundar saga Gripssónar*, which details the story of Friðþjófr's prized golden arm-ring.<sup>610</sup> Additionally, many of *Friðþjófs saga*'s key episodes have parallels in other *Íslendingasögur*. *Víglundar saga* appears to be closely influenced by *Friðþjófs saga* – with Þorgrímr and Ólof taking the roles of Friðþjófr and Ingibjörg. In *Njáls saga* Hrappr Orgumleiðason (or 'Killer Hrappr'), 'wholly invented, as is his ancestry,' appears to be created

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punctuation and to leave various words untranslated. Anderson's publications of Old Norse translations in America, in the *Norroena* series, included William Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon's *Völsunga saga* and George Dasent's *Burnt Njal*, see Einar Haugen, 'A Critique and a Bibliography of the Writings of Rasmus B. Anderson', *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 20/3 (March 1937), 255-69, at p. 266.

<sup>607</sup> John Sephton (trans.), *A Translation of the Saga of Frithiof the Fearless* (Liverpool: Liverpool Literary and Philosophical Society, 1894).

<sup>608</sup> Esaias Tegnér, *Frithiofs Saga, med teckningar af A. Malmström* (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & Söner, 1868). The exact number of English translations is unclear; some claimed that the number was more like twenty. See Adolph B. Benson, 'A List of English Translations of the *Frithiofs Saga*', *The German Review*, 1/2 (1926), 142-67, at p. 142. On this edition's influential illustrations by Malmström see Mjöberg (1967-68), vol. 2, pp. 271-75.

<sup>609</sup> Jonathan D. M. Evans, 'Friðþjófs saga ins frækna', in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopaedia*, ed. by Phillip Pulsiano and Kirsten Woolf (New York and London: Garland, 1993), p. 221.

<sup>610</sup> Ludvig Larsson (ed.), *Friðþjófs saga ins frækna* (Halle A. S.: Max Niemeyer, 1901), p. vi. The original *Hrómundar saga Gripssónar* is no longer extant; the surviving later version is taken from a series of *rímur*. See Ursula Brown, 'The Saga of Hrómund Gripsson and Þorgilssaga', *Saga Book*, 13 (1947), 51-77, at pp. 52-53; Judith Jesch, 'Hrómundr Gripsson Revisited', *Skandinavistik*, 14 (1984a), 89-105; and Judith Jesch, 'The Lost Literature of Medieval Iceland: Sagas of Icelanders' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University College London, 1984b), p. 299.

from the same saga tropes as Friðþjófr.<sup>611</sup> Hrapp takes gold rings from icons of gods and then burns down their shrine, in a villainous parallel to the temple-burning scene in the *fornaldarsaga*.<sup>612</sup> Other notable temple-burners include Þorgeirr of *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, who burns Hrafnkell's temple, with the result being that Hrafnkell gives up his pagan ways.<sup>613</sup> In *Kjalnesinga saga*, Búi, son of Andriðr, kills Þorsteinn Þorgrímsson at his temple and burns it down.<sup>614</sup> Þorgrímr tells Esja, Þorsteinn's foster-mother: '*hann hefit drepit Þorstein, son minn, en þat þó með, at þetta er lítils vert; hann hefir breet upp hofit ok goð vár.*'<sup>615</sup> Meanwhile, in *Þorvalds þáttur víðförla* Klaufi Þorvaldsson attempts to burn down Þorvarður Boðvarsson's church at Ás, but God protects it.<sup>616</sup> Yet despite such parallels, the saga is not commonly read in modern times, so a brief plot summary is worthwhile.

The saga tells of the childhood foster-siblings Friðþjófr and Ingibjörg, whose love for one another is thwarted by Ingibjörg's brothers, the kings Helgi and Hálfðan. The brothers turn down Friðþjófr's marriage request out of spite, deeming him a poor match for their sister (he is in fact their cousin). The rival king Hringr defeats the brothers in battle and demands their sister's hand in marriage. Meanwhile, Friðþjófr has been wooing Ingibjörg regardless at the nearby temple to Baldr, but now sails to Orkney to fetch the dowry for the arranged wedding. While he is at sea the brothers burn his family estate and hire witches to sink his ship, but he and his crew survive and safely collect the dowry. On arriving back in Norway, Friðþjófr discovers the full extent of the brothers's treachery and confronts them at the temple. He assaults Helgi with the bag of Orcadian silver and knocks down a statue of Baldr on the way out. Now an outlaw, Friðþjófr lives as a virtuous Viking until he eventually travels to the court of King Hringr where, after a series of tests of character, he is reunited with his true love.

<sup>611</sup> William Ian Miller, '*Why is your Axe Bloody?*' *A Reading of Njáls Saga* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 154.

<sup>612</sup> 'That night Killing-Hrapp came to the shrine of Earl Hacon and Gudbrand, and he went inside the house, and there he saw Thorgerda Shinebride sitting, and she was as tall as a fullgrown man. She had a great gold ring on her arm, and a wimple on her head; he strips her of her wimple, and takes the gold ring from off her. Then he sees Thor's car, and takes from him a second gold ring; a third he took from Irpa; and then he dragged them all out, and spoiled them of their gear. After that he laid fire to the shrine, and burnt it down, and then he goes away just as it began to dawn.' Dasent (1861), vol. ii, ch. 87, p. 24; note that even Killer-Hrapp feels the need to first drag the religious icons outside (admittedly to rob them) before setting fire to the temple.

<sup>613</sup> *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, in *Austfirðinga sögur, Íslensk fornrit* XI., ed. by Jón Jóhannesson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1950), 97-133, at ch. 6-7, p. 9.

<sup>614</sup> *Kjalnesinga saga*, in *Kjalnesinga saga, Íslensk fornrit* XIV. ed. by Jóhannes Halldórsson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1959), 1-44, at ch. 4, pp. 12-13.

<sup>615</sup> 'He has killed Þorsteinn, my son, and what is more, so that that seems of little worth, he has burned the temple and our gods', *Kjalnesinga saga* (1959), ch. 5, pp. 14-15.

<sup>616</sup> *Þorvalds þáttur víðförla I.*, in *Biskupa Sögur I, Íslensk fornrit* XV., vol. II., ed. by Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson, and Peter Foote (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2003), 49-89, ch. 5, pp. 76-77.

By the early years of the twentieth century this fairly simple saga had seen seven separate publications in the original Old Norse, derived from two main redactions: an older and shorter version, represented, for example, by the manuscripts AM 510 4to, fols. 91<sup>v</sup> -96<sup>r</sup> (1540-60) and AM 568 II 4to, fols. 83<sup>r</sup>-87<sup>v</sup> (1612-50); and a younger, expanded version found in Holm. Papp. 17 4to.<sup>617</sup> The later redaction of the saga appears to have acquired a number of plot features from *Þorsteins saga Víkingssónar* (which tells the tale of Friðþjófr's father) and the *Friðþjófsrímur* (Cod. AM 604 C 4to).<sup>618</sup> The older version has traditionally had few fans (Hans Kuhn says that it gives only 'a fairly rough outline,' of the tale, studded with 'rather mediocre' *lausavísur*) but can count among those few Guðni Jónsson.<sup>619</sup> The chief difference between the two recensions is that the older one does not contain many of the more fantastic *Fornaldarsögur* elements of the later narrative. Yet the older recension had numerous intriguing features of its own which were not considered important by nineteenth-century rewriters. Several points of pre-Christian faith are modified or omitted from the later recension. For example, on falling fatally ill at the start of the poem, King Beli instructs his sons that they must not place any of his moveable wealth alongside him in his grave-mound: *Ekki skal fé bera í haug mér*.<sup>620</sup> Whether or not this is a specific refusal of pagan mortuary practices is unclear but the shorter redaction does frequently stress the importance of earthly pursuits. While at a

<sup>617</sup> Found in the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, Reykjavík and the Kungliga biblioteket, Stockholm respectively. For further details of the manuscript history, see: Halldór Hermannsson, *Bibliography of the Mythical-Heroic Sagas*, ed. by George William Harris, *Islandica*, 5 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 1912), pp. 13–17 (which, however, contains numerous errors); Larsson (1901); and *Sagan ock rimorna om Friðþjófr hinn frækni*, trans. by Ludvig Larsson (Copenhagen and Lund: E. Malströms boktryckeri, 1893), pp. i–ii. The majority of academic work on the actual manuscripts of *Friðþjófs saga* has been done by nineteenth-century German scholars: see Franz Eduard Christoph Dietrich, *Altnordisches Lesebuch: aus der skandinavischen Poesie und Prosa bis zum XIV. Jahrhundert zusammengestellt und mit übersichtlicher Grammatik und einem Glossar versehen* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1843); Hermann Lüning, *Altnordische Texte: Grimnismál – Friðþjófs saga ens frækna – Krókr hinn svartí* (Zürich: Zürcher und Furrer, 1859); and Gustaf Wenz (ed.), *Die Friðþjófs saga* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1913). Richard Paleske commented in 1902 that 'kein Volk besitzt eine solche Fülle an aufklärenden Schriften über Island, wie das deutsche' [no nation possesses such a wealth of insightful writings on Iceland as the German], Valtýr Guðmundsson, *Die Fortschritte Islands im 19. Jahrhundert*, trans. by Richard Palleske (Kattowitz: Gebrüder Böhm Buch- und Kunstdruckerei, 1902), introduction. Indeed, Zernack identifies some twenty-four separate translations of the saga into German between 1830 and 1937, see Julia Zernack, *Bibliographie der deutschsprachigen Sagäübersetzungen 1791-1995* (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 1997).

<sup>618</sup> Larsson (1901), pp. xviii–xix. Examples include the fact that the ship Elliða can understand human speech in the later recension, a feature borrowed from the more fantastical *Þorsteins saga*.

<sup>619</sup> Hans Kuhn, 'Frithiof and Röde Orm: Two Swedish Viking Impersonations', *Scandinavica*, 52/1 (2013), 6-16, at p. 8; and Hans Kuhn, 'Frithiof and Röde Orm: Two Swedish Viking Impersonations', in *Á austrvega – Saga and East Scandinavia: Preprint Papers of The 14th International Saga Conference, Uppsala, 9th-15th August 2009*, ed. by Agneta Ney, Henrik Williams and Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist (Gävle: Gävle University Press, 2009), 545-49, at p. 545. Guðni Jónsson (ed.), *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, IV vols (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfan Forni, 1950).

<sup>620</sup> 'Do not put riches in my burial mound.' *Friðþjófs saga ins frækna*, ch.1, in Guðni Jónsson (1950), vol. III, ch. 1, p. 78.

party in Friðþjófr's halls, Ingibjörg comments on the quality of his ancestral arm-ring; Friðþjófr replies: "*Ekki á ek þat, er ek hafði eiga aflat.*" *Hún svarar: "Þat er mál manna, at sá eigi fé, sem lifir, en ekki dauðir men."*<sup>621</sup> The mantra here is common throughout saga literature and is recognisable from elsewhere in heroic Germanic writings, although in the nineteenth-century adaptations of these texts the notion may have been read in a political, anti-inheritance context.

The passage, popular with nineteenth-century readers, concerning the temple to Baldr is left until the second chapter of the older recension, where we find it presented as a convenient solution to the paternal woes of Ingibjörg's brothers. The temple, we are told, is a haven of celibacy, and therefore an undoubtedly safe location for the brothers to deposit their sister away from the affections of Friðþjófr:

Eftir þat bjuggust þeir til ferðarinnar ok kváðu þat mundu ráð at flytja systur sína í Baldrshaga ok átta konur með henni,—“því at þar er engi svá djarfr, at þar grandir neinu,” því at þar var hof mikit ok goðablót ok skíðgarðr um hofit, ok skyldi þar ekki saman koma konur ok karlar.<sup>622</sup>

As it turns out, the protagonist cares very little for pagan sacrifice or whatever sanctity it bestows. In the older recension, the temple serves a double narrative function: both as a convenient solution for the brothers's need to hide Ingibjörg from Friðþjófr, and as a stage on which Friðþjófr can prove his daring nature. When asked by Ingibjörg how he dares visit her in a place held sacred by the gods, Friðþjófr replies: *Ekki hirði ek um Baldr eða blót yður. Jafngóðir eru mér þínir málsendar hér sem heima.*<sup>623</sup> Later, in the face of a fearsome tempest conjured by the villainous Helgi (with the help of some whale-surfing witches), Friðþjófr recollects his time spent at the temple in what can only be called a taunt to the god Baldr:

Saman höfum brennda bauga  
 í Baldrshaga lagða.  
 Var-at vilgi fjarri  
 vörðr Hálfðanar garða.<sup>624</sup>

<sup>621</sup> “I do not own that which I have not earned.” She replied, “it is said by many people, that those who are living should own wealth, but not dead men.” Guðni Jónsson (1950), vol. III, ch.1, p. 78.

<sup>622</sup> ‘After that they prepared for their journey and gave the command to move their sister to Baldr’s Meadow, and eight women with her—“because there is no one so brash that they would defile it”—for there was a large temple there with sacrifices to the gods, and a boarded fence around the temple, and women and men could not meet together there.’ Guðni Jónsson (1950), vol. III, ch. 1, p. 80.

<sup>623</sup> ‘I do not care for Baldr, nor for your sacrifices. It is just as well with me to talk to you here as it is at home.’ Guðni Jónsson (1950), vol. III, ch. 1, p. 81.

<sup>624</sup> ‘Together we wore pure rings in Baldr’s Meadow. The warden of Hálfðan’s stronghold was then far away.’ Guðni Jónsson (1950), vol. III, ch. 3, p. 86.

The hero's antagonism towards the god Baldr comes to a head at the temple, as Friðþjófr returns to Norway after his excursion to the Orkney Islands. Finding his homestead burnt to the ground by Helgi and Hálfðan, Friðþjófr confronts the brothers at the temple and throws the newly-acquired bag of silver in Helgi's face. He then spots the arm-ring which he had given as a gift to Ingibjörg but which is now in the possession of Helgi's wife:

En Friðþjófr gekk at eldinum ok sá hringinn á hendi konu Helga ok greip til hennar, ok dragnaðist hún, en goðit valt út á eldinn, ok er hann kom at dyrunum, raknaði hringinn af hendi henni.<sup>625</sup>

It is interesting to note that in this version of the saga, the protagonist does not (intentionally or otherwise) burn down the temple, a chief feature of Tegnér's and Stephens's retellings; the idol or carving of Baldr held by Helgi's wife is the only casualty of this symbolic and physical struggle. Indeed, the only suggestion of the hall burning is in Friðþjófr's orders to his friend Björn, whom he instructs to throw fire onto the roof should he fail to return by evening:

Verpi þér eldi  
 í jöfra bæ,  
 ef ek kem eigi  
 aftr at kveldi.<sup>626</sup>

As it is, Friðþjófr completes his act of vengeance and escapes at a leisurely pace. This telling of the saga obviates the necessity for repentance on Friðþjófr's part. If Friðþjófr has violated the temple at all, he has only done so in the name of love, and the consequences of his actions seem not to lie too heavily on his conscience. Thus, the older version contains no mention of Friðþjófr atoning for his past sins, and the Christian prayer with which the saga concludes overrules any need for a reconciliation with Baldr:

Ok endidt svá sjá saga  
 at várr herra gefi oss alla góða daga  
 ok vér megum fá þann frið,  
 allt gott gangi oss í lið.  
 Geymi oss Mária móðir  
 ok mektugir englar góðir.  
 Leiði lausnarinn þjóðir  
 lífs á himna slóðir.  
 Ljufstr mun oss minn lávarð senda  
 mér lífit gott án enda,  
 í frið fyrir farsæld venda

<sup>625</sup> 'And Friðþjófr walked by the fires and saw the ring around the hand of Helgi's wife, and he grabbed her, and she was dragged along, but the god fell into the fire, and when he came to the doors he pulled the ring off her hand' Guðni Jónsson (1950), vol. III, ch. 4, p. 94.

<sup>626</sup> 'Throw fire into the kings' building, if I do not return by evening' Guðni Jónsson (1950), vol. III, ch. 4, p. 94.

*Amen ad eterne  
et mi pater et mater,  
bona soror et frater.*<sup>627</sup>

In the younger *Friðþjófs saga* a number of these references to both early pre-Christian and Christian belief were removed or modified. In Björner's edition, which derives from AM 109a 8vo, fols. 143<sup>r</sup>:1-153<sup>v</sup>:3, the temple to Baldr has become a key factor, and we find depictions of a more fully conceived pre-Christian belief system (perhaps one more attractive to nineteenth-century sensibilities).<sup>628</sup> The younger recension introduces Baldr's shrine at the start of the narrative, between the descriptions of Ingibjörg and Friðþjófr; the temple is positioned as an obstacle to the lovers from the outset:

Par geck strond nockur fyrer vestann fiorþinn, þar var bær stor sa bær var kallaður i Ballþurs haga, þar var gripastapur ok hof mikit ok skyþgarður mikill um, þar voru morg gop þo var af Ballþur mest hallpit, þar var sva mikit vandlæti giort af heiðnum monnum, at þar skyllþi aungvo granþ giora hvorki fe nie monnum, einginn viðskipti skyllþu þar karlar við konur eiga.<sup>629</sup>

Whilst spending more time describing the temple, this latter version of the saga clearly categorises it as heathen in the process. In this recension, pagan rites are a pastime for the wicked. The sinister King Helgi is characterised as villainous through his faith in pagan rituals: *Helgi Belason giorþist snemma blotmaður mikill, eki voru þeir bræður vinsællir.*<sup>630</sup> The juxtaposed remark that the brothers were not 'lucky in friends' appears to be a subtle deprecation of such practices. On the other hand, the hero Friðþjófr is increasingly presented as being indifferent to the gods; when asked by his companions whether or not wooing Ingibjörg at the temple will anger the gods, he replies '*virði ek meira hilli Yngibiargar enn*

<sup>627</sup> 'And so, this saga ends, that our Lord may send us all good days and we may receive that peace, and all may go well with us in life. Mother Mary and the mighty, good angels protect us. The Redeemer leads people in their life on the trail to Heaven. My most beloved Lord, may you grant me a good life without end, and turn in peace towards happiness. Amen in eternity, and my father and mother, good sister and brother' Guðni Jónsson (1950), vol. III, ch. 5, pp. 103–04.

<sup>628</sup> Larsson (1893), p. ii.

<sup>629</sup> 'The shoreline stretched for some distance on the western side of the fjord, and there was a large estate there which was called Baldr's Meadow, where there was a sanctuary and a great temple with a high-boarded fence around it. Many gods were worshipped there, although Baldr was the most praised. This temple was held in such devotion by heathen men that no injury was allowed there to beast nor man, and men could not have dealings with women.' *Friðthiofs saga*, ch. 1, in Erik Julius Björner (ed.), *Nordiska Kämpa Dater, i en sagoflock samlade om forna kongar och hjältar. Volumen historicum, continens variorum in orbe hyperboreo antiquo regum, heroum et pugilum res præclare et mirabiliter gestas. Accessit, præter conspectum genealogicum Svethicorum regum et reginarum accuratissimum etiam præfatio* (Stockholm: Joh. L. Horrn, 1737), section 6, pp. 1–2.

<sup>630</sup> 'Early on Helgi Belason became a zealous sacrificer; the brothers were not well-liked', Björner (1737), section 6, ch. 1, p. 2.

*Balldurs*.<sup>631</sup> As in the shorter recension, Friðþjófr's indifference turns to outright scorn when his life is put in danger by the violent storm brought about through Helgi's dabbling in black magic. Friðþjófr boasts that he and Ingibjörg enjoyed the seclusion of Baldr's temple at Hálfðan's expense.<sup>632</sup>

The Baldr-burning episode in this version is a dramatic, if comic and almost farcical, account, with much slapstick humour and accidental destruction. The saga author modifies the outcome from one toasted idol to the entire temple going up in flames:

Enn þegar Friðþjófur geck utar eptir golfinu, sa hann hringinn goða a hond konu Helga er hun bakapi Balldur við ellþinn. Friðþjófur greip til hringins enn hann var fastur a hendinni, ok dro hann hana utar eptir golfinu at dyrunum, enn Balldur fiell ut a elldinn, kona Hálfðanar griep til hennar, skiott fiell þa þat goðit ut a elldinn er hun hafði bakat. Lystir nu elldinum i bæði goðin, enn þau voru áður smurð, ok sva up i ríafrit sva at logaði húfit.<sup>633</sup>

Helgi is naturally outraged (once he recovers from being hit in the face by a sack of silver), and orders that Friðþjófr should be outlawed from the entire kingdom: '*Hefur sa maður fyrirgiort sier er hann hlífði aungvum griðastöpum*.'<sup>634</sup> Friðþjófr himself reflects on the significance of the event in marking his passage to (temporary) outlawry. He has become the 'Temple-Wolf', defined by his anti-heathen arson:

Enn nu tekur bal at brenna  
 i Balldurs haga meðian,  
 því mun ek Vargur i veum,  
 veit ek því mun heitit.<sup>635</sup>

There is no effort on the part of Friðþjófr to rebuild the temple, and we are told that its destruction has hit Helgi the hardest, which is hardly a surprise, considering his devotion to the

<sup>631</sup> 'I value Ingibjörg's favour more than Baldr's.' Björner (1737), section 6, ch. 4, p. 9; see also ch. 3, p. 6 and ch. 5, p. 10.

<sup>632</sup> '*Saman hofum brenda bauga / i Balldurs haga lagða, / var þar Vigli færi, / vorður Hálfðanar jarða.*' ['Together we wore pure rings in Baldr's Meadow. The warden of Hálfðan's lands was then far away'], Björner (1737), section 6, ch. 6, p. 18.

<sup>633</sup> 'And when Friðþjófr walked out across the floor, he saw the good ring around the hand of Helgi's wife, as she warmed Baldr by the fire. Friðþjófr grabbed for the ring but it was firmly on the hand, and he dragged her out across the floor to the doorway, but Baldr fell into the fire. Hálfðan's wife grabbed for it, and quickly the god which she had been warming also fell into the fire. Now the fire lit up both of the gods – as they had previously been anointed with oil – and so too up to the roof so that the ceiling blazed.' Björner (1737), section 6, ch. 9, p. 28.

<sup>634</sup> 'Such a man forfeited his life when he spared not even the most peaceful of places', Björner (1737), section 6, ch. 10, p. 29.

<sup>635</sup> 'But now the hall begins to burn in the middle of Baldr's Meadow; I know that for this I will be called the wolf in the temple', Björner (1737), section 6, ch. 10, p. 31.

pagan gods thus far.<sup>636</sup> At the end of the longer recension, the heathen Helgi is not bought off or forced to surrender; unlike his brother Hálfðan, he is clearly seen as being too wicked to live, and is killed in combat with Friðþjófr during the saga's climatic battle. There is no prayer (Christian or otherwise) to end the longer redaction.

This tale then, most commonly in its later recension, would become one of the defining works of the nineteenth-century reception of Old Norse literature. Its sudden rise to fame has perplexed modern writers, for whom *Friðþjófs saga* is not an obvious choice for stardom, and it is consequently worth considering why Friðþjófr in particular resounded with nineteenth-century readers.

One suggestion is that the saga's popularity can be connected to the rising abundance of depictions in literature and historical textbooks of the Norseman as the seafarer supreme.<sup>637</sup> This phenomenon could be seen throughout the late-Victorian period in novels, children's books, and essays on British naval history, where the Norsemen were drawn into British history as an example of Northern naval prowess. Seemingly, Friðþjófr was proof of the naval heritage of the North; his saga contained perilous sea-voyages and daring seafaring escapades.<sup>638</sup> This heritage was particularly important for the British, who spent much of the century putting their substantial navy to use across Europe, and were keen to remind other nations what might befall them should they wish to encroach on their maritime dominion. As Laing noted in the same year his *Heimskringla* translation was published, 'England stands without dispute the first naval and commercial power in the world.'<sup>639</sup> Concurrent theories on the inheritance-based development of nations supported the idea that sea-faring aptitude had been passed down through the blood.<sup>640</sup> According to the period's philologists and biologists, the British quite literally had naval prowess flowing through their veins; Friðþjófr's tale was seen as evidence of racial superiority, as Wawn writes, 'The Norse sea-king represents a noble emanation of

<sup>636</sup> *Sva bættu þeir bræður upp allann Balldurs haga, ok var þat langt áður elldurinn var sloktur. Þat fell Halga kongi vest at göðinn voru uppbrend, varþ þat mikill kostnaður áður Balldurs hagi var upp bygður til fuls jafnt ok áður*, (Björner (1737), section 6, ch. 10, p. 31).

<sup>637</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, writing in 1824, referred to Friðþjófr as a *Seeheld*; see Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke Band 13.1, Die Jahre 1820-1826*, ed. by Gisela Henckmann and Irmela Schneider (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1992), pp. 393-97. Frederick Howell notes at the end of the century that 'to all Englishmen the figure of the Northman on his war-ship is familiar' (1893), p. 17. On naval supremacy see also Charles Augustus Vansittart Conybeare, *The Place of Iceland in the History of European Institutions; being the Lothian Prize Essay, 1877* (Oxford and London: James Parker & Co., 1877), p. 4.

<sup>638</sup> One such writer was almost certainly Major Albany Featherstone, whose collection of poetry *Sagas and Songs of the Norsemen* featured the 'Sea-King' as a recurrent character. Most notable is the poem 'Hengest's Landing' which combines the Anglo-Saxon origin myth with stereotypical Viking imagery; see Major Albany Featherstone, *Sagas and Songs of the Norsemen* (London: David Nutt, 1894), pp. 95-97.

<sup>639</sup> Laing (1844a), p. 2.

<sup>640</sup> See, for example, footnote 751, and, more generally, section 5.3, below.



some divine Odinic energy; his sturdy simplicity contrasts favourably with the lofty dilettantism of the Greeks; and his spirit lives on in the world's greatest navy and nation.<sup>641</sup>

The theories on these 'Sea-Kings' (Stephens's preferred term for referring to the more noble northern ancestors) were not isolated. Beside those sagas based in northern Europe, it was tales of the first Europeans to "discover" Greenland and America through astounding feats of maritime skill which had captured the public's imagination.<sup>642</sup> British antiquarian studies supported such readings of history. After all, Old English terminology for the Vikings revolved around seafaring concepts – *flotman*, *sæman*, *sceigðman*, and *æscman* to name but a handful.<sup>643</sup> Then there was archaeological evidence. The discovery of the Viking Age ships at Nydam (1863), Gokstad (1880), and Oseberg (1904) strengthened notions of northern naval supremacy. In the early nineteen-hundreds *Friðþjófs saga* was included, along with passages from *Beowulf*, 'The Seafarer', and *Grettis saga*, in the compilation *Great Sea Stories of All Nations*, guaranteeing it a place in British naval history.<sup>644</sup>

Indeed, one could argue that after Tegnér it was sea-faring Britons who helped to spread the word about *Friðþjófs saga ins frækna*. Inspired by blossoming circles of intellectual discussion across Edinburgh, Liverpool, and Newcastle, the maritime communities of northern Britain developed a keen interest in everything Scandinavian – particularly where they thought it might have a bearing on their own history. Wawn points in particular to the phenomenal output of northern scholarship from the region around Liverpool – home to a number of translators of Old Norse over the century: 'Much of the industrial wealth of the country lay in the North,' explains Wawn, 'and there were many eager to establish and proud to celebrate

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<sup>641</sup> Wawn (2002), p. 74.

<sup>642</sup> Miles notes that the most important sagas were those which narrated the 'ante-Columbian discovery of America', Miles (1854), p. 15. Numerous writers concurred with Miles's views; in much later fictional works of authors such as Wray Hunt, Norse protagonists could be presented as an early Victorian scouting-party, forefathers of the empire in more than one sense, see Wray Hunt, *The Voyage to Vinland* (London: Sheldon Press), and also Laing (1844a), pp. 121-22. Down to the present day the question of the early Icelandic travellers's impact on American history (and particularly on their genetic constitution) is one that attracts numerous scholars and non-scholars alike; 'unlike Columbus, the Vikings may not have established a permanent presence in North America the first time around. But given the millions of Americans who share at least a bit of Viking blood, they are still there--and in considerable force', Michael D. Lemonick and Andrea Dorfman Sunday, 'The Amazing Vikings', *Time*, April 30, (2000), 5, accessed at: <<http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,44020-1,00.html>>

<sup>643</sup> See Fell (1993), p. 94.

<sup>644</sup> Henry Major Tomlinson (ed.), *Great Sea Stories of All Nations* (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1930), pp. 993-999; Tomlinson's passage, entitled 'How Ellidi, The Dragon-ship, at the command of Frithiof the Bold, drove down upon the witches', is taken directly from William Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon's *Three Northern Love Stories*.

links between the ancient presence of Viking settlers in the region and its modern industrial and commercial success.<sup>645</sup> George Stephens was one such eager northern writer.<sup>646</sup>

Yet the enthusiasm for *Friðþjófs saga* cannot solely be ascribed to either northern academia or ancestrally-minded sailors. By the mid-eighteen-hundreds the saga and its poetic variation had become highly-sought items for the public and personal libraries of upper-class British society up and down the country. The writer Sabine Baring-Gould (perhaps best known today for writing the hymn ‘Onward Christian Soldiers’) sourced his own personal copy of the saga while on an expedition-cum-holiday to Iceland in 1863; Baring-Gould was so insistent on purchasing a *Friðþjófs saga* manuscript that the impoverished farmer from whom he was buying it in Akureyri burst into tears.<sup>647</sup> The aforementioned diplomat Lord Dufferin referenced Tegnér’s poem of the saga in his 1857 *Letters from High Latitudes*; riding coastal waves on an ill-planned trip to find the exotic wildernesses of Iceland and Norway, Dufferin described one of the party’s hostesses with characteristic dramatic flair: ‘A fairer apparition I have seldom seen [...]. Such was the Châtelaine of Kaafiord, – as perfect a type of Norse beauty as ever my Saga lore had conjured up! Frithiof’s Ingeborg herself seemed to stand before me.’<sup>648</sup>

In short, *Friðþjófs saga* in its various forms was one of the great success stories of nineteenth-century saga reception, the subject of musicals, operas, theatrical works, children’s books, travel literature, sea-faring anthologies, engravings, paintings, statues, and undergraduate textbooks. Poems about its hero were dedicated to Queen Victoria and attracted the attention of admirers such as William Morris, Kaiser Wilhelm II, Selma Lagerlöf, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.<sup>649</sup> In 1897, shortly after the saga’s fourth English translation and the poem’s twelfth, it became part of the Library of the World’s Best Literature series. Beatrice Clay, whose rewritten saga tales for children were in vogue in the early nineteenth-hundreds, wrote to Eiríkur Magnússon at Cambridge in 1911 seeking background information for a play she was writing based on *Friðþjófs saga*. In bringing Old Norse to British stages Clay was insistent that every detail should be true to tradition. Her questions presupposed that

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<sup>645</sup> Wawn (1994c), p. 218.

<sup>646</sup> Stephens’s work on Old Norse literature and Scandinavian culture more generally is addressed in sections 5.2-5.5 below.

<sup>647</sup> ‘I bought here some MSS. of considerable interest from a native who was reduced to great poverty, and only parted reluctantly with these volumes. “These Sagas,” said he, “are our joy; without them our long winters would be blanks. You may have these books, but, believe me, it is *prava necessitas* alone which forces me to part with them.” As he spoke, the tears came into his eyes, poor fellow!’ Sabine Baring-Gould, *Iceland: Its Scenes and Sagas* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1863), pp. 223-24.

<sup>648</sup> Dufferin (1903), p. 155.

<sup>649</sup> Goethe (1992), pp. 393-97.

the Icelfander must have been in medieval Scandinavia himself: what colour should Ingebjörg ideally be wearing? How should she dress the priests of Óðinn and Baldr? Were there any other gods in the temple? What was the favourite form of spell-casting?<sup>650</sup> Clearly enough people knew the story to necessitate scrupulous attention to detail. Wawn has gone as far as to suggest that in nineteenth-century Europe the tale of Friðþjófr was ‘better known than any other medieval Icelandic narrative except the *Prose Edda*.’<sup>651</sup> Much of this admiration was based on an assumption that the saga represented a realistic depiction of Viking Age Scandinavia. As one of its later translators Margaret Schlauch explained, whilst the saga was ‘probably more fictitious than not’, she nevertheless deemed it worthy of study for its ‘presentment of superstitions and heathen customs, quite apart from the narrative itself’.<sup>652</sup>

Yet the enthusiasm, while not short-lived, was certainly limited. Today the saga wins little attention either from academics or from the public. Wawn describes it as having been ‘a largely forgotten work during the twentieth century, enjoying none of the esteem accorded to the *Íslendingasögur*.’<sup>653</sup> As Wawn’s statement hints, part of the problem is that the *Íslendingasögur* have risen in popularity since their transferral to English translation in the mid-nineteenth century. By contrast, most *Fornaldarsögur* have fallen out of favour with all but the most determined of scholars, and even recent attempts to revitalise scholarly engagement with these sagas have excluded the adventures of Frithiof the Bold.<sup>654</sup> Situated firmly in the latter of the two camps, *Friðþjófs saga* is often considered a meritless example of a fanciful sub-genre. It is seen as having no historical merit and little value even as one of the *Fornaldarsögur*. Writing at the start of the twentieth century, W. A. Craigie remarked that the saga was ‘attractively written, but has not the slightest historical value.’<sup>655</sup> Craigie regarded the scenes involving heathen society as interesting but ultimately fanciful, and probably an

<sup>650</sup> Lbs. 2187a 4to.

<sup>651</sup> Wawn (1994c), p. 222.

<sup>652</sup> Margaret Schlauch, *Medieval Narrative: A Book of Translations* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1928; repr. New York: Gordian Press, 1969), p. 4. Ove Malling certainly took the saga to contain elements of truth; he included a (significantly rewritten) account of Friðþjófr’s journey to the Orkney isles in his *Store og Gode Handlinger af Danske, Norske og Holstenere* (1777), see *Great and Good Deeds of Danes, Norwegians and Holsteinians*, trans. by Andreas Andersen Feldborg (London: C. & R. Baldwin, 1807), pp. 119-20.

<sup>653</sup> Wawn (2002), p. 119.

<sup>654</sup> Such as the excellent collection Martin Arnold and Alison Finlay (eds.), *Making History: Essays on the Fornaldarsögur* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, 2010). On the other hand, see Marianne E. Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland, Islandica*, vol. 46 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990) and Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen, *Essays on Scandinavian Literature* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1895) for some pro-Friðþjófr scholarship. In 1938 Richard Beck included the saga – ‘an exquisite story of romantic love’ – among the most important *fornaldarsögur*, see Giovanni Bach, Richard Beck, Adolph B. Benson, Axel Johan Uppvall, et al., *The History of the Scandinavian Literatures*, ed. and trans. by Frederika Blanker (New York: Kennikat Press Inc., 1966), p. 246.

<sup>655</sup> W. A. Craigie, *The Icelandic Sagas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), pp. 94-95.

invention of the saga author.<sup>656</sup> The majority of contemporary scholars appear to feel the same way, but there are exceptions to the rule. Alongside the better-known works on reception theory,<sup>657</sup> the saga and its various renditions have in fact fed into works on the poetry of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow,<sup>658</sup> cross-cultural appropriation,<sup>659</sup> bridal-quest romance,<sup>660</sup> Victorian visions of Norway,<sup>661</sup> folklore-inspired national epics,<sup>662</sup> and the history of ice-skating,<sup>663</sup> to name but a few. Evidently the tale possessed some aspects worthy of examination. Not least, it warrants consideration as a precursor to the Old Norse translations of the latter half of the century.

### 5.1. The Great and Powerful North

It was in the guise of the Swedish bishop Esaias Tegnér's epic poem of 1825 that *Friðþjófs saga* first came to the attention of nineteenth-century British readers. Tegnér (1782-1846) received his higher education at Lund University, where he was appointed to professor of Greek in 1811. From an early age Tegnér held the sagas in high regard and followed the lead of fellow Swedish poets Pehr Henrik Ling (1776-1839) and Erik Gustaf Geijer (1783-1847) in using the legends and myths of the North to write about the modern nations of Scandinavia and northern Europe.<sup>664</sup> Tegnér frequently emphasised the appropriate nature of using northern mythology

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<sup>656</sup> Craigie (1913), p. 95. Craigie made no mention of which version of the saga he had read but his comments suggest that it was the later, longer recension. It also seems likely that he based his views on English translations of Tegnér's poem.

<sup>657</sup> Wawn (2002); Leslie J. Workman and Kathleen Verduin (eds.), *Medievalism in England II. Studies in Medievalism*, 7 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1996); and Kuhn (2013), pp. 6-16.

<sup>658</sup> Edward Thorstenberg, 'The Skeleton in Armour and the Frithiof Saga', *Modern Language Notes*, 25 (1910), 189-92; George L. White, Jr., 'Longfellow's Interest in Scandinavia During the Years 1835-1847', *Scandinavian Studies*, 17/2 (May 1942), 70-82.

<sup>659</sup> Marina Mundt, 'Zur Adaption orientalischer Erzählstoffe im hohen Norden. Der Fall der Friðþjófs saga', in *Deutsch-nordische Begegnung. 9. Arbeitstagung der Skandinavisten des deutschen Sprachgebietes 1989 in Svendborg*, ed. by Kurt Braunmüller and Mogens Brøndsted (Odense: Odense University Press, 1991), 164-76; Chester Nathan Gould, 'The Friðþjófs saga, an Oriental Tale', *Scandinavian Studies*, 7 (1923), 219-50; Margaret Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland* (New York: American Scandinavian Foundation; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1934), p. 26.

<sup>660</sup> Kalinke (1990).

<sup>661</sup> Fjågesund and Symes (2003); and Fjågesund (2014).

<sup>662</sup> DuBois (2009), pp. 178-210.

<sup>663</sup> Beverly A. Thurber, 'A New Interpretation of Frithiof's Steel Shoes', *Scandinavica*, 50/2 (2011), 6-30.

<sup>664</sup> See Wallete (2004). Tegnér himself readily admitted that it was the Danish nationalist poet Adam Oehlenschläger whose 'Helge' inspired his 'Frithiof'; see Tegnér, trans. by Stephens (1839), p. 44, and Sylwan, in Greta Hedin, Elof Hellquist, Otto Sylwan, and Erik Wallén, *Tegnér's Fritjofs Saga: Fyra Studier* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1931), p. 193. As if to seal this artistic connection, Tegnér crowned Oehlenschläger as 'poet-king of Scandinavia' in Lund cathedral in 1829; see Hans Kuhn, 'The Farmer and the Viking: Forms of Romantic Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Scandinavia', in *Romantic Nationalism in Europe*, ed. by J. C.

and legend as a model for modern national literature. Outside Scandinavian literature, he was an admirer of Goethe and Schiller, Byron and Scott.<sup>665</sup> In 1812 he was invited to become a member of the group *Götiska förbundet* ('The Gothic Society'), a literary collective founded the previous year whose expressed goal was 'Knowledge and employment of the Ancient Northern Myth and Saga in the Fine Arts.'<sup>666</sup> When in 1825 he published his first verse translation of *Friðþjófs saga*, it was in *Göther's* journal *Iduna*. From these roots, it is perhaps unsurprising that Tegnér's approach to northern literature was to highlight its underlying potential as nationalist material:

However weakened, frivolous, or degenerate the [Swedish] People may be, - a Viking-vein still lies at the bottom of the National Temperament, and willingly will we recognize it also in the Bard. The race of *Fornjoter* ['ancient giants'] is not yet extinguished. Something Titanic and full of defiance runs through the people like a national feature.<sup>667</sup>

In Old Norse mythology *forn-jötnar* would indicate a group of giants from the early reaches of time, from whom powerful rulers were descended. To use the word while talking about the modern Swedish people implied a claim to hereditary mastery of the northern lands. The term also recalled the start to *Porsteins saga Víkingssonar*, the sequential prequel to *Friðþjófs saga's* which related the early exploits of the protagonist's father.

If that alone were not sufficient evidence of northern legend being repurposed as nationalist rhetoric, Tegnér provided the same sentiment in poetic format, in the first stanza of *Gerda*, translated (a little loosely) by Stephens and included in his preface:

Nordens kraft är trots, och falla  
 Är en seger för oss alla;

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Eade (Canberra: Humanities and Research Centre, Australian National University, 1983), 81-100, at p. 86. Oehlenschläger repaid the courtesy in his poem 'Esaias Tegnér':

*Saa vist som Freia smiler ned,  
 klart over land og Sø,  
 vil Frithiofs, Axels Kioelighed  
 i Norden aldrig døe.*

['As long as Freyja smiles down clearly over land and sea, Frithiof, Axel's love, will never die in the north'], Oehlenschläger (1853), vol. 2, pp. 90-91.

<sup>665</sup> Gosse and Craigie (1925), p. 209; see Boyesen (1895), pp. 242-43,

<sup>666</sup> Stephens (1839), pp. xxv-xxvi; see also Kuhn (2013), p. 7 and 1983, p. 81. The group are also referred to as simply *Göther* (or 'The Goths').

<sup>667</sup> Tegnér, in Stephens (1839), p. xxx. Peter Fjågesund usefully identifies two political strands to Tegnér's poem, which he argues reflects on Swedish politics 'negatively in the sense of its scepticism towards a narrow Swedish nationalism, and positively in the sense of its appeal to a common northern culture, based on a common past', (2014), p. 327; Hans Kuhn argues that although Tegnér was a member of *Götiska förbundet* he 'thought it absurd to pretend that the world had not moved on since the early Middle Ages' – this reading would paint Tegnér as something of a progressive medievalist, although as *Frithiof* was his last major work there is not necessarily enough material to sufficiently support this claim (2009), p. 548.

Ty, om ock man föll till slut,  
 Fick man ändå kämpa ut.  
 Stormar det, han gerna brottas  
 Emot stormen, gerna blottas  
 Ludet bröst, att åskan må  
 Veta hvar hon bäst kan slå.<sup>668</sup>

Tegnér asserted that he was not merely aiming to create a poetic version of the saga, but more to capture the spirit of the age represented by Friðþjófr's tale.<sup>669</sup> He was not interested in a psychological profile of his protagonist, nor in presenting a true history of events. Instead it was a 'poetical image of the old Northern Hero-Age' that Tegnér sought to depict; in Stephens's edition of the poem, Tegnér told readers: 'It was not Frithiof, as an individual, whom I would paint; it was the epoch of which he was chosen as the Representative.'<sup>670</sup>

Even so, it appears Tegnér experienced some difficulty in marrying the *Zeitgeist* of legendary Scandinavia with his romantic-nationalist hero. In a letter sent as an introduction to Stephens's translation, the poet discussed the complexity of dealing with a subject matter that encompassed both 'much that is high-minded and heroic' alongside 'instances of the raw, the savage, the barbarous.'<sup>671</sup> As Percy and Blackwell had experienced when translating Mallet's work, one had to find the appropriate balance:

On the one hand the Poem ought not too glaringly to offend our milder opinions and more refined habits; but on the other hand it was important not to sacrifice the national the lively the vigorous and the natural. There could, and ought to, blow through the Song that cold winter-air, that fresh Northwind which characterises so much both the climate and the temperament of the North.<sup>672</sup>

<sup>668</sup> 'Northland's Strength defies, and never / Death can Conquest from us sever; / For, e'en should we fall at last, / Life in Battle's sport was past. / Roars the Storm – how willing dare we / Wrestling beard him! Willing bare we, / Thunder mocking, hairy breast – / There his arm can strike us best!' Tegnér, trans. Stephens (1839), p. xxx.

<sup>669</sup> As Brandes phrased it, '*Han vil give et Billede af det gamle Nordens Liv*' [He wished to provide a picture of the life of the old North], Georg Brandes, *Esaias Tegnér: En Litteraturpsychologisk Studie* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1878), p. 122. See also Mattias Pirholt, 'En ofullständig modernisering: Georg Brandes läser Esaias Tegnér', in *Ett Möte: Svensk og dansk litterär romantik i ny dialog*, ed. by Gunilla Hermansson and Mads Nygaard Folkmann (Stockholm: Makadam Förlag, 2008), 40-52.

<sup>670</sup> Tegnér, trans. Stephens (1839), p. 44; Kuhn comments that although the poem mirrored Old Norse literature 'in spirit and form, it did not provide much national mileage apart from a general feeling of pride that such splendid specimens of humanity could be found among one's ancestors' – although one suspects such a criticism could be levelled against many artistic works of nationalism (1983), p. 84.

<sup>671</sup> Tegnér, trans. Stephens (1839), p. 45. Tegnér had taught himself English through James Macpherson's *Songs of Ossian*, see DuBois (2009), p. 179; and Brandes (1878), p. 13.

<sup>672</sup> Tegnér, trans. Stephens (1839), p. 45. See also DuBois (2009), p. 210 for a discussion of Tegnér's enthusiasm for nationalist poetry. Mattias Pirholt sees *Frithiofs Saga* as a strikingly conflicted text, in which national concepts of tradition and progression vie for supremacy: '*Frithiofs saga representerar både tids och Tegnér's egen paradox: motsättningen och föreningen mellan det alltför moderna och det inte tillräckligt moderne i romantiken och i Tegnér's diktning*' [*Frithiofs saga* represents the both the period's and Tegnér's own

Stephens himself recognised this dichotomy, writing that the poem reflected ‘an age remarkably Homeric in its barbaric civilization and its pirate independence.’<sup>673</sup> The problem does not appear to have troubled Stephens, but Tegnér was after all a bishop and this conflict of literary appropriation came to a head in matters of religion.<sup>674</sup> Tegnér wished to convey the essence of the text, but feared differences in religious temperament between Viking Age Norway and nineteenth-century Sweden could hamper understanding.

Thus, when in 1825 Tegnér came to publish his full verse translation of the saga – now a two-hundred-page epic poem – the subject matter of his magnum opus was in more than one sense a matter of faith. One of the most notable divergences from the original saga is Tegnér’s portrayal of heathen culture.<sup>675</sup> Firstly, it should be noted that there is simply far more of it. Whilst the saga’s later redaction itself could be said to use the names of the Norse gods and goddesses only superficially (and even then, only those of the aforementioned Baldr and the sea-goddess Rán), Tegnér’s poem was awash with mythological references. Balder played a central role (his name or synonyms of it appearing well over seventy times), but also frequently mentioned are Odin, Thor, and Freya (each more than ten times), while Frey, Saga, Brage, Hel, and Ran joined a host of other deities depicted with knowing nods to their respective roles and characteristics. Tegnér presented a North in which the Norse gods were an integral element of Viking-Age life.

Secondly, Tegnér refused to let good faith go to waste – regardless of whether it was Christian or heathen. He made the burning of Balder’s temple an accidental act and filled his protagonist with pious remorse thereafter. He even had him try to put out the fire.<sup>676</sup> At the end of the poem Frithiof humbly rebuilds the temple to Balder. Tegnér’s *Frithiofs Saga* may have

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paradox: the contrast and the connection between the modern and the not-sufficiently-modern in Romance and in Tegnér’s poetry]. Pirholt (2008), p. 50.

<sup>673</sup> Stephens (1839), p. 28. In fact, Tegnér’s poem is significantly more ‘homeric’ than its Old Norse source; Margaret Clunes Ross and Lars Lönnroth comment: ‘*Tegnér låter till och med sin mytologiska sagohjälte Frithiof besöka Greklands klassiska ruiner foer att bli mindre viking och mera av en polerad gentleman*’ [Tegnér even allows his mythological sage hero Frithiof to visit Greece’s classical ruins before becoming less of a Viking and more of a polished gentleman], (2001), p. 47.

<sup>674</sup> Although seemingly anti-Viking in every other sense, and most certainly anti-*Deutsch*, Stephens nevertheless went to great pains to exhibit the positive cultural dimensions of the old north, particularly the religious integration. In his discussion of a runic lead tablet found in 1883, Stephens commented, ‘This Odense specimen, the 3rd in Scandinavia and first from Denmark, is another proof (if such were wanting) that the Clergy did not ban and drive out the Runes as heathen. So far from this, the priest who incised these letters pre-supposed that Our Lord Himself was familiar with the Futhorc – which of course He was’, George Stephens, *The Oldest Yet Found Document in Danish*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Copenhagen: Thiele, 1888b), p. 298. Here Danish runes are explained as neither heathen nor backward but rather well-known and appreciated by the early Christian community. For more on Tegnér and his engagement with (primarily Christian) religion see Joh[an] Lindblom, *Tegnér och Bibeln* (Lund: Håkon Ohlssons Boktryckeri, 1946).

<sup>675</sup> On Tegnér and concepts of heathenism see Mjöberg (1967-68), vol. 1, pp. 120-22.

<sup>676</sup> Tegnér, trans. Stephens (1839), canto XIII., v. 20, pp. 132-133.

portrayed the young foster-siblings as a northern Romeo and Juliet – Frithiof being the embodiment of a form of northern bravado and autonomous action, Ingeborg that of unparalleled northern beauty and patient commitment – but more importantly both characters started the poem as morally innocent and both reached its conclusion deeply faithful and open to the incoming Christian teaching of the modern Scandinavian spirit.<sup>677</sup> The cultural indifference (and on occasion antagonism) of Frithiof is tempered by Ingeborg's wary, parental register, but at the poem's start he clearly prefers his own might to godly support. Yet Tegnér did not present his protagonist as an atheist, but as a studied interpreter of Norse cosmology:

Hvad hviskar du om Balders vrede?  
 Han vredgas ej, den fromme Gud,  
 den älskande, som vi tillbede,  
 vårt hjertas kärlek är hans bud;  
 den Gud med solsken på sin panna,  
 med evig trohet i sin barm:  
 var ej hans kärlek till sin Nanna,  
 som min till deg, så ren, så varm?<sup>678</sup>

Baldr, Tegnér's Frithiof argued with knowing scholarship, was the god of love. If anything, he should support the lovers's argument. Meanwhile, the characterisation of the villainous brothers Helge and Halfdan turned the former's heathen sensibilities into a perversion. If Frithiof's lack of piety proved problematic for Tegnér it was nothing compared to too much heathen zeal:

Då trade de i salen, som kung befall,  
 Och främst bland dem gick Helge, en mörk gestalt.  
 Han dvaldes helst bland spåmän kring altarrunden,  
 och kom med blod på händren ur offerlunden.<sup>679</sup>

Being a follower, however devout, of the Norse gods did not guarantee one a virtuous life in Tegnér's North. King Beli's advice to his eldest son carries the same warning: the gods may

<sup>677</sup> See for example the description of Ingeborg in Tegnér (1868), canto VII, vv. 1-24, pp. 39-46.

<sup>678</sup> 'What do you whisper about Baldr's anger? He is not angry, the pious god, at the lovers, like us two; our hearts' love is his command. The god with sunshine on his brow, with eternal faith in his breast – was not his love for his own Nanna like mine to you, so pure, so warm?' Tegnér (1868), canto VII, v. 11, p. 42; cf. trans. by Stephens (1839), p. 66.

<sup>679</sup> 'Then they came into the hall, as the king commanded, and foremost among them went Helgi, a dark figure. He most often could be found among spearmen around the altar-circle and came with blood on his hands from the sacrificial graves.' Tegnér (1868), canto II, v. 5, p. 11; cf. trans. by Stephens (1839), p. 16.



be found in the sacrificial circle, but it would be unhealthy to spend one's entire life there.<sup>680</sup> Throughout the poem the early misguided spirituality of the early northerners was linked to foul sorcery and bloody sacrifice, as when Helge uses his affinity with otherworldly spirits to call down a storm on Frithiof's ship:

Men på stranden stod  
 Kung Helge och qvad  
 Med förbittradt mod,  
 Och till trollen han bad.<sup>681</sup>

Tegnér's overall sentiment was clear: unchecked Norse faith was a vessel for wickedness and perversion. Yet something of this approach still rankled with his sensibilities. Faith was still faith, Christian or otherwise, and the former societies of the North could not simply be mocked as morally backward. Tegnér seized on the latter recension's temple-burning scene to paint his Frithiof as a horrified accidental arsonist, he and Björn markedly shuddering at their crime: '*Dödsblek Björn vid porten står, / Frithiof blygs att han darrar.*'<sup>682</sup> Desperately trying to put out the fire he unwittingly started, the hero mounts the roof and, like an inversion of the undead Glámr of *Grettis saga*, attempts to save the hall: '*Frithiof sitter, som regnets Gud, / högt på bjelken och flödar.*'<sup>683</sup> Now an accidental sinner, Frithiof's attitude to Norse mythology takes a dramatic turn:

Du tempelrök,  
 flyg högt och sök,  
 sök upp Valhalla  
 och nederkalla  
 den Hvites hämnd  
 åt mig bestämd!<sup>684</sup>

<sup>680</sup> Tegnér (1868), canto II, v. 12, p. 11. This turns out to be appropriate advice for Tegnér's Helge, who meets his end exploring an ancient heathen altar when the arched stone doorway collapses on top of him. Mjöberg has noted that in an excellent example of northern European cultural assimilation, the heathen temple as portrayed in Ernst Roeber's 1886 illustrations for *Frithiofs Saga* bears a striking resemblance to the English Stonehenge; see Mjöberg (1967-68), vol. 1, p. 241.

<sup>681</sup> 'But on the shore stood King Helgi, and spoke with embittered temper, and begged to the trolls.' Tegnér (1868), canto XIII, v. I, p. 68; cf. trans. by Stephens (1839), p. 97.

<sup>682</sup> 'Björn stands pale at the door, Frithiof feels so ashamed that he trembles.' Tegnér (1868), canto XIII, v. 17, p. 99. The fact that even Björn is unsettled by this turn of events is noteworthy; throughout the rest of Tegnér's poem, Björn conforms to our modern notions of the violent Viking to a much greater extent than Frithiof. See Boyesen (1895), pp. 260-61.

<sup>683</sup> 'Frithiof sits, like a rain god, high on the beam and pours.' Tegnér (1868), canto XIII, v. 20, p. 100; cf. trans. by Stephens (1839), p. 133.

<sup>684</sup> 'You, temple-smoke, fly high and seek, seek out Valhalla and call down the white god's revenge on me.' Tegnér (1868), canto XIV, v. 2, pp. 102-03; cf. trans. by Stephens (1839), p. 175.

This monologue sets the tone for the rest of Frithiof's journey. No longer is he the arrogant youth; now he is haunted by his sin against Balder at every turn. '*Kan ej glömma Balders hage,*' Frithiof laments in canto nineteen: the god's temple can never be forgotten.<sup>685</sup> In the final canto Frithiof prays to Balder at the site of the old temple and through divine magic a new, everlasting temple appears.<sup>686</sup> His prayers are answered through a high-priest of Balder; the white god becomes a symbol of the trial against and victory over the forces of evil present in each individual human soul. '*Hvart hjerta har sin Balder,*' readers are told.<sup>687</sup> Tegnér reconciles ancient Norse faith with the future Christian piety.

It seems to have been the potential national relevance of the saga which made these problematic issues of faith worth the exertion. Tegnér viewed Frithiof as possessing 'something individually Northern – that fresh-living, insolent, daring rashness' which to his mind characterised the spirit of the North in terms beyond the established facets of Norse mythology.<sup>688</sup> In exile, Tegnér's Frithiof instinctively turns northward for solace:

'There's a flag on the mast, to the Northland it points,  
 And the North holds the Country I love;  
 Back to northward I'll steer, and will follow the course  
 Of the breezes fresh-blowing above!<sup>689</sup>

It was aspects of this spirit of Northern independence which recommended the saga to George Stephens and Tegnér's other nineteenth-century readers.

When Stephens undertook the first English translation of the original saga in 1839 it would have been almost impossible for him not to be influenced by the Swedish versions of the text – firstly in Björner's translation (which contained both Latin and Swedish translations on the same page) and secondly in Tegnér's poem. The first translation into English of Tegnér's poetic version had been published back in 1833 by the Reverend William Strong, and there followed another two translations before Stephens's 1839 edition: an anonymous 1835 publication, and Robert Gordon Latham's 1838 translation.<sup>690</sup> On top of these, one could

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<sup>685</sup> 'Balder's Pasture cannot be forgotten.' Tegnér (1868), canto XIX, v. 8, p. 131; cf. trans. by Stephens (1839), p. 175.

<sup>686</sup> Tegnér (1868), canto XXIV, v. 2, pp. 154-55.

<sup>687</sup> 'Every heart has its own Baldr', Tegnér (1868), canto XXIV, v. 2, p. 158; cf. trans. by Stephens (1839), v. 17, p. 215.

<sup>688</sup> Tegnér, trans. Stephens (1839), p. 45.

<sup>689</sup> Tegnér, trans. Stephens (1839), canto XV., p. 152.

<sup>690</sup> Rev. William Strong (trans.), *Frithiof's Saga: a Skandinavian Legend of Royal Love. Translated from the Swedish Poetic Version of Esaias Tegner, Bishop of Wexio. With Copious Notes, Illustrations of the Ancient Manners and Northern Mythology* (London: J. Wacey, 1833); [Anonymous] (trans.), *Frithiofs Saga or The Legend of Frithiof. By Esaias Tegnér. Translated from the Swedish*, ed. by W. E. F[rye] (London: A. H. Bailey

consult several partial translations, musical adaptations, and artistic engravings.<sup>691</sup> Praise for the Swedish bishop and his work was in abundance: Hjalmar Boyesen wrote of Tegnér that the ‘genius of the Scandinavian north has never found a more complete and brilliant incarnation’ and moreover stressed the physical and mental superiority of the man: ‘a specimen of magnificent manhood’ in whom ‘the race-type had reached such perfection.’<sup>692</sup> Frederick Metcalfe commented that Tegnér’s poem rendered ‘the old Norse saga into Swedish verse so vivid and lifelike that our breath bates and our limbs move in unison as we read of his hair-breadth escapes and deeds of daring.’<sup>693</sup> George Dasent, in charting the practice of sea-roving through English history via Chaucer and the Tudors, held Tegnér’s Frithiof as a paragon of northern mastery of the seas.<sup>694</sup> Frithiof could even be found attractively mirrored in late Victorian fiction, as with Frithiof Falck, the young love-interest of *A Hardy Norseman*: ‘His features were of the Greek type not unfrequently to be met with in Norway: while his Northern birth was attested by a fair skin and light hair and moustache, as well as by a pair of honest, well-opened blue eyes.’<sup>695</sup> This modern-day Frithiof’s recital of his namesake’s saga owed more to Tegnér’s poem than to any Old Norse text.<sup>696</sup>

Nor could one simply ignore *Frithiofs Saga* by living abroad; it was not just Britain where the poem found favour. By the time Stephens’s translation was published, Tegnér’s poetic adaption had gone through four German translations, three in Danish, and one in French.<sup>697</sup> G. Berger, in his German translation of Tegnér’s poem, commented: ‘Über den Werth des Gedichtes selbst ist wohl nicht mehr nötig, irgend etwas zu sagen; es ist zu anerkannt, als dass man noch Rühmendes sagen könnte.’<sup>698</sup> Gottlieb Mohnike, who first translated the poem into German, remarked that it was a narrative ‘in welche[r] das

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& Co., 1835); Robert Gordon Latham (trans.), *Frithiof, A Norwegian Story. From the Swedish of Esaias Tegnér* (London: T. Hookham, 1838).

<sup>691</sup> One such example of a Tegnér-inspired reimagining was George W. Cox’s and Eustace Hinton Jones’s *Tales of Teutonic Lands* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1874), pp. 210-46.

<sup>692</sup> Boyesen (1895), pp. 219-21.

<sup>693</sup> Metcalfe (1880), p. 287.

<sup>694</sup> ‘By no one has the Viking of the good type been so well described as by Tegnér in his immortal Frithiof’s Saga. [...] The whole work is well worth consulting for the beautiful way in which the author has caught the true spirit of the early North’, Dasent (1861), vol. ii, pp. 357-58).

<sup>695</sup> Lyall (1889), p. 8.

<sup>696</sup> See Lyall (1889), pp. 26-29.

<sup>697</sup> See Stephens (1839), pp. xxi-xxxii; it was also translated ‘back’ into Icelandic by Guðmundur Torfason, see Lbs. 480 4to and Lbs. 2399 4to. On German translations see Detleff Brennecke, *Tegnér in Deutschland: Eine Studie zu den Übersetzungen Amalie von Helvigs und Gottlieb Mohnikes* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1975).

<sup>698</sup> ‘It is not necessary to say anything about the value of the poem itself; it is too well-known, for one to be able to say anything else in praise of it’, G. Berger (trans.), *Die Frithiofs-Sage*, 11<sup>th</sup> edn (Stuttgart: Riegerische Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1890), p. 5.

*Schwedische Volk seine lieblichste und berühmteste Nationaldichtung verehrt.*<sup>699</sup> That Tegnér's poem was considered a work of national importance in his own time is also evident from contemporary Scandinavian writers; the Icelander Sveinbjörn Sveinbjörnsson – '*tónskáld Edinberg*' – mentioned *Frithiofs Saga* as a definitive example in his discussion of '*Faedrelandssange*' ('patriotic songs').<sup>700</sup> Guðmundur Torfason and Matthías Jochumsson translated the poem into modern Icelandic.<sup>701</sup> In short, Stephens had a wealth of supporting material for his work.<sup>702</sup>

Stephens was attracted to many of Tegnér's characters, but it was in Frithiof that he found justification for his political anti-monarchism. The notion was arguably already present in Tegnér's poem. The Bishop wrote of poetry that it was '*likvöl till sitt innersta väsende en popular konst. Ett poem som den bildade allmänheten ej fattar, är just derigenom ett*

<sup>699</sup> '...in which the Swedish people honour their loveliest and most famous national poetry.' Gottlieb Mohnike (trans.), *Frithiofs-Sage*, 15<sup>th</sup> edn (Halle: Hermann Gesenius, 1879), p. iv. [1<sup>st</sup> edn 1826]. On Mohnike's translation see Brennecke (1975), pp. 49-59; Detlef Brennecke, 'Gottlieb Mohnike und Amalie von Helvig: Zur Konkurrenz der beiden Übersetzer Esaias Tegnér's', in *Wahlverwandschaft: Skandinavien und Deutschland 1800 bis 1914*, ed. by Bernd Henningsen, Janine Klein, Helmut Müssener, and Solfrid Söderlind (Berlin: Jovis Verlagsbüro, 1997), 67-69; and Thomas Mohnike, 'Att bilda Norden efter grekernas mått: om bildningstankens litterära filogiska och pedagogiska dimensioner hos J. L. Heiberg, E. Tegnér, G. Chr. Mohnike och C. C. Rafn', in *Ett Möte: Svensk og dansk litterär romantik i ny dialog*, ed. by Gunilla Hermansson and Mads Nygaard Folkmann (Stockholm: Makadam Förlag, 2008), 174-88, at p. 176.

<sup>700</sup> Lbs. 631 fol. (i); an expert on Scandinavian national music, Sveinbjörn translated numerous nationalist poems from Icelandic to English; Cederlund points to *Frithiofs Saga* as an entry-point into medieval scholarship and medievalism for numerous Swedish scholars, see Carl Olof Cederlund, 'The Modern Myth of the Viking', *Journal of Maritime Archaeology*, 6/1 (October 2011), 5-35, at p. 13, see also p. 26.

<sup>701</sup> Lbs. ÍB 10 8vo; Lbs. 480 4to; and Lbs 2399 4to. Matthías Jochumsson wrote to Steingrímur Thorsteinsson on the 6th May 1866 about *Frithiofs saga*: '*Friðþ. er að mínum dómi einhver hinn glæsilegasti vottur um skáldlegt líf og sálarfjör, og þegar margbreytni kvæðanna er dregin saman til heildar, þá sagan orðin allstórkostlegt listaverk, skáldlegt panórama með mörgum fegurðarmyndum ýmist samstæðum eða gagnstæðum... Það er satt að Symbolik Tegnér's er ekki eftir kokkabók Dana og Þjóðverja og máske slæm og smekklau á vissum stöðum, en Symbolik Tegnér's, einmitt hans Symbolik verður líka oft guðdómleg, og fullkomlega original. Því T. er sannur snillingur og gjörir, eins og (að mig minnir) Geijer segir, óreglur að reglum*' [*Frithiofs Saga* is, in my opinion, one of the most splendid attestations to the poetic life and its spiritual vigour, and when we consider the variety found in the poem's individual sections, we can say that the saga has become an outstanding work of art, a poetic panorama with many beautiful episodes, either harmonic or contrasting... It is true that Tegnér's symbolism is not to the taste [lit. 'cookbook'] of the Danes or the Germans and may be poor or tasteless sometimes, but Tegnér's symbolism, his precise symbolism, can also often be divine and completely original. Thus, Tegnér is a true genius and creates, as Geijer says (or so I recall), order out of chaos], Matthías Jochumsson, cited Wawn (2002), p. 122; see also Matthías Jochumsson, *Bréf Matthíasar Jochumssonar*, ed. by Steingrímur Matthíasson (Akureyri: Bókadeild Menningarsjóðs, 1935), pp. 32-33. Benedikt Gröndal, writing to Jón Sigurðsson on the 24<sup>th</sup> May 1866, says he has been inspired by *Friðþjófs saga* and wishes to write something about it (Lbs. JS 141b fol.).

<sup>702</sup> The award for most reverential disciple surely goes to the American Albert Morey Sturtevant, who between 1941 and 1948 alone published fourteen separate papers on Tegnér's works (see bibliography). Sturtevant felt his personal love of Tegnér had wider national implications, that he might be spiritually Swedish: 'within a nationality individuals differ from one another and often to such a degree that they feel themselves closer akin to individuals of foreign nationality than to their own fellow country-men', Albert Morey Sturtevant, 'An American Appreciation of Esaias Tegnér', *Scandinavian Studies*, 16/5 (Feb. 1941), 157-64, at p. 157.

*misslyckadt; all poesi måste, I denne högre mening, vara folkpoesie.*<sup>703</sup> The first canto ends with a justification of worthy force over unproven (and frankly incompetent) monarchic power – a fact which no doubt excited republican feelings back in Britain.<sup>704</sup> Indeed, the Old Norse staple of the hero who trusts in his own ‘might and main’ over a belief in gods and kings is fully realised in Frithiof. When the young lovers’s foster-father Hilding warns Frithiof away from amorous games with one above his station, Frithiof casts thoughts of birth-rights aside:

But FRITHIOF smiling said, ‘Down fly  
 To Death’s dark vale my ancestry;  
 You[r] forest’s king late slew I; pride  
 Of high birth heir’d I with his hide.

‘The freeborn man yields not; for still  
 His arm wins worlds where’er it will;  
 Fortune can mend as well as mar,  
 Hope’s ornaments right Kingly are!

‘What is high birth but force? Yes! THOR,  
 Its sire, in Thrudvang’s fort gives law;  
 Not birth, but worth, he weighs above; -  
 The sword pleads strongly for its love!’<sup>705</sup>

Thus Frithiof, being told at an early age that he is an unsuitable match for Ingeborg, decides that both the whims of the gods and the regulations of hereditary power are flawed, and that he will try his luck with her nonetheless. The poem clearly presents individual worth as being more important than inherited titles.<sup>706</sup> In the fourth canto we are again told that although Frithiof is not ‘A King’s Son,’ nevertheless, ‘Was his Temper kingly by nature – / Friendly, and gentle; thus daily grew he more famous.’<sup>707</sup> Meanwhile, the villainous Helge dismissively categorises Frithiof as ‘The Peasant’s Son’ – seemingly worthless by birth.<sup>708</sup> Whether this

<sup>703</sup> ‘Poetry is, by its inmost nature, a popular art. A poem which is not embraced by the educated populace must, by virtue of this fact, be deemed a failure. All poetry must be *Volkspoesie* in its higher sense,’ cited DuBois (2009), p. 210, translation by DuBois.

<sup>704</sup> Göte Jansson points out that the description of Hring’s kingdom found in the closing chapters of Tegnér’s poem is potentially a theoretical model for an idealised kingship, see Göte Jansson, *Tegnér och Politiken 1815-1840: En skalds syn på sin tids samhällsproblem* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri, 1948), pp. 60-61.

<sup>705</sup> Tegnér (1868), canto I., vv. 36-39, pp. 7-8; cf. trans. by Stephens (1839), p. 11.

<sup>706</sup> Lyall tries to capture something of this in her Frithiof Falck, who not only personifies Norway’s courageous independent spirit but seems to be cut from the same rock as its majestic landscape; thus the heroine Cecil Boniface amorously merges mountain and man: ‘She looked beyond to the grand cliff-like mountains with their snowy tops touched here and there into the most exquisite rose-colour by the rising sun; and then she turned back to the strong Norse face with its clearly-cut features, its look of strength, and independence, and noble courage, and her heart throbbed with joy’, Lyall (1889), pp. 382-83. That Lyall pairs off all of her upper-class British characters with such spectacular northern specimens seems to imply that she felt a coupling of the two nations was in order.

<sup>707</sup> Tegnér, trans. Stephens (1839), canto IV., p. 40.

<sup>708</sup> Tegnér, trans. Stephens (1839), canto VIII., p. 77.

theme was important enough to be a *Leitmotiv* across Tegnér's wider corpus is difficult to say; his literary career in Europe did not stretch further than the notable success of *Frithiofs Saga*. He suffered much from sicknesses towards the end of his life, particularly from 1833 onwards, to the extent that he was committed to the Schleswig Insane Asylum in the autumn of 1840, where he stayed until the following May.<sup>709</sup> Upon being released he returned to Växiö, where he remained until his death in November of 1846. It was Tegnér's foreign translators who would expand his national readings of the saga into the realm of philological theory.

## 5.2. George Stephens's 1839 translation

In 1839 *Friðþjófs saga* became the first Icelandic saga to be completely translated from the Old Norse directly into English. The choice does not seem to have been accidental; something about the saga spoke to Stephens's concept of a pan-Scandinavian North. Stephens had such respect for the characters that he named his own daughter after Ingeborg, the saga's heroine, who in attractiveness and patience was a northern counterpart to Penelope.<sup>710</sup> He clearly revered Tegnér, describing the Swede as a 'mighty Genie who organises even disorder', while he himself was merely 'an *unknown* and *undistinguished* student.'<sup>711</sup>

Stephens's translation of Tegnér's poem appears to have enjoyed a wide reception, being reprinted in 1877 alongside Rasmus B. Anderson and Jón Bjarnason's saga translation. On the other hand, the original 1839 translation of the saga itself, while far more important in terms of the history of the reception of Old Norse literature in Britain, was something of a sideshow to the poem. Taking up a mere thirty-nine pages in a three-hundred-and-forty-nine-page book, the translation could be easily overlooked. The slight importance granted the Old

<sup>709</sup> Anderson (1901), pp. 144-45.

<sup>710</sup> Wawn (2002), pp. 134-135; although perhaps not the most fitting counterpart to Penelope, as Ingebjorg only had one suitor, and was given away to him by her brothers without any word on her part.

<sup>711</sup> Stephens (1839), p. v - Stephens was actually quoting Erik Geijer. In fact, Stephens was particularly well-read in Old Norse literature, owning a number of sagas and eddaic material, several signed copies of which are preserved in the national and university library of Iceland, Reykjavík (see Lbs. 978 4to, Lbs. 980 4to). By 1884 he had accumulated a wealth of honours and memberships fitting for a top-level scholar. This is quite clearly demonstrated in the opening page of his 1884 *Handbook of Old-Northern Runic Monuments*, in which he introduced himself as, 'Knight of the Northern Star (Sweden), St. Olaf (Norway), and of the Danebrog (Denmark); Hon. Fellow of the Roy. Hist. Soc., London; of the Soc. Ant. Scotland; of the Roy. Hist. & Archaeol. Assoc. of Westmorland, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Yorkshire, Helsing fors, Christiana, Tronyem, Gotenburg, Stockholm, Upsala, West-Gotland, &c. &c; Prof. of Old-English and of the English Language and Literature in the University of Cheapinghaven, Denmark', Stephens (1884a), p. iii.

Norse saga in comparison to the treatment of the Swedish poem suggests that Stephens viewed it less as a stand-alone work and more as a necessary piece of background reading for a sincere appreciation of Tegnér's poem (despite ranking the saga as the finest example of the genre). 'Conceiving it necessary to a proper appreciation of the Poetic Legend,' Stephens wrote, 'we have appended a Translation of the Prose Icelandic Saga, in itself one of the most beautiful in the whole Cycle of Icelandic Literature.'<sup>712</sup> Stephens's edition also came with a forty-six-page introduction, complementary musical accompaniments from Bernhard Crusell, and a concise appendix.<sup>713</sup> He stressed that he limited the notes and glossary not for a want of personal knowledge or enthusiasm, but because he did not think the British public would appreciate it due to the 'low state of Scandinavian Literature generally in Great Britain', which 'induces the idea that the *majority* of our readers will thank us for our otherwise thankless trouble.'<sup>714</sup>

According to Stephens, his own knowledge of the saga was passed down to him in the manner of ancient tradition via oral narration. His brother, the Rev. J. R. Stephens, provided the necessary dramatic inspiration: 'He it was who recommended to my eager study the literature of the north in general, and *Frithiof's Saga* in particular – which he unrolled before me by an oral translation – at a time when far away from the shores of the North, and when the work was altogether unknown in England.'<sup>715</sup> The truth of this statement is questionable. According to Stephens himself he used Erik Julius Björner's 1737 text, a copy of which was then available in the main library in Stockholm, where Stephens was living.<sup>716</sup> Björner's text presented the Old Norse *Friðþjófs saga* alongside the editor's own Swedish and Latin translations. Stephens mentioned that he referred to the Latin translation to assist him, and it seems unlikely that he would not have also made use of the Swedish translation.

Much as the perceived value of *Friðþjófs saga* has decreased since the early twentieth century, so the success of Stephens in laying the flagstones for English-Old Norse translation is by now debateable. Wawn argues that Stephens did not achieve his goal in establishing a model style for saga translation, at least not the style he was to champion later in life for his

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<sup>712</sup> Stephens (1839), p. vi.

<sup>713</sup> Stephens (1839), p. vi.

<sup>714</sup> Stephens (1839), p. ix.

<sup>715</sup> Stephens (1839), p. ix.

<sup>716</sup> There were potentially two editions of the saga available to Stephens: Erik Julius Björner's *Nordiska Kämpa Dater* (1737) and Carl Christian Rafn's *Fornaldar Sögur Norðrlanda*, in 3 vols (Copenhagen: Enni Poppsku, 1829-30), vol. II, pp. 61-100. Rafn's edition contained both the longer and shorter redaction. For an examination of the relationship between Björner's manuscripts and his final work see Vera Johanderwage, 'Björner's Edition of the *Friðþjófs saga* ins frækna', in *Á austrvega – Saga and East Scandinavia: Preprint Papers of The 14th International Saga Conference, Uppsala, 9th-15th August 2009*, ed. by Agneta Ney, Henrik Williams, and Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist (Gäule: Gäule University Press, 2009), 469-76.

Old English Scholarship.<sup>717</sup> As the years passed, his translation of *Frithiofs Saga* received equally cool criticism. One hundred years on from the initial publication of Tegnér's epic, Charles Dealtry Locock commented that 'of the earlier versions that of professor Stephens (1839) is in some respects the most remarkable' but he evidently did not mean 'remarkable' in any positive sense.<sup>718</sup> Locock acknowledged that Tegnér was an early fan of Stephens's work but that the bishop later went back on his compliments:

Two years later we find him writing to Longfellow, "Where the translator has understood the meaning, which has not always been the case, the translation has often suffered from ignorance of technicalities or *insufficient command over his own language*." Stephens's versification can, in fact, only be described as ludicrous.<sup>719</sup>

This was a far cry from the recommendation found in Stephens's original translation, where Tegnér claimed that no other translator had penetrated as deeply into the true essence of the text: '*Det är min öfvertygelse att ingen af de föregående öfversättarne som jag haft tillfälle att lära känna, inträngt så som Herr Professoren i Originalets ursprungliga anda och så respekterat dess Nordiska egenheter.*'<sup>720</sup> It could be argued that the *Nordiska egenheter* mentioned by Tegnér (undoubtedly referring to those embodied by the eponymous hero and his *fornaldarsaga* society) were in fact captured by Stephens after all. His collected volume purported to tell the nineteenth-century reader everything they could possibly want to know about the Sea-Kings of Sognefjord. It was a true 'Legend of the North.'<sup>721</sup>

Stephens, writing on his own translation style, commented that it was 'as literal as a due regard to the genius of the two languages would admit.'<sup>722</sup> Meanwhile he stressed that the only editorial changes on his part had been to modernise spelling to a certain extent (an uncharacteristic move for Stephens, who often did the opposite in his academic work) and to filter out some of the text's more obscure terminology: 'The text has been rendered in a style rather antique,' Stephens remarked, 'but old-fashioned spellings, and Archaisms decidedly unintelligible to a common Reader, have been purposely rejected.'<sup>723</sup>

<sup>717</sup> Wawn (2002), p. 134.

<sup>718</sup> Charles Dealtry Locock (trans.), *Fritiof's Saga by E. Tegnér – Translated in the Original Metres* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1924), p. 7.

<sup>719</sup> Locock (1924), p. 8.

<sup>720</sup> 'I am of the opinion, that none of the previous translators with whom I have had the opportunity to meet, have explored so deeply as the professor the defining spirit of the original, and thus respected its Nordic characteristics', Tegnér, cited and trans. by Stephens (1839), introductory letter [unmarked].

<sup>721</sup> The initial subtitle of Stephens's volume, in line with Tegnér's notion of cross-border northern strength. The second edition, published in the same year, saw the subtitle changed to *A Legend of Norway*. See Benson (1926), p. 149.

<sup>722</sup> Stephens (1839), p. 39.

<sup>723</sup> Stephens (1839), p. 39.



For readers of Stephens's later works, this approach would undoubtedly have jarred with their experiences of his scholarly writing style. In actual fact, what Stephens considered to be a literal translation with as much adherence to the original as possible often displayed a large degree of poetic license. Stephens's eccentric writing style is evident in works such as his scholarship on the inscription of the Ruthwell Cross, where his translation of the rood poem was impenetrably archaic for any reader not versed in Old English; he was quite happy to let the reader deal with such common words as *atheling*, *bedd*, *bever*, *dreeten*, *gar*, *hilde-rink*, *hote*, *ken*, *mote*, *ond*, *selcouth*, *sigor-fast*, *sithance*, *streal*, *swefan*, *tholed*, *throwed*, *waldend*, *wemful*, and *wun* (as he put it himself, 'I have preserved many of the characteristical old words – as is my wunt').<sup>724</sup> In his reasoning for such an approach, Stephens argued that with the omission of such terms, 'not only would the version have been mechanically inferior, but it would have lost much of its spirit and colour. As it is now, we see and feel, from the terminology as well as the style, that everything is Old-Northern, imbued with Gothic strength.'<sup>725</sup> The resulting warlike spirit of the piece Stephens found to be most fitting.

This later approach to translation is worth keeping in mind when examining the style of Stephens's *Friðþjófs saga* translation and his possible reasons for interest in the saga. For this it is enough to turn to several extracts from the 1839 text, chosen either because of the particular style employed by Stephens or because of wider points of thematic interest they exhibit. For instance, if one examines the now familiar introduction of the temple from the saga's longer recension, Stephens provides the following rendition:

There, west of the frith, stretched the strand, and thereupon stood a considerable village, called Balder's Hage, where was a Sanctuary and a great Temple, hedged round about with a lofty plank-work. Here were many Gods, but Balder was the most honoured among them all; and so zealous were those heathen men, that they had forbidden any harm being done there to either man or beast, nor could a male have any converse with a woman.<sup>726</sup>

The translation contains a few oddities – a modern translator might think twice before opting for 'frith' (an archaic version of 'firth') or 'lofty plank-work', but by and large the style is modern and accessible for a non-specialist English reader, particularly for Stephens. He has

<sup>724</sup> George Stephens, *The Ruthwell Cross, Northumbria. From About A.D. 680, with its Runic Verses by Cædmon, and Cædmon's Complete Cross-lay "The Holy Rood, A Dream" from a South-English Transcript of the 10th Century* (London: John Russel Smith; Copenhagen: Michaelsen and Tillge, 1866), pp. 27-28. In addition to such linguistic amalgamation, Stephens's own system of spelling was highly erratic; see, for example, George Stephens, *Prof. S. Bugge's Studies on Northern Mythology: Shortly Examined* (Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1883), p. 1/289.

<sup>725</sup> Stephens (1866), pp. 28-29.

<sup>726</sup> Stephens (1839), p. 3.

not left numerous words untranslated, and neither has he opted for a word order favouring the Old Norse over the present-day English.

As another example one might take the temple-burning scene. As previously mentioned, Stephens used the longer and better-known recension of the saga when recounting the incident:

Now directly as Frithiof was going out along the floor, he saw that the wife of Helge wore his Ring the Good, as she was warming Balder before the fire. Frithiof griped [*sic*] the Ring tightly, but it was fastened to her, and he drew her out along the floor towards the door. Balder fell into the fire, and as Halfdan's wife hastily laid hold of it to save it, that image which she was warming fell down among the flames. Soon now began both the Gods to blaze, for they were both anointed with oil. The flames then caught the roof and the whole building was on fire.<sup>727</sup>

Once again, the tone here is remarkably modern. The initial confusion at Helgi's wife 'warming Balder before the fire' is explained by the following reference to one of the idols as 'that image.' Even in direct speech, where later, Victorian translators were inclined to adopt a Shakespearian register (George Webbe Dasent's 1861 *Burnt Njal* springs to mind), Stephens resisted an antiquated tone.<sup>728</sup> The translation style is frequently eloquent, employing alliteration, varied word order, and the Old Norse penchant for understatement (the description of Helgi and Halfdan as 'but little friend-fortunate' is particularly effective).<sup>729</sup>

Further comparison of Stephens's translation alongside his source text reveals that he did not feel bound to Björner's edition. Take, for example, the introduction of Friðþjófr from the very first chapter of the saga; here is Björner's original, alongside Stephens's translation:

Son atti þorsteirn er Friðþiofur het, hann var allra manna stærstur ok sterkastur ok vel at iþróttum buinn þegar I æsku, hann var kallaður Friðþiofur hinn frækni. Han var sva vinsæll at allir báðu honum góðs, [...].<sup>730</sup>

Thorsten's spouse bore him a son called Frithiof, who was the tallest and strongest of men, and, from his very youth, was versed in all manner of exploits; hereby got he the name Frithiof the Bold, and was so happy in his friends that all men wished him well.<sup>731</sup>

<sup>727</sup> Stephens (1839), pp. 25-26.

<sup>728</sup> See for example Stephens (1839), p. 9.

<sup>729</sup> Stephens (1839), p. 4.

<sup>730</sup> Björner (1737), p. 2. Compare with a more normalised twentieth-century text: '*Son átti Þorsteinn við konu sinni, er Friðþjófr hét. Hann var allra manna stærstr ok sterkastr ok vel at iþróttum búinn þegar í æsku. Hann var kallaðr Friðþjófr hinn frækni. Hann var svá vinsæll, at allir báðu honum góðs*' [Þorsteinn had a son, who was called Friðþjófr, with his wife. He was the biggest and strongest of all men, and he was already well accomplished in his childhood. He was called Friðþjófr the Brave. He had so many friends that everyone wished him well], Larsson (1901), p. 2; Eiríkur Magnússon had provided Larsson with various points of information on the *Friðþjófs saga* manuscripts, see Lbs. 2190a 4to.

<sup>731</sup> Stephens (1839), pp. 3-4.

We have already noted above that Stephens's personal writing bore an antiquarianism more pronounced than even that of William Morris. Here we see several odd constructions, such as the unusual word order and old-fashioned nature of 'hereby got he the name' where a modern translator might have opted for the more literal 'he was called.' Stephens, like many Englishmen after him, chose 'the Bold' for the hero's appended title, highlighting the bravery and daring of his character (the modern Icelandic adjective *frækinn* means 'brave' or 'valiant'). Interestingly, French and German translations of the saga often chose to stress Friðþjófr's strength rather than his courage, with words such as *fort* or *stark* used instead.<sup>732</sup> But perhaps the most interesting factor about the above passage is the reference to Þorsteinn's wife, who is neither mentioned in Björner's Old Norse text, nor in the accompanying translations in Swedish ('*Thorstens son het Fridthiof*') or Latin ('*Thorsteno filius Fridthiofus*').<sup>733</sup> Larsson's version in 1901 has '*Son átti Þorsteinn við konu sinni*' which seems to suggest there was another version to which Stephens also had ready access, possibly that of Rafn's 1829 three-volume collection of *Fornaldursögur*.

Stephens's translation was not only *not* beholden to Björner's translation, it was also the platform for his personal politics. Of Friðþjófr's birth right Stephens translates Björner's '*Sva mikill rausnarmaður var Friþþiofur, at þat toluðu slestr men at hann væri ei minni somamaður enn þeir bræður fyrer utann Kongs tign*' of chapter two to: 'So generous was Frithiof, that most men said he was no way inferior in honour to the two brothers themselves, except in kingly birth.'<sup>734</sup> As noted above, questions of birth right and love above one's station filled Tegnér's poetic version of *Friðþjófs saga*. There are only minor allusions to this in the text itself, but the saga does make the distinction between the royal brothers and the plain-born Friðþjófr apparent. Stephens's edition made his stance on hereditary power quite clear:

The Kingship of the old North was originally, as it should be, - an Elective Presidency; though the history of the Scandinavian Kingdoms affords melancholy proof enough, how respect for the "divine races" (as the families said to be descended from Oden were called) overwhelmed the land with destructive minorities or imbecile manhood. With the "hereditary principle," whether monarchic or aristocratic equality cementing Dynasties formed in Kingdoms gained by the sword, came in also "hereditary degradation."<sup>735</sup>

<sup>732</sup> See, for example, Charles Guyot and E. Wegener's '*Fridtjof le fort*', in *Le Livre des Vikings: d'après les anciennes sagas* (Paris: H. Piazza, 1924), pp. 129-73. See Halldór Hermannsson (1912) for a full list of translations up to the twentieth century.

<sup>733</sup> Björner (1737), p. 2.

<sup>734</sup> Björner (1737), p. 4; Stephens (1839), p. 5.

<sup>735</sup> Stephens (1839), p. 228. The sentiment stuck; half a century later Stephens wrote, 'Birth and Rank cannot create, albe they may illustrate, virtue [...] Gentle deeds alone constitute true Gentility', George Stephens,

For Stephens, societal degeneration was apparent from the sagas themselves. Such distinctions could be drawn from a comparison between *Friðþjófs saga*'s protagonist with his characteristic daring nature and the unsavoury brothers who had denied him their sister's hand. Friðþjófr's indifference to the Norse gods could, in a similar vein, be seen as a parallel for upstart republicanism:

Björn said, 'whither shall we now hold us, fosterbrother?'  
 'To Balder's-Hage,' answered Frithiof, 'to jest with Ingeborg.'  
 'It is not well done,' said Björn, 'to draw down the anger of the Gods upon us.'  
 'That shall now be tried,' returned Frithiof, 'but, however, I value Ingeborg's favour more than Balder's.'<sup>736</sup>

Stephens's respect for Friðþjófr as a suitor and sailor was far greater than his respect for him as a Viking. The translator had far more time for what he described as a 'Sea-king', which he defined in his notes as a 'Chief, generally of royal birth, who had no kingdom to inherit at home, and therefore sought one on the waters. Higher in title than the *Vikings*, they were also commonly at the head of much more powerful fleets.'<sup>737</sup> The distinction was important to Stephens: 'Every Sea-King was a Viking, but the reverse was only occasionally the case.'<sup>738</sup>

Even when Stephens's text itself opted for the latter terminology, as when Friðþjófr was outlawed in chapters ten and eleven, the writer was particular in providing contextual information to separate Friðþjófr from common villains.<sup>739</sup> Stephens underlined the difference between the noble Sea-Kings and the generally wicked and destructive Vikings: 'VIKING, (*Vik-ingr*, BAY-BOY or WAR-BOY), the common appellation of the numerous Northern buccaneers who formerly ravaged "the Shures of every sea." As in early Greece, Piracy was originally in Scandinavia an honourable and glorious path for booty and exploits.'<sup>740</sup> Stephens was evidently still channelling Romantic sentiment from his translation of Tegnér's poem; later in his career he would typically depict all Vikings and Sea-Kings as irretrievably wicked:

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*Queen Dagmar's Cross: Facsimilie in Gold and Colors oft he Enameled Jewel in the Old-Northern Museum, Cheapinghaven, Denmark* (London: John Russell Smith; Copenhagen: Michaelsen & Tilloe, 1863), p. 7.

<sup>736</sup> Stephens (1839), pp. 8-9. From Björner's Old Norse: '*Biörn mællti, hvort skal nu hallþa fostbroþir, Friþþiofur mællti, til Balldurs haga att skemta sier við Yngibiorgu. þat er ei giorandi seiger Biörn at gremia gob at ser, Friþþiofur svarar, þar skal nu a hæta, enþa virpi ek meira billi Yngibiargar enn Balldurs*', Björner (1737), p. 9.

<sup>737</sup> Stephens (1839), p. 288.

<sup>738</sup> Stephens (1839), p. 288.

<sup>739</sup> "I may not," says Frithiof, "be here in Norway; I will learn the customs of the Thiefs [sic], and will go out as a Viking." So islands and sea-cliffs searched they all through the summer, winning them both goods and renown [...]', Stephens (1839), p. 28.

<sup>740</sup> Stephens (1839), p. 300. George Dasent similarly spoke of the 'honourable' nature of piracy in his appendix to *Burnt Njal* (1861), vol. II, p. 351, as did Frederick Metcalfe in his comparison of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian literature (1880), p. 192.

However we may sometimes sentimentally admire and besing the Wikings and Sea-Kings and the wild hordes who followed them, *the facts* remain. By all testimony at home and abroad, they were no better than all other buccaneers and pirates and daredevils. [...] Wikings were the scourge of God, an intolerable plague and calamity, bloody barbarians, sparing neither age nor sex, mainsworn oath-breakers of their own holiest heathen oaths, carrying fire and sword far and wide, living only for plunder and desolation, till at last they seized lands instead of harrying them.<sup>741</sup>

Moreover, Stephens took pains to dispel any notions his readers might have of the Vikings as being fame-seekers, in his mind they were just violent capitalists.<sup>742</sup>

Aside from downplaying the real-life Friðþjófr's likely villainy, the translation afforded Stephens an opportunity to promote his theories of northern Europe's past. It allowed for didactic passages concerning the Old Norse language; in chapter eleven's riddle verse, Stephens eschewed an unbroken rendition and instead provided literal translations of all of the hero's pseudonyms:

'Thiof [Thief] am I hight, with Ulf [The Wolf] was I last night, and in Angri [Penitence] was I brought up.<sup>743</sup>

[...]

'Then hight I Frithiof [Peace-Thief]  
 When with Vikings I banded,  
 But Herthiof [Army-Thief] when Widows  
 I made to weep sore,  
 Geirthiof [Spear-Thief] when good spears  
 I grimly launched,  
 Gunthiof [Battle-Thief] when gladly  
 I gash'd in the Battle;  
 Eythiof [Isle-Thief] indeed when  
 Sea-isles I ravag'd,  
 Helthiof [Death-Thief] when careless  
 To death I cast children,  
 Valthiof [the Slain's-Thief] when valiant  
 I vanquished others: -  
 Now since have I wander'd  
 With salt-burners sadly,  
 Help highly needing ere

<sup>741</sup> Stephens (1883), pp. 13/301-14/302.

<sup>742</sup> 'The Wiking sought partly fame; but his real trade was beef and beer and booty, gold and gauds, silks and slaves and silver, wines and women and war-gear. These things he would get by foul means (fire and sword) or by fair (commerce), and foul means were the easiest and commonest', Stephens (1883), p. 14/302.

<sup>743</sup> Stephens (1839), p. 30.

Hither I came!<sup>744</sup>

Such passages reveal Stephens's attitude toward the text more so than his own commentary; *Friðþjófs saga* was a font of antiquarian knowledge, both linguistic and historic.

As the reader may already have surmised, aside from the inclusion of the original saga itself, the aspect in which Stephens's edition excelled in comparison to the fifteen or so other English works on Tegnér's poetic epic was the quantity of contextual information provided. From consulting the saga translation and the extensive material in the appendices, the nineteenth-century English reader could discover a great deal about the cultural context of Friðþjófr's world. Moreover, this world was presented in a historical light; consider the following two entries to Stephens's glossary:

BALDER, (THE POTENT) related to *Bel, Baal. &c. Lord*, a title of the Sun. Hence Baldr is the source of light and life, the delight of Gods and men, the good.<sup>745</sup>

BALDER'S HAGE, - 'at Sogn, in Norway, a Sanctuary consecrated to Balder, was surrounded by an extensive enclosure, and consisted of buildings constructed with great cost. There was one temple for the Gods, and another for the Goddesses of Valhall, - the latter, especially, extremely high'.<sup>746</sup>

What one has here is a scholarly authentication of the saga's more questionable or fantastical elements. Typical antiquarian commentary on the sociological origins of Baldr is juxtaposed with a contemporary romantic appraisal of Norse Mythology from Icelfander Finnur Magnússon (1781-1847). In the latter entry, one can note that numerous features from the Old Norse saga have been placed in a scientific or archaeological framework – the temple's primary dedication to Baldr, the large fence around the boundary of the site, and the high cost of the buildings. Readers of Stephens's saga translation were reassured of the historical accuracy of the embedded depictions of Viking Age society, and of the value of the saga as a historical source for theories of hereditary strength.

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<sup>744</sup> Stephens (1839), p. 31.

<sup>745</sup> Stephens (1839), p. 251.

<sup>746</sup> Excerpt from Finnur Magnússon, *Bidrag til Nordisk Archæologie: meddeelte i Forlæsinger* (Copenhagen: Beeker, 1820), cited in Stephens (1839), pp. 252-53.

### 5.3. What's in a Name? German, Germanic, Germanification

Such authoritatively identified historical sources were of a vital significance to nineteenth-century scholars as evidence of racial characteristics, which were believed to be calculable through linguistic qualities of a language, features of early faith, or trends in literary subject matter. Even before the time of the period's academic luminaries such as Jacob Grimm (1785-1863), the issue of scientifically mapping the state of the northern languages against the northern nations was a matter of great significance. Grimm may have opened a congress in 1846 by declaring '*Ein Volk ist der Inbegriff von Menschen, welche dieselbe Sprachen reden*' but the sentiment was hardly unique; similar claims were being made across the North Sea.<sup>747</sup> Tegnér viewed the English and German translations of his work as possessing the potential to match or even surpass his own vision of Old Norse Europe precisely because he considered the languages of the two lands to be linked to Swedish (and, by extension, Old Norse).<sup>748</sup> Percy and Blackwell had both noted the importance of the relationship between language and nation: a relationship that formed a fundamental argument of comparative philology. As noted, Percy was thoroughly dismayed at the 'erroneously applied' scholarship of preceding historians, who had grouped the northern races into one entity, bandying around terms such as 'Celtic' and 'Gothic' with careless regard. To Percy such an approach was ludicrous; each nation had its own designation, and England's Saxon forefathers were clearly categorised alongside the Scandinavians.<sup>749</sup> Blackwell agreed that racial division was fundamental to understanding characteristics of various peoples. If Norse philology was going to be taken seriously then it

<sup>747</sup> 'A nation is the totality of people who speak the same language', Jacob Grimm cited in Shippey (2012), p. xiv. On the Brothers Grimm see also Arthúr Björgvin Bollason, *Ljóshærða villidýrið: Arfur Íslendinga í hugarmheimi nasismans* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1990), pp. 23-34.

<sup>748</sup> Tegnér took pains to correspond with his German translators, much as he had with Stephens. In a letter written May 15, 1822, he explained his feelings regarding potential German translations of his forthcoming poem: '*Ich sehe mich in der Übersetzung mit demselben Gefühl, mit dem man sich in einem verschönernden Spiegel betrachtet. Dies ist der Weg, auf dem eine Übersetzung ein selbstständiges Kunstwerk wird; und könnte der ganze Frithiof, wenn er eines Tages vollständig erscheint, in dieser Weise auf deutsch wiedergegeben werden, dann – bin ich überzeugt – wird es ihm in Deutschland besser ergehen als in Schweden*' [I regard translation the same way in which one observes a beautifying mirror. This is the process by which a translation becomes an independent work of art; and if the whole of *Frithiof*, when it appears one day in completed form, could be rendered in German in this manner, then (I am convinced) it will be better off in Germany than in Sweden], Tegnér 1822, cited Brennecke (1975), p. 77. On Tegnér's later antipathy to German culture see Albert Morey Sturtevant, 'Tegnér's Literary Activity During the Period 1840-1846', *Scandinavian Studies*, 20/4 (Nov. 1948c), 202-08, at pp. 206-08.

<sup>749</sup> 'Ancient Germany, Scandinavia, Gaul and Britain were not inhabited by the descendants of one single race; but on the contrary, divided between two very different people; the one of whom we shall call, with most of the Roman authors, Celtic, who were the ancestors of the Gauls, Britons, and Irish; the other Gothic or Teutonic, from whom the Germans, Belgians, Saxons and Scandinavians, derived their origin; and that these were *ab origine* two distinct people, very unlike in their manners, customs, religion, and law', Percy (1847), p. 3.

had to get its categories correct; ethnological distinctions must be updated. ‘Returning to the anthropological branch of ethnology,’ he wrote, ‘we must remark that each variety of the human species may be divided into races – each race offering certain physiological and psychological traits that distinguish it from all others.’<sup>750</sup>

Such an outlook was a reality of Stephens’s academic world. Racial inequality, alongside concepts of distinct racial characteristics, was fundamental to the developing reception of northern literature. In his 1853-55 four-volume *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines*, the French philosopher and ‘father of modern racism’ Arthur de Gobineau could thus write: ‘The Germanic peoples, so long misunderstood, appear to us now as great and majestic as they were thought barbarous by the writers of the Later Empire.’<sup>751</sup> National pride was both a product and a provocation of northern antiquarianism. The history of the collective nations of the north was no longer an embarrassing sideshow to southern European classical history; these nations had an heroic age of their own.<sup>752</sup>

Throughout this academic debate, nationalist-inspired philology made scientific the uncertainties of medieval historiography, and in doing so opened up Old Norse literature for northern historians everywhere. Literature, language, and history became the great scientific measures of race. The commentaries to Grimm’s *Deutsche Grammatik*, *Deutsche Mythologie* (translated into English in 1880-83 by James Steven Stallybrass as *Teutonic Mythology*), and *Deutsche Wörterbuch* made clear that this cultural history was not only traceable but also highly flattering. Questioning its integrity was comparable to questioning that of your own nation or your own language. Through linguistic similarities one could justify connected attitudes to law and religion, shared national traits, and even land-claims stretching back into

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<sup>750</sup> Percy (1847), pp. 33.

<sup>751</sup> Arthur de Gobineau, *Selected Political Writings* ed. by Michael D. Biddiss (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1971), p. 38. On de Gobineau see also Arthúr Björgvin Bollason (1990), p. 41, J. A. V. Chapple (1986), pp. 122-23, and Michael D. Biddiss, *Father of Racist Ideology: The Social and Political Thought of Count Gobineau* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970). De Gobineau’s concepts of societal division – and in particular of the inequality of races – have traditionally been traced back to the writings of Herder, while the terminology found its way into English in 1836, see Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), p. 5.

<sup>752</sup> This process was effectively charted by Geary in his book *The Birth of Nations*, where he described the three-step model for the creation of national identity employed by the nations of nineteenth-century Europe: a) the study of language, culture, and history of a particular group of people; b) the circulation of ideas resulting from such study via patriotic public figures; c) the nationalist movement achieves wide-spread acceptance, see Patrick J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 17-18. Geary’s work is not necessarily interested in the political movements of any particular age, but in the adoption and adaption by those movements of elements of the middle ages for nationalist gain. The origin myths of various nation states are arguably the most influential acts of medievalism in our cultures today. They are also usually the least understood, and the most frequently used in nationalist debate. On ‘origin myths’ see also Craig Calhoun, ‘Nationalism and Ethnicity’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 19 (1993), 211-39, at pp. 221-24.



the reaches of Germanic or Scandinavian pre-history. If language dictated race then the countries of northern Europe could start making serious cases for additional acquisition of land; many did.<sup>753</sup> The Schleswig-Holstein wars of the mid-nineteenth century were a classic example of conflict supported by linguistic claims to land supported by literary evidence (of an Old Norse persuasion).<sup>754</sup>

As Shippey has pointed out, nationalism was not merely a by-product of these developments in the discipline of philology, but one of its chief recruiting factors.<sup>755</sup> This was true in Stephens's adopted homeland Denmark, but equally so beyond its southern border.<sup>756</sup> In opposition to what they suspected to be a wide-spread German cultural-assimilation campaign, scholars such as Stephens tried to redraw the north-south divide north of the German-Danish border and rewrite the academic terminology of linguistics.<sup>757</sup> Cultural 'Germanisation' as a conspiracy theory was not as paranoid as might appear.<sup>758</sup> Kaiser Wilhelm II was an admirer of the poetic, Swedish *Frithiof* (perhaps in part because of his interest in maritime matters, and desire to rival his grandmother's navy) and in 1895 wrote the '*Sang an Ägir*' to let the world know as much. The 'Song to Aegir' was duly translated into English by Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900), the Oxford-based, German-born philologist and one of the most outspoken supporters of the notion of the Germanic North of Stephens's age.<sup>759</sup> In nineteenth-century Europe, pro-German Old Norse philology was a feature of both the Prussian royal court and the English university lecture hall. Stephens may well have felt under attack.<sup>760</sup>

<sup>753</sup> See Calhoun (1993), p. 227.

<sup>754</sup> See section 5.4 below.

<sup>755</sup> Shippey (2012), p. xiii.

<sup>756</sup> 'Philology blossomed because it was at heart a subject which the people wanted. It was a science created out of public demand, and as such it gained enormous importance and gravity. While Romantic Nationalism had the benefit of the great writers, musicians, and painters of the age ethnic-nationalism went one further. It had the backing of modern science's golden child: comparative philology. Combined with some of the century's finest minds this movement looked set to revolutionise concepts of Anglo-Scandinavian relations. In earlier scholarship there was a tendency, particularly in the German-speaking countries, to Germanicise Old Norse literature in a somewhat biased fashion, because its texts were believed to preserve the heritage of Germanic antiquity in its purest form', Klaus von See, 'Snorri Sturluson and the Creation of a Norse Cultural Identity', *Saga Book*, 25 (2001), 367-95, at p. 367.

<sup>757</sup> See, for example, Shippey (2012), p. xxii. Frederick Metcalfe was an enthusiastic reader of Stephens's works, and adopted his antipathy to all things German; see, for example, Metcalfe (1880), pp. xi, and 460.

<sup>758</sup> In an intriguing piece of trivia, one of the German words for 'translation' is *verdeutschen* – or literally, 'to make German' – see Bellos (2012), p. 27.

<sup>759</sup> Wawn (2002), p. 141.

<sup>760</sup> It was by no means the case that all German scholars and writers were fans of the North; Friedrich Engels, writing to Karl Marx in December of 1846, spoke of the Icelanders, '*Der noch ganz dieselbe Sprache spricht wie die schmierigen Wikinger von Anno 900, Tran säuft, in einer Erdhütte wohnt und in jeder Atmosphäre kaputtgeht, die nicht nach faulen Fischen riecht. Ich bin mehrere Male in Versuchung gewesen, stolz darauf zu werden, daß ich wenigstens kein Däne oder gar Isländer, sondern nur ein Deutscher bin*' [...who still speak the exact same language as the grubby Vikings from 900 AD, drink whale oil, live in mud-huts, and break down in any atmosphere that does not smell of foul fish. I have been tempted a number of times to be proud that I am at least not a Dane or an Icelandic, but rather just a German'], Engels, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke*,

The Danish scholar Rasmus Christian Rask (1787-1832) was a fellow opponent to German cultural appropriation. Much like Stephens, Rask suggested a selection of preferable terms for discussing Old Norse literature and culture (*gothisk*, *nordisk*, or simply *Norden*).<sup>761</sup> Rask saw the potential advantages of studying Icelandic within a wider European academic sphere, particularly after he travelled around the country himself and viewed the latent knowledge of the sagas held by its inhabitants.<sup>762</sup> In 1816 Rask had established *Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag*, or the Icelandic Literary Society, in order to preserve the Icelandic tongue both in the face of foreign influence and with the aid of foreign interest. In a letter written by Rask to an anonymous recipient on the 21 September, 1815, Rask invited Englishmen of all trades to partake in the soon-to-be-established society:

For a pretty long time all the Gothic Nations, in emulation of one another, have taken a particular care to preserve the Antiquities of the whole tribe of their ancestors as being nearly connected with their National glory and a material branch of ancient history, very useful to keep up the public spirit and interest to men of letters: but I wonder how they could overlook the noblest of all those sacred relics [*sic*], and carelessly leave it to all the destroying injuries of time. This most valuable remainder of Gothic Antiquity almost the only one preserved in Iceland, is certainly the ancient general language of all the kingdoms of the North; which is still spoken throughout that Island to a truly astonishing degree of purity and elegance. This I may pretend to ascertain; for having travelled through the kingdoms of Denmark, Sweden and parts of Norway in order to study the languages and the philological antiquities of the North, I have now spent these two years in travelling the island of Iceland to inquire into the present state of that remarkable language, and in every corner of the country I have been able to converse with the natives in the ancient Scandinavian tongue and I have found them reading still the old *sagas* of the heroic age. [N]ay there are some songs of the *Edda* celebrating the exploits of the heathen deities still understood by every peasant boy, with the exception of a few difficult words.<sup>763</sup>

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vol. 27 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1963), p. 72. The passage is admittedly somewhat out of character for Engels, who elsewhere proved himself a great admirer of northern antiquity, particularly as presented by Grimm in his *Deutsche Mythologie*, see Ursula Dronke, 'Marx, Engels, and Norse Mythology', *Leeds Studies in English*, new series, 20 (1989), 29-45, at pp. 33-34.

<sup>761</sup> See for example Erasmus Christian Rask, *Anvisning till Isländskan eller Nordiska Fornspråket* (Stockholm: A. Wiborgs Förlag, 1818). Shippey also remarks, 'Rasmus Rask opposed *nordisch* to *germanisch* in his set of terms for linguistic classification, and even counterpunched by arguing that a better term for "germanisk" as a whole, North, West, and East Germanic all together, would be *gotisk*', Shippey (2012), p. xv.

<sup>762</sup> See Clarence E. Glad, 'The Greco-Roman Heritage and Image Construction in Iceland 1830-1918', in *Iceland and Images of the North*, ed. by Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson and Daniel Chartier (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec; and Reykjavík: Reykjavíkur Akadémían, 2011), 67-113, at p. 76.

<sup>763</sup> Rask (1941), p. 183. Rask had a comparatively inclusive view of northern racial divisions; in his 1818 essay on the Icelandic or Old Norse language, he wrote: '*Alla Nordens stammer af Gothiskt ursprung utgjorde, i äldre tider, ett enda stort folk, hvilket talade ett ende språk, nemligen det, som jag nu har sökt beskrifva*' [All the tribes of the North of a Gothic origin were, in ancient times, one single great people/nation, who spoke one single language, namely that which I have attempted to describe here], Rask (1818), p. 276.

As Rask saw it, the Icelandic language was a unifying point for Denmark's biological cousins, a preserved sample of the proto-Gothic tongue.

Moreover, like Stephens, Rask regarded British interest in the sagas as a vital preventative measure against Icelandic and wider Northern cultural degradation; 'As the poverty of the people has encreased [*sic*]' Rask remarked, 'printing almost is fallen into disuse and the literature and language are certainly in a declining state', with many priceless manuscripts being 'in danger of being lost forever.'<sup>764</sup> His long-term plan to encourage the reading of sagas across Europe relied on interest from countries such as Britain.

As the Icelandic or old Scandinavian language is the source of part of the English and Scottish and, besides the Anglosaxon (the chief source of both) is so so very nearly [i.e. closely] related to it, and in itself is so difficult and confused, owing only to the incessant irruptions [*sic*] of the ancient Scandinavians into Great Britain, that, if I may believe my own experience, at the compiling of an Anglosaxon Grammar, it will never be sufficiently extricated but through perpetual succour from the Icelandic: I thought the Britons the most wealthy of all the Gothic Nation, ought not to be altogether unconcerned [*sic*] about its conservation.<sup>765</sup>

It is possible that Rask's favour for Britain had just as much to do with his academic rivalry with a certain Jacob Grimm as it did with his work on the Anglo-Saxon language, but in any case, he attempted, as Stephens and later Eiríkur Magnússon would do, to present Britain as a natural partner to Iceland in matters literary and linguistic.<sup>766</sup>

Such olive branches were highly valuable to scholars such as Stephens, but the construction of national relations could be a fickle business. Stephens would rail against Rask's later pronouncement of English as a German language rather than a Northern one; the Dane's argument had numerous philological grounds (such as the position of articles in relation to English nouns).<sup>767</sup> Stephens's response summarised both his political leanings and his aversion to Old Norse philologists in general:

Unhappily this theory, that the Prefixt Article stamp the land as German, was not only scientifically false but politically disastrous. It was taken up by the German philologer

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<sup>764</sup> Rask (1818), p. 276.

<sup>765</sup> Rask (1941), p. 184.

<sup>766</sup> Cries of plagiarism abound in the academic study of Grimm and Rask, with various scholars claiming that one or the other came up with key linguistic concepts first. As Antonsen notes, this debate has often been influenced by 'patriotic fervour on the part of both Danes and Germans', Elmer H. Antonsen, 'Rasmus Rask and Jacob Grimm: Their Relationship in the Investigation of Germanic Vocalism', *Scandinavian Studies*, 34/3 (August 1962), 183-94, at p. 183. Antonsen himself has no doubts as to the direction of influence; '[Grimm's] studies of the vocalism of Old Norse and Old English in particular, but to a certain extent even those of Old and Middle High German, were directly influenced by the early works of Rasmus Rask', Antonsen (1962), p. 194.

<sup>767</sup> George Stephens, *Is English a German Language?* (London: W. M. Allen & Storr, 1890b), p. 14; see also *Er Engelsk et Tysk Sprog?*, trans. by Jón Stefánsson (Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gad., 1890a).

Jacob Grimm, who hounded on the German Professors and Schoolmasters; Jutland was claimed as German because it had this Article; Prussia made use of the cry for its own perfidious purposes against its weak neighbour, and by force and fraud deprived Denmark not only of German Holstein, but also of the old Danish folkland Slesvig, and there it now extirpates the Danish tung with fire and sword. [...] How can folk lean on such broken logic in the nineteenth century?<sup>768</sup>

For Stephens, a responsible approach to philology involved deconstructing the confusion of past scholarship. The English language needed to be appreciated in its proper context. ‘Wash the Romance and the Keltic from the face of English, and we find Old Northern,’ wrote Stephens, ‘Wash the Saxon, and German and Finnish and Keltic varnish from the Scandinavian, and we see Old English. English for England; Scandinavian for Scandinavia; Scando-Anglic for Scando-Anglia!’<sup>769</sup>

As the above example demonstrates, Stephens’s scholarly activities after his *Friðþjófs saga* translation displayed a continuing interest in the division of Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon literary, linguistic, and archaeological property. There is an urgent sense of ownership about Stephens’s antiquarian scholarship. Thus, in Stephens’s 1866 work on the Ruthwell Cross, he hoped his project would ‘add to our love and veneration for our own matchless mothertung [sic] and *our own* precious remains, and help those Northern studies which have been and are too largely neglected among us!’<sup>770</sup> Stephens had a particularly dim view of previous scholars of the Ruthwell Cross and other remnants of Anglo-Saxon society, particularly textual; he accused them of sullyng their attempts by ‘inventing a kind of bastard Pictish language.’<sup>771</sup> Stephens despaired at former scholars’ inability to admit defeat in the face of obscurity, remarking that this tendency had led to a procession of scholarly errors.<sup>772</sup> Where he credited other British northernists with a degree of competence they could be demoted just as quickly based on their political preferences. Of John Kemble, the only one of the former cross-scholars who appeared to have correctly translated its poem, Stephens remarked that his excellent career

<sup>768</sup> Stephens (1890b), pp. 15 and 19-20. See also Stephens (1890a), p. 18.

<sup>769</sup> Stephens (1890b), p. 23.

<sup>770</sup> Stephens (1866), foreword. As with all of these quotations, the emphasis and peculiar spelling is Stephens’s own. On the value of runes to British history see also George Stephens, *Macbeth, Earl Siward and Dundee. A Contribution to Scottish History from the Rune-Finds of Scandinavia* (London: Williams & Norgate; Copenhagen: H. H. J. Lynge, 1876), p. 13.

<sup>771</sup> Stephens (1866), p. 8.

<sup>772</sup> ‘All our monumental history, Oriental and Classical and Runic, is full of terrible mistakes, the humiliating blindnesses, the childish blunders, the unheard-of combinations and wild guesses, the endless rash changes of letters or words, which have resulted from this unhappy school of half-taught “criticism.” Let us, now at least, steer clear of the shoals mark [sic] by so many a disastrous shipwreck’, Stephens (1884a), pp. xxi-xxii.

was marred by the fact that he was ‘half Germanized’ in later life.<sup>773</sup> For Stephens, high-quality scholarship was necessarily *anti*-German.

Stephens attempted to support this notion with several in-depth studies into Old English and runology, two subjects to which he felt sure that the Germans could not hope to lay a cultural claim. Stephens wrote of a northern coalition comprising of Britain and Scandinavia: ‘Only in the Scando-Anglic lands,’ he wrote, ‘do we find the stubborn mother tongue employed, wholly or in part, whether the staves were Runish or Roman.’<sup>774</sup> Stephens believed, perhaps in this case correctly, that in the study of the old northern runic monuments, scholars had previously overlooked the English element entirely in favour of Germanic or Icelandic readings – to the detriment of the entire system:

We are called upon to believe that all our oldest written remains are ‘unreadable,’ ‘unintelligible,’ ‘nearly inexplicable,’ ‘only here and there a word to be understood,’ ‘gibberish,’ ‘some outlandish tung,’ ‘carved by a foreign slave who had learned the runes,’ ‘miscut,’ and the like. And all because people will not abandon their school-creed about ‘Icelandic,’ and their German contempt for the evidence of the monuments themselves!<sup>775</sup>

In retaliation, Stephens’s work excluded German scholars from taking any part whatsoever in the runic history of the North. Though there were runic stones in Schleswig, Stephens was firmly of the opinion that the area was decidedly Danish, and had nothing to do with Prussia. Saxons, and Germans, he argued, had no place in the history of the North: ‘The old population of Danish South and North Jutland, the old outflowing Anglic and Jutish and Frisic settlers, mixt with the Norse and Swensk adventurers and emigrants, who flockt to England in the third

<sup>773</sup> Stephens (1866), p. 8. Kemble’s famous history of the Anglo-Saxons was dedicated to Victoria and addressed, ‘The history of the childhood of our own dye, - the explanation of its manhood’, John Mitchell Kemble, *The Saxons in England: A History of the English Commonwealth till the Period of the Norman Conquest*, 2 vols (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1849), vol. 1, p. v.

<sup>774</sup> George Stephens, *Further Remarks on an Inscribed Stone found at Yarm* (London: Yorkshire Archaeological and Topographical Association, 1880), p. 2/113. Stephens referred to such evidence of the ‘Scando-Anglic’ pre-history as ‘forn monuments’ – a classic example of his attempts to reinstate Scandinavian word-choice into modern English writing, Stephens (1880), p. 5/116. Stephens would have disagreed with the notion that he was merely using old forms however; he was ever a proponent of un-uniform language and variability: ‘Every living tongue is full of exceptions and archaisms and anomalies, AND ALWAYS WILL BE’, Stephens (1880), p. 7/118.

<sup>775</sup> Stephens (1884a), pp. ix-x. Stephens may have viewed Iceland as the ‘Holy Land of the Northern peoples, whose geographical position made it the isolated ocean-surrounded depository of so much that was antique,’ but that did not mean the country was afforded preferential treatment in his scholarship, Stephens (1883), p. 18/306. For Stephens, Old Norse was just as much a cultural element of Danish or Norwegian society as it was of Icelandic, perhaps even more. ‘No one now defends the glaring absurdity (universal in my time, a giant now nearly slain) that Icelandic was the mother-tung of all Scandinavia, some thousand years before the island itself was found and inhabited, so that the antique Danish and Swedish groups were children of the perplex mixt iland-speech. We must bow to facts and common sense. English came from the Rune-land Scandinavia’, Stephens (1890b), p. 21.

and fourth and fifth and following centuries, were chiefly Scandinavians. Northmen, not Saxons, still less Germans.<sup>776</sup> Northern runic script and the languages it contained were thus a cultural and national marker of the true north, one spread across many (but not all) lands.

Stephens's hostility to the pro-Germanic philology of his academic peers was most strikingly demonstrated in a series of eight public lectures given from 4 April to 6 May, 1881 in Copenhagen, and responding to the ongoing volumes of the Norwegian philologist Sophus Bugge (1833-1907), *Studier over de nordiske gude- og heltesagns oprindelse* (1881-89). Stephens viewed Bugge's entire project as an erroneous attack on his own earlier work *Old-Northern Runic Monuments* – a work, Stephens asserted, based squarely on 'Facts.'<sup>777</sup> Bugge had posited that Norse mythology was a product of Christian activity in the ninth and tenth centuries, and was later adopted by the Vikings in the course of their raids on Christian communities; Stephens, who protested against such a late origin for Old Norse literature, wanted to establish northern mythological development some eight-hundred years before this, and perhaps further. Stephens refused to believe Bugge's theory that the same people responsible for harrying Britain's coastal settlements were the self-same people behind the great literary tradition of the North:

We are now [...] called upon to believe that at this moment of rapid heathen decay and transition, the most intelligent Scandinavian adventurers, such as had escaped death by sea or sickness or weapon, after ravaging and firing churches and monasteries where almost alone skin-books were kept, and after slaughtering the monks and nuns and clergy and leading men – all who had any particular book-culture – , suddenly ran about to read the codices they had destroyed and to hold friendly talk with the wise men they had butchered, and in this way pickt up a lot of legends and traditions and details, many of them so minute as to be unknown to most learned men *even now*. And so they went home and elaborated heathen genealogies and myths and tales, for the use of a population whose masses had already *abandoned* and now openly *ridiculed* not a little of what they had inherited.<sup>778</sup>

Such a scenario stuck Stephens as highly improbable; 'No amount of intercourse with foreign slaves and wives and concubines at home, or of parleyings and ale-drinkings with English or Irish friends or allies abroad, would be sufficient for such a phenomenon as this.'<sup>779</sup> Instead, the process of change would have had to have taken longer, perhaps a thousand years – and here, he argued, Bugge's argument fell apart; the development from Heathen to Christian, from barbarian to scholar, could not have simply happened overnight.

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<sup>776</sup> Stephens (1884a), p. xiii.

<sup>777</sup> Stephens (1883), p. 32/320. He capitalises the word.

<sup>778</sup> Stephens (1883), pp. 16/304-17/305.

<sup>779</sup> Stephens (1883), p. 17/305.

Stephens's issues with Bugge's scholarship were only partly intended as a riposte to the Norwegian's comments. He also took issue with the wider trends in Old Norse philology which Bugge's work typified. Stephens felt that the 'modern omnipotent philologists' and their entire school of thought grossly overestimated the influence of German, Saxon, and Frisic literature on Old Norse.<sup>780</sup> Furthermore, he was troubled by Bugge's correlation of classical Greco-Roman elements with Norse elements; 'To these things I have nothing to say,' Stephens remarked, 'except that it is this abuse of etymological and philological tricks which has justly excited the ridicule of sober people.'<sup>781</sup> Broad and meaningless cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary scholarship, which ignored evidence on a pick-and-choose basis, had no place in northern antiquarianism: 'To crush and press the gradual or sudden accidental developments of thousands of years from India to Iceland, as well as the spontaneous independent accidental upgrowth of parallel popular ideas, into the narrow box called the Wikings of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century – is meaningless.'<sup>782</sup> As Stephens saw it, Bugge's work quickly passed over finds which problematised his theories, took no account of parallel traditions nor of possible cultural survivals, and suggested a timeline which was impossibly recent.<sup>783</sup>

Stephens's objections to Bugge and to the processes of Old Norse philology in general can also be read as something of a timely advertisement for his subsequent publication, the 1884 *Handbook of Old-Northern Runic Monuments*, a summation of Stephens's work on the subject to date dedicated to 'all lovers of our Northern mother-tung [*sic*].'<sup>784</sup> The work served to present readers with evidence for many of his long-held beliefs regarding the composition of Northern Europe. In addition, the mass collection of data only confirmed his hypothesis on the fallacies of contemporary philology, and the lines for its proper pursuit as a discipline.<sup>785</sup> Stephens was not at all keen to subscribe to the claim that language dictated or signified race:

Time and Commerce and the local influence of other clans or of the remains of far older tribes and greater or less isolation and War and Slavery and a thousand Accidents, NOT RACE, explain among cognate peoples the presence or absence of particular forms and words and phrases and idioms and technical terms.<sup>786</sup>

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<sup>780</sup> Stephens (1883), pp. 19/307 and 4/292.

<sup>781</sup> Stephens (1883), p. 28/316.

<sup>782</sup> Stephens (1883), p. 29/317.

<sup>783</sup> 'Whether this curious facile method, this mere abuse of subjective caprice, this more than ridiculous personal infallibility, can be approved by a reality called SCIENCE – I shall leave for others to decide', Stephens (1883), pp. 70/378-71/379.

<sup>784</sup> Stephens (1884a), p. vii. Stephens's volume was an intense work of scholarship, and at some three hundred A4 pages only a "handbook" in the loosest possible sense of the word.

<sup>785</sup> Stephens (1884a,) pp. vii-viii. The emphasis is Stephens's own.

<sup>786</sup> Stephens (1884a), p. xvi.

Encouraging the disassociation of language and race, Stephens noted that differences in runic script could not possibly be signifiers of ‘nationality,’ due to their obscurely ‘intermingled’ state.<sup>787</sup> Stephens separated his own inclusive and expansive brand of philology from that practised by rival German scholars (‘Let us NEVER believe INFALLIBLE philologists’); his own methodology allowed for dialectal variation, cross-cultural parallels, and a wealth of material evidence passed over by other scholars – indeed, these formed essential features of many of his hypotheses.<sup>788</sup>

Stephens concluded his response to Bugge’s publication with the realisation that the amalgamation of races was unavoidable in modern society, particularly considering advances in maritime technologies, yet still held out hope that Britain could remain somewhat superior on the world stage as the years progressed. In his final paragraph he aptly recapitulated much of his approach to northern culture:

Let us hope that this olden Northern moral strength, this Salt not unknown to their heathen Godlore, but since so much enricht and multiplied among them by more than a thousand years’ in-drinking of the Christian Revelation – never may lose its Savor! May the Northern-Anglic folk ever stand fast against those beggarly fetishes – modern Materialism and modern Nihilism!<sup>789</sup>

It is remarkable how little Stephens’s outlook on European national dynamics had changed between this fairly late piece and his early work on *Friðþjófs saga*. In Stephens’s mind, the Northern-Anglic coalition was still embroiled in a perpetual conflict with hostile southern elements; the great wolf of ‘Germanification’ was baring its jaws at the gates of Ásgarðr. In reality, much of his imagined coalition had been dismantled in the decades before.

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<sup>787</sup> Stephens (1884a), p. 220.

<sup>788</sup> Stephens (1884a), p. 166. ‘Multiplicity was the mark of the folk; standardisation was the work of the scholar. Stephens was a scholar who saw his task as the restoration of the voice – or rather the voices – of the folk through the humane practice of comparative philology. This was, he claimed, very different from much mid-nineteenth-century German linguistics whose ‘iron’ rules could herald the ultimate silencing of these once vigorous but now almost inaudible voices’, Andrew Wawn, ‘George Stephens, Cheapinghaven, and Old Northern Antiquity’, in *Medievalism in England II*, ed. by Leslie J. Workman and Kathleen Verduin (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), 63-104, at p. 78.

<sup>789</sup> Stephens (1883), p. 126/414.



#### 5.4. Old Norse and the Schleswig-Holstein Question

As questions of northern identity and international relations took centre stage in nineteenth-century intellectual discussion, British philologists watched political developments abroad (particularly in Prussia and Denmark) with mounting concern. Having moved from Stockholm to Copenhagen, George Stephens saw the southern regions of his new adopted homeland as an essential part of the Anglo-Scandinavian north he had been promoting in his informative publications such as *Friðþjófs saga*, and viewed the trending ‘Germanisation’ of the North as a serious threat to this international collective. For other scholars such as Samuel Laing and Nicolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872), the sagas offered vital ammunition in contemporary international conflicts. Old Norse literature could serve as national propaganda for the “true” north, supporting language-based claims to national identity.<sup>790</sup> For numerous northern scholars, weaponizing the sagas was a timely necessity to be used in international conflict.

The Schleswig-Holstein Question was one such conflict, a martial realisation of northern philology’s popular theories, and one which saw Old Norse literature as a key source for the academic justification of force.<sup>791</sup> Laing described the first war of 1848-51 as a defence of fundamental principles of territory. A Prussian victory would support their claim for control of all lands in which ‘Germanic’ languages were spoken, and would guarantee them a forced entry into the heritage of Scandinavia and the North:

They [Prussia] declared, also, that wheresoever the German race and tongue could be traced, in Switzerland, Alsace, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Scandinavia, in England itself, there the inalienable right of this new Teutonic empire extended. The war against

<sup>790</sup> Lars Lönnroth, ‘The Academy of Odin: Grundtvig’s Political Instrumentalization of Old Norse Mythology’, in *Idee, Gestalt, Geschichte: Festschrift Klaus von See*, ed. by Gerd Wolfgang Weber (Odense: Odense University Press, 1988), 339-354, at p. 339. Grundtvig’s approach to nationalism was complex, and is easy to oversimplify. It was not the exclusive, even aggressive, variety demonstrated by other Old Norse scholars: ‘love of the fatherland to Grundtvig certainly did not mean any aggressive or expansionist nationalism of the German type, which he rightly saw as a danger. Grundtvig greatly emphasised the cultural unity of the Scandinavian nations, but he would have no truck with the political Pan-Scandinavianism which was a strong movement among young academic liberals in the Forties and Fifties’, Jensen *et al*, in Nicolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig, *A Grundtvig Anthology*, ed. by Niels Lyhne Jensen, William Michelsen, Gustav Albeck, Helmut Toftdal, and Chr. Thodberg, trans. by Edward Broadbridge and Niels Lyhne Jensen (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1984), p. 29.

<sup>791</sup> The artistic propaganda on both sides of the dispute borrowed heavily from medieval motifs, with eddaic material providing a strong stock of suggestive imagery. Wawn notes, ‘as tensions on the Slesvig-Holsten border grew in the middle of the century, it was not difficult to interpret murals featuring Týr with his hand between Fenrir’s jaws in terms of the sacrifice that (Danish) youth must make to subdue (foreign) worldly bestiality’, Wawn (2007b), p. 330. From the Danish perspective, this selective medievalist framework was at once inclusive (in that it portrayed the Danes and Prussians as age-old peoples with a shared history) and exclusive (in that it suggested the Danes had a stronger claim to Old Norse heritage).

Denmark for the possession of the Duchy of Sleswick was a corollary of this new principle among nations.<sup>792</sup>

But the victory over the threat of real and theoretical-linguistic conquest was short lived. After the first war, provoked by continuing Danish-German language conflict, the duchies of Slesvig and Holsten were resolved in a politically-confusing manner which led to intense difficulties of governance. A portion of the population of the duchies – comprising of a combination of Danish- and German-speaking citizens – remained unsatisfied with their settlement. While scholars and politicians debated linguistic and literary details, the end product had been an unprecedented loss of life. (The 1850 battle of Idstedt, the culmination of hostilities, remains to date the largest battle fought on Scandinavian land.)<sup>793</sup> Hostilities arose anew in 1864 with crushing defeat for the outnumbered Danish forces. Denmark lost two-fifths of its land to Prussia. Schleswig and Holstein (their new names) became part of what is now modern-day Germany. Old Norse literary-based nationalism proved to be a grave tactical error for the Danes, leading to defeat and mass bloodshed.

The details of the conflict are worth considering in detail, not only for the concrete example they provide of a real-life application of the academic theories of the age regarding concepts of language and race, but additionally for the use of Norse-based propaganda in these theories. As well as cementing European opinions on national interests, the conflict was understood and followed with interest by the later translators of Old Norse sagas. It provided a tangible political context for much contemporary and subsequent scholarly activity.

Following the English Wars of 1801-1814, the Unified Monarchy of Denmark lost control of Norway to Sweden. It retained two major areas of land thereafter: the Kingdom of Denmark, and the Duchies of Slesvig, Holsten, and Lauenborg. Of these Duchies, the latter two were also members of The German Confederation. The already intricate political set-up was exacerbated by the northward spread of German language and culture during the eighteenth-century, culminating in questions of national identity in the first half of the nineteenth century. Sandiford notes the complications involved: ‘Holstein had become solidly German and South Schleswig predominantly so by the beginning of the nineteenth century. The middle regions of Schleswig had become almost entirely divided between Danish and German elements, and by the nineteenth century German influences had penetrated into North

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<sup>792</sup> Laing (1852), p. 241.

<sup>793</sup> Tom Buk-Swienty, *1864: The Forgotten War that shaped Modern Europe*, trans. by Annette Buk-Swienty (London: Profile Books Ltd., 2015), p. 118 [originally published as *1864: Slagtebænk Dybbøl* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2008)]. See Laing (1852), pp. 240-62.

Schleswig as well.<sup>794</sup> In the mid-eighteen-hundreds this development came to a violent head. In 1848 Prussian-backed Slesvig-Holsten rebels engaged in direct conflict with Danish forces, culminating in the Battle of Isted on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 1850.<sup>795</sup> Decisive successes at Mysunde and Frederiksstad (alongside foreign pressure calling for Prussia not to intervene) led to victory for Denmark, but the subsequent agreements and treaties did little to alter the mood of tension in the disputed regions. *The London Protocol* of 1852 re-confirmed Denmark as a state comprising of four autonomous regions: the Kingdom of Denmark and the Duchies of Slesvig, Holsten, and Lauenborg. Of these, Slesvig and Holsten were subject to the authority of the Danish King, but in his role as the Duke of Slesvig-Holsten and not as the Danish monarch. Many in Slesvig and Holsten still held to the 1460 *Ribe Treaty*, which stated that the two duchies were to remain in indissoluble union.

In the autumn of 1863, Danish nationalists pushed through a new law granting them the right to rule down to the Eider River. At the last minute, Prussia objected strongly to the terms, but by this point events were set in motion. Over the winter, Prussia and Austria moved troops into Holsten and marched into Slesvig. Outnumbered, and with harsh winter conditions rendering their fortifications useless, the Danish troops under General Christian Julius Frederick de Meza conducted a large-scale tactical retreat on the eve of the Prussian assault. The bulk of Danish troops consolidated at Dybbøl, where they entrenched themselves and withstood weeks of heavy Prussian bombardment, hoping their politicians would resolve the dispute. It was to no avail. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 1864, the Prussian forces overwhelmed the Danes. A truce was called, but no compromise reached, and hostilities recommenced. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of June a large Prussian force crossed the Sound of Als and took the island by force. With the very real prospect of an attack on Copenhagen, the Danes admitted defeat. In the resulting *Treaty of Vienna*, Denmark ceded Lauenborg, Holsten, and Slesvig; it lost a third of its population and two-fifths of its territory.

#### 5.4.1. Norse Texts as National Propaganda: Models of Language-based Land-claims.

Scholars of the Schleswig-Holstein conflict have tended to emphasise the influence of literary-based northern nationalism in the lead-up to 1864. Thus, Danish historian Tom Buk-Swienty

<sup>794</sup> Keith A. P. Sandiford, *Great Britain and the Schleswig-Holstein Question 1848-64: A Study in Diplomacy, Politics, and Public Opinion* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1975), p. 21.

<sup>795</sup> On the first Schleswig-Holstein war and rising Danish nationalism see Celenza (1998), p. 388.

conforms to the given formula when he describes Denmark's National Liberal Party, along with Danish Prime Minister Ditlev Gothard Monrad (1811-1887) – editor of the newspaper *Fædrelandet*, founder of the Danish Scandinavian Society, and former Bishop of Lolland-Falster – as being ‘informed by the wave of nationalism that had swept across Europe since the late 1840s, when political upheaval led to a string of revolts against European monarchies;’ Buk Swienty elaborates:

The ideology of nationalism soon became infused with a strong romanticism. And it was romantic nationalist sentiment that moved the Danish parliament in the beginning of the 1860s to focus blindly on the fabled tales of Schleswig having been ruled by Danish kings and queens since ancient times. In their view, then, Schleswig was Danish.<sup>796</sup>

The fabled tales in question included an increasing number of volumes of Old Norse literature, edited, romanticised, and politicised through Denmark's chief intellectuals such as N. F. S. Grundtvig and Adam Gottlob Oehlenschläger (1779-1850).<sup>797</sup> Grundtvig, a talented theologian, philosopher, hymn-writer, teacher, politician, journalist, philologist, and ‘luminary of the Danish awakening,’ was ‘a legend in his own lifetime.’<sup>798</sup> For him, in nineteenth-century Scandinavia, ‘there was no problem in presenting rediscovered ancient Norse mythology as a relatively new and potentially fruitful source of poetic imagery with a patriotic flavour.’<sup>799</sup> Ardently religious in outlook, an approach he applied indiscriminately to his literary studies as well as his theology, and simultaneously encouraged by wider European Romanticism, Grundtvig believed that the rise of illiterate paganism was behind Denmark's nineteenth-century woes.<sup>800</sup> As far as Grundtvig was concerned, early nineteenth-century Danes had lost

<sup>796</sup> Buk-Swienty (2015), pp. 116-117. For a brief biography of Monrad see Nicholas Hope, *German and Scandinavian Protestantism, 1700-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 469.

<sup>797</sup> Alongside these two prominent writers, Nielsen Gremaud names ‘politician Orla Lehmann (1810-1870) as well as the head of the Royal Academy of Art, Niels Laurits Høyen (1798-1870)’ as a representative group of public figures involved in promoting ‘views that connected praise of the Old Norse heritage with the need for cultural rearmament’, Ann-Sofie Nielsen Gremaud, ‘“The Vikings are coming!” A Modern Icelandic Self-Image in the Light of the Economic Crisis’, *NORDEUROPAforum*, 20 (2010), 87-106, at p. 94. One might realistically add Stephens to this group. By the middle of the century, the works of Adam Oehlenschläger had been affecting the public's impressions of their Norse heritage for several decades, through such publications as *Nordens Guder* (1819), later translated into English by W. E. Frye.

<sup>798</sup> Hope (1995), p. 359; Lundgreen-Nielsen (1994), p. 41; and Julia Zernack, ‘Old Norse Myths and the Poetic Edda as Tools of Political Propaganda’, in *Studies in the Transmission and Reception of Old Norse Literature: The Hyperborean Muse in European Culture*, ed. by Judy Quinn and Adele Cipolla (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers n. v., 2016), 239-74, at pp. 255-57. On Grundtvig's relationship with the Norse Middle Ages see Mjöberg (1967-68), vol. 1, pp. 109-116, 155-62, and 211-13; and Guðmundur Hálfðanarson (2001), p. 181.

<sup>799</sup> Lundgreen-Nielsen (1994), p. 42. Grundtvig's political writing is extensive, but see in particular his *Politiske Betragtninger, med Blik paa Danmark og Holsten* (note that Sleswig is implicitly included in ‘Danmark’) of 1831 and Poul Dam, *Politikeren Grundtvig* (Aarhus: Aros, 1983) for a general overview.

<sup>800</sup> On Grundtvig's admiration of the works of Friedrich Schelling, for example, see Martin Chase, ‘True at Any Time: Grundtvig's Subjective Interpretations of Nordic Myth’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 73/4 (Winter 2001), 507-34, at p. 507.

the ability to subjectively read their own literature; true appreciation of literary material (particularly Old Norse mythological material) entailed conferring importance to a text through personal attachment. A study of Old Norse which did not include an emotional reaction of some sort was not doing its job.

The solution, in Grundtvig's eyes, was a wholesale public information campaign, a drive to encourage readers of all ages (in 1847 he published of *Greek and Norse Mythology for Young Readers*) to engage with Denmark's Norse heritage.<sup>801</sup> His scholarship constituted a reading of Old Norse designed to appeal to the masses; 'Though unmusical, Grundtvig had an ear for daily speech, and could versify. He realised that a revived church had to speak a language close to the people: what he referred to in 1816 as "Danish chat used in servants' quarters or the hay-loft."'<sup>802</sup> The ethic applied to his antiquarian works as much as it did to his sermons.

Such a return to antiquities was at least in part a result of Grundtvig's relation with England and Old English literature.<sup>803</sup> In 1820 he translated *Beowulf* into Danish rhyming verse, creating the first complete translation of it in any language, and reaffirming his own understanding of the interrelated nature of Old Northern languages.<sup>804</sup> (Writing on *Beowulf* in 1815, Grundtvig had argued that the vast differences between Old English and Danish, combined with the former's similarity with Old Norse, suggested that the accepted origin of Danish in Icelandic was little more than an 'illusion'.)<sup>805</sup> Grundtvig expanded on his theories in the 1841 article 'Bjovulfs Drape eller det Oldnordiske Heltedigt,' in which he complained of German and Anglo-German attempts to claim the rightful literature of Denmark, and through

<sup>801</sup> Grundtvig thus addressed his *Nordens Mythologi* (published in 1808 and republished in 1832) to the 'Sønner og Døttre af Nordens Aand' [sons and daughters of the Nordic spirit] – an appeal for Danes to read themselves into Old Norse literature, Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig, *Nordens Mythologi, eller Sindbilled-Sprog, historisk-poetisk udviklet og oplyst*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Copenhagen: J. H. Schuboths, 1870), p. iii. On *Nordens Mythologi* see Malm (1996), pp. 130-35.

<sup>802</sup> Hope (1995), p. 360. The work in question was Grundtvig's *Literatur-Tidendens Skudmaal* (1816).

<sup>803</sup> As Arthur Allchin notes, Grundtvig's term 'Norden' encompassed modern Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) plus Finland and Iceland, and occasionally England, Arthur Macdonald Allchin, *N. F. S. Grundtvig: An Introduction to his Life and Work* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1997), p. 7.

<sup>804</sup> In Grundtvig's own terminology, his interaction with Old English made him 'a catalyst, or a gadfly, or a menacing Viking threatening to plunder England's literary heritage', S. A. J. Bradley, "'A Truly Proud Race": Grundtvig and the Anglo-Saxon Legacy', in *Grundtvig in International Perspective: Studies in the Creativity of Interaction*, ed. by A. M. Allchin, S. A. J. Bradley, N. A. Hjelm, and J. H. Schjørring (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2000), 147-62, at p. 147. See also Franklin Cooley, 'Grundtvig's First Translation from *Beowulf*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 16/6 (May 1941), 234-38; Cooley classifies Grundtvig's work as a 'paraphrase', (see p. 234).

<sup>805</sup> Grundtvig (1815), cited Tom A. Shippey and Andreas Haarder (eds.), *Beowulf: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 113. Grundtvig's devastating critiques of Thorkelín's *Beowulf* edition are well-covered by subsequent scholarship, see Fjalldal (2008), p. 330, Cooley (1940), pp. 53-60.

it Danish territory.<sup>806</sup> Grundtvig also undertook two periods of research in England, from 1829-31 and in 1843.<sup>807</sup> He returned from these visits as a thorough Anglophile: ‘The Danish need to learn from the Englishman,’ he commented in his *Within Living Memory*, ‘who would unhesitatingly assure us, soberly and seriously, that even if England could not survive unless the rest of the world perished, he would still vote for old England (old England for ever).’<sup>808</sup> In such evaluations Grundtvig’s tone was more than a little playful, but it is undoubtedly true that his time in Britain was a formative experience which would shape his views on literature and politics.

The year after this second visit, Grundtvig co-convened the first *Folkemøder*, ‘taking place initially on 4 July 1844 (to coincide with American Independence Day), at *Skamlingsbanken*, the highest hill in southern Jutland, close to the German border. These popular gatherings mixed quite freely an awakened piety with accounts of Nordic history and mythology.’<sup>809</sup> On the 7<sup>th</sup> of November of the same year, Grundtvig opened the first of many *Folkehøjskoler* in Rødding in Slesvig.<sup>810</sup> Cultural appropriation was not a one-way practice, as Grundtvig was aware. Prussian scholars might be laying claim to a linguistic legacy, but Denmark still held the literature of the old North through its manuscript collections and its control of Iceland. As Lundgreen-Nielsen writes, ‘Grundtvig saw the Norse myths and legends as appropriate weapons in the battle between national identities. Here the Danes had something the Germans could not match!’<sup>811</sup>

This military terminology is not to imply that Grundtvig’s model of nationalism was necessarily expansionist, or that he would have ever sided with violent ambitions of the following generations of young Danish nationalists. Grundtvig was not by principal anti-

<sup>806</sup> Shippey and Haarder (1998), p. 245.

<sup>807</sup> Gustav Albeck, *Grundtvig og Norden* (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag, Arnold Busck, 1942), pp. 54-55; Hope (1995), p. 362; Allchin (1997), p. 48; Frank (2012), p. 1. Albeck, in particular, presents Grundtvig’s time in Britain as a vital formative element for his 1832 *Norden Mythologi*. Grundtvig took back to Denmark, amongst other things, an enthusiasm for the British parliamentary system. On this, see also Dam (1983), pp. 27-28. The *Beowulf* poem had been (re)discovered in England, in a similar state-backed research project, by the Dane Grímur Jónsson Thorkelín in 1786, and published in 1815. In what would be an act of historical irony, most of Thorkelín’s work on *Beowulf* was (supposedly) destroyed along with his house during the British bombardment of Copenhagen. Bjork and Fjalldal both regard this as an unlikely cover for Thorkelín’s failings as a scholar; Fjalldal remarks, ‘It is rather difficult to picture Thorkelín having had time and opportunity to rescue his precious transcripts from the fire while his translation and editorial notes – presumably as close at hand and hardly very bulky – were left to be destroyed by the flames’, see Bjork, Corse, and Grímur Jónsson Thorkelín (1996), pp. 291, 294, and 311, and Fjalldal (2008), p. 328. On the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reception of *Beowulf* see David Damrosch, ‘Translation and National Literature’, in *A Companion to Translation Studies*, ed. by Sandra Bermann and Catherine Porter (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2014), 349-360, at p. 351.

<sup>808</sup> Grundtvig (1984), p. 104.

<sup>809</sup> Hope (1995), p. 372.

<sup>810</sup> Hope (1995), p. 372.

<sup>811</sup> Lundgreen-Nielsen (1994), p. 53; see also Lönnroth (1988), p. 342.

German, not even during the lead up to conflict between Prussia and Denmark; he understood the attraction of using, possibly even the obligation to use, Old Norse material for other countries. For Germany to look to Old Norse literature for its national image was only to be expected:

It is nonetheless a thousand times worthier of a nation to overdo its admiration for the pleasing expression and unique achievement of its spirit than to despise and deride it. For the latter, which, while Latin held away, was the case in Germany far more so than with us, is spiritual death leading to beastliness, slavery, and national destruction. By contrast, the former is only the national bias which every nation, just like every man, has for what is his own, which is therefore to a certain degree inseparable from the vitality of the national life of any country. So the nations must learn to forgive each other for this bias, so long as it does not try to assert itself with real weapons.<sup>812</sup>

Not all of Grundtvig's countrymen were so eager to share what they viewed as Denmark's exclusive heritage, even if those appropriating it were not brandishing 'real weapons'. Supporters of "Eiderdanism" lobbied for Schleswig to be incorporated into the Danish Kingdom and a new border to be drawn along the Eider River. The notion found its way into numerous pieces of Danish literature, such as a post-war poem by Mads Hansen: 'Our hope is just that Denmark's lands, / To where our language ends, may stand / – Frontier of an allied North.'<sup>813</sup> A language-defined nation state was essentially what Frederick VII had promised before the first conflict in 1848, causing the duchies to revolt. The Danish nationalists did have linguistic evidence to back up their claims to Schleswig; census reports from 1847 showed that Danish speakers far outnumbered German speakers in the region.<sup>814</sup>

The ancient histories of the North, both in Old Norse and Old English, also seemed to provide Danish nationalists with much of the evidence they needed for a campaign of repatriation. Inge Skovgaard-Petersen discusses such beneficial passages in her paper 'The Making of the Danish Kingdom':

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<sup>812</sup> Grundtvig (1984), p. 103. Grímur Thomsen, although by no means a supporter of German expansionism, held a similar view on the multinational significance of medieval literature: 'The Old Northern *Literature*, the Old Northern *Speech*, the Northern *Spirit* and *People* etc. is as much Danish or Swedish or Icelandic as Norwegian; [...] it is best to regard it as a common inheritance of the whole Scandinavian race', Grímur Thomsen, *The Northmen in Iceland*, trans. by George Stephens (Copenhagen: Thiele, 1861), pp. 12-13.

<sup>813</sup> Hansen, cited Inge Adriansen and Jens Ole Christensen, *The Second Schleswig War 1864: Prelude, Events and Consequences* ([na]: Sønderbrog Slot – Tøjhusmuseet, 2013), p. 35.

<sup>814</sup> Twiss, writing the year the first war broke out, provides some more precise figures: 'According to the Danish State Calendar for 1847 [...] The inhabitants of Holstein are mainly Germans, whilst in Schleswig the German population forms the minority, there being upwards of 180,000 Danes and 26, 000 Frises [...]. Of the Danish population there are above 125,000, whose language is exclusively Danish', Travers Twiss, *On the Relations of the Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein to the Crown of Denmark and the Germanic Confederation, and on the Treaty-Engagements of the Great European Powers in Reference Thereto* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1848), p. 5.

The geographic extent of Denmark is indicated by Othere's and Wulfstan's descriptions of their voyages in Scandinavia, as recorded in Old English translation of *Orosius*. Here the three Scandinavian countries – Denmark, Norway (*Norðweg*) and Sweden (*Sweoland*) – are each mentioned. Denmark consisted of the present-day Danish territories except for the island of Bornholm. It also contained the southern part of Schleswig as far as the river Eider [...].<sup>815</sup>

Nor were the scholars of the time unaware of such promising antiquarian support. Repp had been a supporter of the Danish arguments for the control of the Duchies since the first half of the nineteenth century. In relation to an 1845 document entitled *A Protest from The Sleswick Association*, published in response to the Provisional States of Holstein's declaration of independence from the Danish crown on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1844, Repp argued that historical evidence proved that Denmark was one body all the way to the river Eider – the basic principal of Eiderdanism.<sup>816</sup> Repp was also against German occupation on linguistic grounds; 'Our language and our nationality, and together with these the whole of our intellectual life, would by such a connexion be oppressed and abused, and our civil independence totally annihilated,' he wrote.<sup>817</sup>

It was not just the theoretical field in which Denmark was channelling antiquarian material; the face of the Danish navy was distinctly Old Norse. In the year leading up to the second war, the Danish fleet consisted of some fifteen warships, many named after figures such as *Heimdal* and *Thor* from Denmark's Norse literary heritage.<sup>818</sup> It was admittedly a diminished force (Denmark had been forced to surrender thirty large vessels at the close of the second Battle of Copenhagen in 1807) but they nevertheless outmatched the Prussian naval forces, and had retained some formidable ships. Chief amongst these was *Rolf Krake*, the first ironclad warship of the Danish fleet.<sup>819</sup> At 56 metres long, weighing 1235 tons, with 12cm metal-plating around the hull and two cannon turrets wielding four heavy sixty-four-pound cannons, it was considered a tactical advantage for the Danish forces, leant even more of a formidable aura by

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<sup>815</sup> Inge Skovgaard-Petersen, 'The Making of the Danish Kingdom', in *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia: Volume 1. Prehistory to 1520*, ed. by Knut Helle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 168-83, at p. 169.

<sup>816</sup> The full title is: *A Protest from The Sleswick Association against what is called an "Act of Protestation" dated the 20th December last from the Diet of Itzehøe and against The Intermeddling of the Diets of Germany with the affairs of Sleswick* (Lbs. ÍB. 89b fol.); see also Lbs. ÍB. 90c fol.

<sup>817</sup> Lbs. ÍB. 89b fol.

<sup>818</sup> Theodor Fontane, *Der Schleswig-Holsteinische Krieg im Jahre 1864* (Berlin: Verlag der Königlichen Geheimen Ober-Hofbuchdruckerei, 1866), p. 295.

<sup>819</sup> It was designed by the British naval shipbuilder Captain Cowper Phipps Coles and constructed in Glasgow by Napier & Sons, see Buk-Swienty (2015), pp. 32-33.



its association with Denmark's heroic past.<sup>820</sup> Once the fighting at Dybbøl began in earnest the ship was soon shown to be more of a deterrent than a threat, and was forced to withdraw early in the battle. At the battle for Als, *Rolf Krake* looked briefly like it may win the day as its heavy gunfire made the Prussian forces seek shelter and halted the transfer of troops.<sup>821</sup> Yet once more it proved as luckless as its Norse namesake; the warship was called back to cover the retreating Danish forces.<sup>822</sup>

Still more disruptive to the Danish campaign was the popular overestimation of the effectiveness of the Dannevirke, also called 'Thyra's Fortress'.<sup>823</sup> The Dannevirke was a set of fortifications, almost seventy kilometres long, running from the extensive wetlands in the west to Hedeby (modern-day Haithabu) in the east. It was given its popular name after Thyra Dannebod, the legendary queen of Gorm the Old. This name was largely down to popular misconceptions regarding the fortress's origins and use; Buk-Swienty explains that many Danes believed that the Dannevirke was constructed in the tenth century 'to protect against German expansion – a misconception bolstered by a myriad of fantastic historical anecdotes.'<sup>824</sup> In fact, the fortifications were considerably older than Gorm's reign, and although many battles were fought near it, it was never used as a defensive structure. The earthworks had been largely useless since the Middle Ages, and it had not been used as a military stronghold for some six-hundred years.<sup>825</sup> Its actual history was clouded by numerous nationalist myths concerning its origin, purpose, and effectiveness.<sup>826</sup>

In the winter of 1863-64, the Dannevirke was rendered useless by the particularly cold conditions, which caused the rivers on either flank to freeze over. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of February, de Meza ordered the army to withdraw from their positions and begin a tactical retreat to the north. The overblown expectations and actual fate of the Dannevirke mirror those of the Danish army in general in the second Schleswig-Holstein war. Denmark was prepared for being caught in a war between Britain and Russia, not an assault from the south. Both its land defences and navy

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<sup>820</sup> Buk-Swienty (2015), p. 85.

<sup>821</sup> Buk-Swienty comments, 'Perhaps it was not the best idea to name a warship after a legendary warrior king who, despite many victories on the battlefield, came to an unfortunate end. Nonetheless, Denmark's first ironclad warship was named *Rolf Krake*, its namesake's unfortunate fate chronicled in the nine-volume history of Denmark written by Saxo Grammaticus around year 1200', (2015), p. 32.

<sup>822</sup> Adriansen and Christensen (2013), p. 22.

<sup>823</sup> On the reception of Old Norse and the *Dannevirke* see Mjöberg (1967-68), vol. 1, pp. 214-15.

<sup>824</sup> Buk-Swienty (2015), p. 145.

<sup>825</sup> Adriansen and Christensen (2013), p. 41.

<sup>826</sup> 'The Danevirke fortification was the stuff national myths are made of – possessing a mythological power which politicians and officers helped promote. The result was that in military terms the Danevirke was accorded a dominating position that in no way corresponded to its real military value', Adriansen and Christensen (2013), p. 9.

were lacking, and had not been adequately funded since the start of the century. To add insult to injury, much of their army came from the Duchies, and deserted to the Prussians once war broke out.<sup>827</sup> The great and unified realm of Scandinavia, promised by Grundtvig and Oehlenschläger, proved greatly lacking in the minds of Denmark's Eiderdanism supporters.

The Danes might claim that Schleswig was historically Danish, as proven by numerous Old Norse and Old English texts, but for German nationalists this was an overly-simplistic reading of the duchies's history. Questions of hereditary ownership had been unresolved as far back as 1375 at the point of King Valdemar IV's death.<sup>828</sup> Schleswig may have been declared part of the Danish Kingdom in 1424, but members of both the Danish- and German-speaking residents of the area argued that it was an inseparable entity along with Holstein – *up ewig ungedeelt*.<sup>829</sup> Their basic three points were that the Duchies were independent states; that Schleswig and Holstein were firmly united; and that the male line ruled in the Duchies.<sup>830</sup>

As with the Danish antiquarians, German nationalists claimed that from a historical or linguistic prospective Holstein and even Schleswig were rightfully theirs.<sup>831</sup> As Klaus von See has discussed, the prologue to Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* includes 'Saxland, the north-German land of the 'Saxons', in the linguistic area connected with the Æsir.'<sup>832</sup> Northern Germany (or the area which would become northern Germany) was thus provided a Scandinavian identity – linked linguistically with the other northern nations – by the most-exalted Old Norse writer; '*þeir æsir hafa tonguna norðr hingat í heim, í Nóreg ok í Sviþjóð, í Danmørk ok í Saxland*.'<sup>833</sup> As the definitions of *deutsch* expanded to encompass Old Norse works and Scandinavian artefacts, so too did the notion that language was the defining characteristic of a nation, and that this combination of ideas supported the military decisions of the mid-nineteenth century. In the 1817 musical anthology *Gesangbildungslehre für den*

<sup>827</sup> Adriansen and Christensen (2013), p. 8.

<sup>828</sup> Jens E. Olesen, 'Inter-Scandinavian Relations', in *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia: Volume 1. Prehistory to 1520*, ed. by Knut Helle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 710-70, at pp. 720-22.

<sup>829</sup> ['Forever undivided.']

<sup>830</sup> This was not technically true, see Twiss (1848), pp. 70-71.

<sup>831</sup> 'The population of the kingdom was exclusively Danish; that of Holstein and Lauenburg, German. Schleswig, with the probable exception of the extreme southern portion, was Danish at the beginning of its history, but early in the Middle Ages, German settlers began to penetrate it. In the later Middle Ages, the rulers and the great landowners were German. With the Reformation, the process of Germanization was accelerated by the introduction of the German language in the church services as far north as the present boundary between Denmark and Germany. The advance of the German language and culture continued into the third decade of the nineteenth century when the people of Angeln, the region south of Flensburg Fiord, gave up the use of Danish for "Platt-deutsch"', Lawrence D. Steefel, *The Schleswig-Holstein Question* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1932), p. 4.

<sup>832</sup> See (2001), p. 371.

<sup>833</sup> 'The Æsir brought the language north to this part of the world, that is to Norway and to Sweden, to Denmark and to Saxland', trans. by See (2001), p. 371.

*Männerchor*, the Swiss composer Hans Georg Nägeli (1773-1836) included a number of songs intended to remind Germans of what exactly ‘Germany’ implied; ‘*Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?*’ asked Arndt’s familiar refrain; the answer: ‘*So weit die deutsche Zunge klingt.*’<sup>834</sup> Under such logic, German-speaking Holstein and the southern districts of Schleswig were rightfully German.

This was perhaps one of the things on the Prussian soldiers’s minds when they marched into Holstein on the eve of the 1864 war. The move was described by the German command as an occupation of German territory, although the actions of the soldiers seemed to suggest otherwise. According to reports of the time: ‘Federal troops entered Holstein with bands playing the revolutionary air; they allowed the Augustenburg colours to be displayed in all directions, while they removed the arms of Denmark from the public buildings and took away every symbol of Danish authority.’<sup>835</sup> Denmark’s new ruling in November of 1863 had been seen as a direct affront to Schleswig and Holstein’s supposed unity. The Danes knew their new laws would break this unity, but proceeded anyway; ‘*Sie deuteten dies an, aber vergebens, die Heißsporne in Kopenhagen gingen vor,*’ commented the German writer Theodor Fontane (1819-1898).<sup>836</sup> Such an approach to contextualising the course of events suggests that many Prussians viewed the nationality of the residents of Holstein and Schleswig as German from the start.

British interest in the conflicts followed various and often conflicting lines of thought. There was a great deal of sympathy amongst the general public for the Danish people, partly due to perceived Anglo-Scandinavian connections and shared heritage, and partly due to the fact that the Danes were undoubtedly the underdogs while the Prussians were assumed to be the aggressors. All but a couple of the British papers took the Danes’s side. In December of 1863, the *Morning Post*, *Daily News*, *Morning Herald*, and *Standard* all called for military support for the Danes; only *The Times* and *Spectator* urged moderation, but they found little popular support for these measures.<sup>837</sup> In the build up to the conflict no such moderation had been shown, a *Times* article from 1858 mockingly asked the question on the tongues of the Prussian nationalists: ‘What is the Germanic Bund?’

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<sup>834</sup> Unverhau (2000), p. 29; for a substantial collection of literary responses to the mounting conflict in the region see Franz Benöhr, *Die politische Dichtung aus und für Schleswig-Holstein in den Jahren von 1840-1864* (Schleswig: Verlag von Johs. Ibbeken, 1911).

<sup>835</sup> Earl Henry George Grey, ‘Denmark and Germany: Speech of the Right Hon. Earl Grey, in the House of Lords, Monday, April 11, 1864’, in *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 174, p. 739[, at p. 2].

<sup>836</sup> [‘They suspected as much, but in vain; the hot-heads in Copenhagen went on ahead’], Fontane (1866), p. 25.

<sup>837</sup> Sandiford (1975), pp. 81-82.

Yes, the Germanic Bund is like the Sea Serpent; when we don't see it or hear of it, of course we know nothing about it. [...] Well! but the Bund is going to come to closer quarters with Denmark. It is going to war with Denmark. Having exhausted all its notes and exhibited its ultimatum, it is going to seize Holstein and Lauenburg; in other words, it is going to bite its own tail; for everyone knows that Holstein and Lauenburg are the last joints in the Bund's body. [...] To us the Danish proposals seem fair and reasonable. They are at least consistent with common sense. [...] Let the Bund beware of bullying a little neighbour.<sup>838</sup>

Lack of clarity about what exactly the German nation was fired speculation in Britain. Denmark, with its ancestral ties to the English people, was a known entity; Germany was more akin to the fabled *Miðgarðsormur* of eddaic fame, something ominously large and unseen, lying beneath the surface. Yet as with the World-Serpent, Germany's Scandinavian expansion was viewed by the writer as being something of an ouroboros; Denmark was already considered 'Germanic' by most of Europe, meaning the Prussian forces (even by their own logic) were attacking their own people, biting their own tail.

The British parliament was restrained by the pro-German monarchy, and was given little room to act in support of Danish interests in 1864. In the first conflict of 1848-50, Lord Palmerston had similarly found himself at something of a crossroads. On one hand there was pressure from Disraeli as leader of the opposition to support the Danes, along with most of the press. The Danes themselves pointed to the 1727 Treaty of Copenhagen, in which Britain and France agreed to support Denmark's right to rule Schleswig. On the other hand, there was pressure from the court for him to support the Schleswig-Holsteiners. Two decades later, British politicians were facing the same conundrum, and to make matters more confusing, Britain at the time had a Danish Princess, Alexandra, soon to be married to a German Prince of Wales.

Few foreign onlookers realised the full complexity of the developments, or even how long the regions had been contested. Writing of the first war in 1848, Travers Twiss described the dispute as one, 'With which foreign powers are not concerned and into which a foreign writer cannot enter with much hope of uniting the sympathies of parties.'<sup>839</sup> Similarly, Earl Grey, addressing the House of Lords in 1864 on the shame of Britain refusing to help the Danes, prefaced his speech by saying that 'he need not weary their Lordships with the long and complicated question, as to what were the respective rights of Germany and Denmark and of

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<sup>838</sup> Lbs. 369 fol.

<sup>839</sup> Twiss (1848), p. iii.

the Duchies themselves.’<sup>840</sup> While travelling around Iceland in 1863, the writer, teacher, and theologian Sabine Baring-Gould attempted to find out what was going on by asking a Dane on the way to Akureyri (“Now,” said I, “let us have the rights of the Holstein squabbles”) but found himself none the wiser for it: ‘The discussion of these rights occupied the Dane some hours. I will spare the reader. I never did understand them, and I fear that I do not comprehend them a bit better now.’<sup>841</sup>

Baring-Gould’s attitude may seem a little dismissive, but it is representative of the impressions of a number of British citizens in response to the complex arguments of governance presented by the Schleswig-Holstein Question. Friedrich Engels, writing to Karl Marx from England in September of 1846, described his frustration at the inability of the British press to understand the situation:

Die Londoner Adresse hab ich gestern abend hier bei den Arbeitern bereits gedruckt gelesen. Schund. Adressieren sich an das “Volk,” d.h. die vorausgesetzten Proletarier in Schleswig-Holstein, wo nichts wie plattdeutsche Bauerlummel and zünftige Straubinger herumstrolchen. Haben von den Engländern gerade den Unsinn, die totale Ignorierung aller wirklich vorliegenden Verhältnisse, Unfähigkeit, eine historische Entwicklung aufzufassen, gelernt.<sup>842</sup>

Harsh words, but it was not just the British who misread the situation. In one of history’s many spectacular incorrect predictions, Engels went on to inform Marx that he doubted the situation would deteriorate into violence.

Yet regardless of what Palmerston, Engels, or Baring-Gould may have said on the complexities of the matter, many members of the public actually did take an interest in what was going on at the Danish-Prussian borders, and what the implications of such language-based land-claims might be on their fellow northern neighbours.<sup>843</sup> One such figure was Norse-

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<sup>840</sup> Grey (1864), p. 1.

<sup>841</sup> Baring-Gould (1863), p. 167.

<sup>842</sup> ‘I read *The London Address* here last night, already printed, with the workers. Rubbish. It addresses itself to the “people,” that is, the presupposed proletarians in Schleswig-Holstein, where nothing like Low German country bumpkins and hearty louts hang out. The only thing we have learned from the British is nonsense, a total ignorance of all actual current conditions, an inability to conceive any historical development’, Marx and Engels (1963), pp. 48.

<sup>843</sup> Shippey has suggested that the British reaction to the German claims to Scandinavian heritage were muted: ‘British opinion remained split, in so far as there was any interest in the matter at all. Some liked to imagine a Scandinavian ancestry, most were happy with Walter Scott’s thesis of multi-ethnic British amalgamation, and there was for a time a strong pro-Germanic party, usually recognisable by their preferred use of the term ‘Saxon’’, Shippey (2012), p. xxiii. Conversely, it appears that of the members of the public who knew anything of foreign news or were interested in northern antiquity the subject was one of strong opinions.

enthusiast Bligh Peacock, who frequently wrote about the conflict. The following is an extract from a letter to his Copenhagen-based friend Jón Sigurðsson on the first of February, 1864:

[I] hope you will yet escape from the miseries of war with Germany, but if you are unfortunately driven to defend the rights of your country by force of arms you may be sure that the sympathy of all Englishmen is with you, whatever may be the conduct of our government. We do not pretend fully to understand the merits of the questions at issue between Denmark and Holstein, but we are satisfied that the Germans have no right to set a foot in Slesvig and if they do we sincerely hope they will be ignominiously expelled.<sup>844</sup>

Similarly, after the Danish defeat in April, Peacock wrote on the nineteenth of March that he did not know ‘what is going to become of poor Denmark with all the German powers upon her back; I am afraid they will never be satisfied with a change of the government of Slesvig and Holstein, but will want to keep the two Duchies for the sake of their fine harbours, in which to create a German Navy.’<sup>845</sup>

Several scholars of Old Norse such as Samuel Laing were on Peacock’s and Stephens’s side in this matter; Laing was sceptical throughout his work of the reality of a German nation state and looked unfavourably on Prussian foreign policy, despite having lived in Kiel for two years (and having enjoyed his time there).<sup>846</sup> For Laing, Denmark deserved to be valued by the British for its ancestral ties; ‘Denmark is a country peculiarly interesting to the English traveller,’ he remarked in his 1852 *Observations on the Political State of Denmark, and the Duchies of Sleswick and Holstein*, ‘It was the home of his forefathers.’<sup>847</sup> As far as Laing was concerned, the spirit of these forefathers could still be seen in the heroic deeds of the victorious Danes in the first Schleswig-Holstein war:

The English traveller is almost entitled, from these circumstances, to expect, in this country of his forefathers, that some traces of the spirit, energy, and character which so remarkably distinguish the people of England and of the United States from the people of Germany at the present day, may still be observable in the mind and social institutions of the inhabitants of the original seat of the people who invaded and conquered England in the fifth century, and who, in the tenth, infused fresh blood from

<sup>844</sup> Lbs. JS 143 fol.; see also Wawn (1996), pp. 84–85. Peacock, who spear-headed the Victorian interest in Old Norse in Tyneside and Weardale, was a regular correspondent of numerous Icelandic scholars and sourced texts directly from Denmark and Iceland (see Lbs. ÍB 100a fol.).

<sup>845</sup> Lbs. JS 143 fol.; see also Wawn (1996), p. 85.

<sup>846</sup> See Wawn (2002), p. 99 and Wawn (1999a). Laing also shared Stephens’s dislike for the ‘Vikings’ (still a divisive term in modern scholarship), notably (and erroneously) claiming that ‘no Icelandic Viking is mentioned in the sagas’ (i.e. in *any* of them), Laing (1844b), vol. 1, p. 58.

<sup>847</sup> Laing (1852), p. v. Frederick Metcalfe expresses similar views in his travels some five years later, see Rev. Frederick Metcalfe, *The Oxonian in Thelemarken; or, Notes of Travel in southwestern Norway in the Summers of 1856 and 1857, with Glances at the Legendary Lore of that District*, 2 vols (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1858), vol. 2, p. 34.

the same stock into the English population, by the conquests of Northumberland, and at last of the whole kingdom of England by Swein and Canute the Great. With these expectations, the author of the following observations visited Denmark, and the Duchies of Holstein and Sleswick a few months after the successful struggle of this small nation to maintain its independence, nationality, and ancient territories, against the whole power of the German empire of forty millions of people.<sup>848</sup>

Furthermore, Laing wrote, the national traits shared by Britain and Denmark were of a far less superficial nature than those claimed by Germany; they were deeply embedded in the physical and mental constitution of their peoples:

No two European nations with different languages, laws, institutions, governments, and with so little intercourse with each other, are so like, so identical in character, spirit, way of thinking and of acting, as the Danish and the English. Their descent from a common ancestry is not like the claims of the Prussians, Saxons, Bavarians, or other Germans, to be considered the original stock of the Anglo-Saxon race, founded upon the merely physical circumstances of a similar colour of hair, eyes, complexion, and a similar structure of the head and body, but upon the psychological circumstances of a similar character, constitution of mind, and social action, which can no more be obliterated than the external bodily similarity between cognate nations, and which are as distinct and as universal.<sup>849</sup>

According to Laing, such a nation (or group of nations) was a product of a communal sense of need amongst a select group of people, a need which overrode language, ethnicity, and other factors in order to establish a cooperative society of ‘mutual interests.’<sup>850</sup> Denmark, like Britain, formed one such set of resolved parties.

Laing argued that part of the distinction lay in the innate Danish ability to summon up the spirit of their heroic literary past. The nineteenth-century Danish troops channelled the saga-age love of war that Blackwell and others described in their histories of the ancient North, and did so with modernised weaponry to boot. ‘They retain much of the manners and ideas of the middle ages, and among the soldiery this middle age character is remarkably strong,’ posited Laing, ‘The Danish soldier, like the peasant in the days of chivalry, thinks the real battle is but beginning when, in most modern armies, it is considered ending – when the combatants come hand to hand in the charge of bayonets.’<sup>851</sup> Germany, on the other hand, Laing compared

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<sup>848</sup> Laing (1852), pp. vi-vii.

<sup>849</sup> Laing (1852), pp. 445-46.

<sup>850</sup> Laing (1852), pp. 8-9. Laing viewed Montesquieu’s theories of climate and race with scepticism. As far as he was concerned, climate could affect individuality of character, but any other claims were unproven; see Laing (1852), pp. 203-06.

<sup>851</sup> Laing (1852), p. 197. See also Laing (1844b), pp. 36-37.

to the descriptions of sparring tribes of Tacitus's *Germania* ('The great mass of German people seemed not to want a nationality'), incapable of forming an alliance.<sup>852</sup> Laing's personal aversions had materialised in his *Heimskringla* translation where he consistently distanced matters of Northern heritage from the Germans, whom he viewed as barely capable of maintaining a common culture, let alone a nation.<sup>853</sup> As far as his terminology was concerned, Goths, Visigoths, Franks, Anglo-Saxons, Danes, and Northmen were 'all of one stock', but German 'laws and institutions' he ascribed to Roman influence.<sup>854</sup>

Stephens himself poured scorn on the notion of the Germans having any hereditary claim to northern antiquity.<sup>855</sup> According to him, cultural artefacts such as runes belonged 'exclusively to the North', with *non-German* heavily implied.<sup>856</sup> Similarly, Viking Age archaeological finds from south of the Danish border did not grant the Germans inclusion into the Scandinavian countries:

It is true that half-a-dozen loose Jewels have turned up in what is now called "Germany". But Scandinavians went to "Germany" and elsewhere, then as much as now. And many of these loose things are found in lands not then, or for hundreds of years after, "German". We are really not so simple as, for the sake of a groundless theory, to confound the Gothic March with "Germany". If this "Germany" were to seize Finland tomorrow, all its old-laves would not, the day after, be "German".<sup>857</sup>

Stephens instead claimed that there should be a 'North-Germanic' language alongside the Scandinavian tongues, but separated from German.<sup>858</sup> Writing shortly after the Schleswig-Holstein War had come to its conclusion, Stephens warned that the adoption of literature and language was part of a broad campaign sustained by:

[...] certain German critics, [...] who of course know English better than we do ourselves, perhaps on account of their having been facetious enough to call it "a German dialect", like as to our Literature has now become "German", our Land a "German

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<sup>852</sup> Laing (1852), pp. 6-7.

<sup>853</sup> 'Laing loathed all things German', Wawn (1999a), p. 42.

<sup>854</sup> Laing (1844b), vol. 1, p. 5.

<sup>855</sup> Stephens, and his correspondent Peter Andreas Munch (1810-1863) regularly exchanged thoughts on the matter of dividing the northern lands, see Wawn (2002), p. 215, and Wawn (1996), pp. 66-95. Both were in agreement. Munch wrote to Stephens in 1845: 'That Great-Britain belongs to the North only, and that she has been wrong when in any period thinking herself belonging to the South, we can certainly state as beyond all doubt!' Munch, cited Wawn (2002), p. xv.

<sup>856</sup> Stephens (1883), p. 10/298.

<sup>857</sup> Stephens (1883), p. 8.

<sup>858</sup> Shippey writes, 'Stephens argued, the 'Old Northern' or (Grundtvig's term) 'old-nordisk' area of Anglo-Scandinavia had its own traditions, its own culture, and – the really important point – every right to political autonomy', (2012), p. xxiii. Indeed, Shippey notes that this idea still has favour in Denmark to this day.



Province”, our Sovrans [*sic*] “German Kings” (Heaven bless the mark. Everything in half Europe is now being claimed as “German!”)<sup>859</sup>

As with Blackwell’s objections to Percy and Mallet, Stephens was not arguing that such a cultural interest was a bad idea, nor even a comparative study of nations, merely that it had been incorrectly implemented thus far. He warned of the dangers of the new philological school, remarking that a good deal of the ‘Boasted “Modern Philology” – with its “iron laws” and “straight lines” and “regular” police-ruled developments – *is only a House built upon the Sand!*’<sup>860</sup> Stephens felt that *vergleichende Philologie* ignored too much solid, material evidence, making broad claims while purposefully simplifying national boundaries.

As might be expected from Stephens’s tone, this exclusion of Germans from the linguistic world of the northern nations also applied to the literature of the North. The daring figures of *Friðþjófs saga* and Laing’s *Heimskringla*, along with the established characters of eddaic fame, were off limits to German literary historians:

Whatever mythic songs any of the German or Saxon or Frisic races may have had, are lost. As far as we know, only the Northmen, the folk-stems in Scandinavia and England, had what we understand by develop[ed] Mythology. [...] Germany can show a couple of short interesting mythical fragments; but what is now vulgarly called “German Mythology” is – the wholesale annexation, the theft bodily, by Germany in modern times (for all the traffic is comparatively modern) of the whole mythic store of Scandinavia and England.<sup>861</sup>

Stephens’s often-published views on the matter could still be heard reflected in works of northern scholarship towards the end of the century, particularly in the later works of Matthew Arnold, whose 1891 *The Study of Celtic Literature* looked back gravely at the ‘Germanisation’ of northern Europe. This process, Arnold argued, ‘went far deeper than the Latinisation of France, and not only laws, manners, and language, but the main current of blood, became Germanic.’<sup>862</sup> In Arnold’s view, the movement resisted by Stephens and other anti-*Deutsch* English scholars could be considered a return to form after extensive Celtic influence rather than an unprecedented change. In this light, Arnold pointed to the Schleswig-Holstein conflict as an embarrassment for the northern nations. It could only be read as one of two options: familial infighting or sinister appropriation.

<sup>859</sup> Stephens (1866), p. 43.

<sup>860</sup> Stephens (1884a), p. 226. The emphasis is all Stephens’s.

<sup>861</sup> Stephens (1883), p. 18/306. Stephens’s sentiments here could be found echoed in Anglo-Scandinavian writing from across the period, compare for example Frederick Metcalfe, who argued that all of Germany’s claims to antiquity were in fact stolen from the true North, (1861), p. 123.

<sup>862</sup> Arnold (1912), p. 76.

Since the war in Schleswig-Holstein [...] all one's German friends are exceedingly anxious to insist on the difference in nature between themselves and the Scandinavians; when one expresses surprise that the German sense of nationality should be so deeply affronted by the rule over Germans, not of Latins or Celts, but of brother Teutons or next door to it, a German will give you I know not how long a catalogue of the radical points of unlikeness, in genius and disposition, between himself and a Dane.<sup>863</sup>

The contemporary reaction of Germans living in Britain led Arnold to the conclusion that there might be nothing Germanic about the Scandinavians's poetry whatsoever.<sup>864</sup> Stephens would have agreed.

The nationalist sentiment that encouraged Denmark into the 1864 war did little to avail them once the fighting started. At ten in the morning on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April, 10,000 Prussian troops descended on Dybbøl. The Danes were outnumbered by five to one, without even taking into account the 27,000 Prussian reserves. Many positions were overrun in a matter of minutes. An hour into the battle, the ominously-named *Rolf Krake* had to pull back after taking a direct hit which bore through its deck. Around 5500 Danes were killed or captured in little under two hours. With the added injury of losing 3300 men on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June in the Occupation of Als, it was a disastrous war in terms of casualties, and demoted Denmark from one of the major powers in Europe to a petty state. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of July the king dismissed Monrad's national liberal government and installed a conservative cabinet under Bluhme in its place. Yet Norse-based Danish nationalism was not overhauled.<sup>865</sup> To the North of Schleswig, folk schools continued to promote such material as Grundtvig's politicised Norse scholarship, even as Grundtvig himself was elsewhere writing of the follies of the 1860s's nationalist euphoria. Medievalism still ruled Danish war-poetry – informing its imagery and provoking nationalist responses. The poet Paludan Müller could thus write about, 'Loved ones clad in armour, / Boys in shining mail, / Valiant men stout-hearted, That is Denmark's goal... / Schleswig's soil reconquered! / Our struggle's final goal!'<sup>866</sup>

Meanwhile, for the Prussians, and particularly for Otto von Bismarck, the war was the first step in a grand three-stage victory. Bismarck went on to win decisive wars against Austria in 1866 and against France in 1870-71, but before the war of 1864 his position was not

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<sup>863</sup> Arnold (1912), pp. 118-119.

<sup>864</sup> Arnold (1912), p. 119. It should be mentioned, though, that while he could not reconcile Norse poetry with German literature, Arnold saw the sagas as being distinctly Germanic, and gave George Dasent's translations as an example of this.

<sup>865</sup> Lönnroth writes, 'After the loss of South Jutland in 1864, voluntary riflemen's associations sprang up all over the country: the young men attending the folk high schools provided the major portion of the recruits and the teachers at the folk high schools were actively involved in the recruiting process', (1988), p. 348. The *folk* movement initiated by Grundtvig continued to gain support.

<sup>866</sup> Müller, cited Adriansen and Christensen (2013), p. 34.

necessarily stable and he faced considerable political opposition in Berlin.<sup>867</sup> Through the second Schleswig-Holstein war and his subsequent victories he was able to realise the long-term project of seeing a united Germany with Berlin as its head. Holstein, along with the town of Schleswig, remains part of modern Germany.<sup>868</sup> The northern region of the district of Schleswig remained under German governance until the 1919 Treaty of Versailles granted residents the right to vote on their nationality. Those to the north of Flensburg voted three to one in favour of joining with Denmark.<sup>869</sup> Nationalist propaganda displaying comparative philology's key principles continued. In 1920 pro-German political posters declared in Danish: *'I tusind år har vi været slesvigere. Vi vil vedblive at være slesvigere. Derfor stemmer vi tysk.'*<sup>870</sup> In the early twentieth century the image of the Old Norse god Heimdallr could be seen in iconography of both the Germans and the Danes in the ongoing border dispute.<sup>871</sup>

For many British antiquarians, the series of unfortunate events in Denmark's southern duchies had grave repercussions for the rest of northern Europe.<sup>872</sup> The explorer and experienced soldier Sir Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890) was dismayed by what he perceived as the lull in interest in northern antiquities in Britain following the conflict: 'Since the unhappy Dano-Prussian war we have heard little of Scandinavia in England, and we are apt to conclude that the pan-Scandinavian is dead,' wrote Burton; 'It is not dead but sleeping' he added hopefully, 'We still live in hopes of seeing a federal union of the great northern kingdoms.'<sup>873</sup> For others it was less Britain's decline in interest as her decline in international

<sup>867</sup> See, for example, Otto von Bismarck, 'Ablehnung der dänischen Kriegsanleihe. 22. Januar 1864', in *Reden*, ed. by Eugen Kalkschmidt (Berlin: Deutsche Bibliothek, 1914), 46-51. See also Walter Platzhoff, *Bismarck und die Nordschleswigsche Frage: 1864-1879* (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, 1925).

<sup>868</sup> Providing an exact linguistic portrait of the area is still a complex exercise today, with numerous dialectal elements of Danish and German influencing matters; see Wanda Guckes, *Die gegenwärtige sprachliche Situation der dänischen Minderheit in Schleswig-Holstein* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011).

<sup>869</sup> Adriansen and Christensen (2013), p. 29; Steefel (1932), p. 262.

<sup>870</sup> ['For a thousand years we have been Slesvigians. We wish to remain Slesvigians. Therefore, we speak German'], Inge Adriansen, 'Jyllands formodede tyskhed i oldtiden – den dansk-tyske strid om Sønderjyllands urbefolkning', in *The Waking of Angantyr: The Scandinavian Past in European Culture / Den nordiske fortid i europæisk kultur*, ed. by Else Roesdahl and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1996), 120-146, at pp. 134-35. For a discussion of contemporary voters on either side of the border see Jørgen Elklit and Ole Tonsgaard, 'The Absence of Nationalist Movements: The Case of the Nordic Area', in *The Social Origins of Nationalist Movements: The Contemporary West European Experience*, ed. by John Coakley (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1992), 81-98. See also Peter Thaler, 'Identity on a Personal Level: Sleswig Biographies during the Age of Nationalism', *Scandinavian Studies*, 80/1 (Spring 2008), 51-84.

<sup>871</sup> See Zernack (2016), pp. 266-69.

<sup>872</sup> Wawn writes, 'The loss of these provinces to Germany in 1864 is not just a military and diplomatic defeat for Denmark, but a humiliation for the land of his birth, whose leaders do not share his sense of cultural identification with the old north', Wawn (2002), p. 233. In a similar passage he writes, 'The supine failure, as Stephens regarded it, of Britain to offer military or diplomatic support to the Danes struck at the heart of the Englishman's vivid sense of Anglo-Scandinavian wholeness', Wawn (1996), pp. 83-84.

<sup>873</sup> Burton (1875), vol. I, p. 109.

involvement which alarmed them. Stephens had always regarded Schleswig and Holstein as being ‘integral parts of his adopted homeland’ and was shocked that the greater British public (not to mention parliament) should not share his view.<sup>874</sup> He was not alone. Peacock, too, had been convinced that the English people would rush to the defence of their northern neighbours, and wrote bitterly about the outcome of the war.<sup>875</sup>

George Dasent, writing of a trip to the Faroe Islands in May of 1864, expressed common British frustration at the government’s lack of action. He imagined expressing his feelings to the local governor: ‘We will tell them English and Danish news, and with a fresh blush own that Denmark has all our sympathy, and that she must not stand alone – only we don’t mean to fight for her or do anything for her, except give her that drug in the diplomatic market, the bitter root called “good advice.”’<sup>876</sup> The Sysselmann, in response, remarks: ‘It will be just as hard work to get the Germans out of Schleswig as the rats and grampuses and fulmars out of Faroe.’<sup>877</sup> Yet not all Englishmen agreed that the Danes were in the right. The Earl of Salisbury wrote that, ‘In holding Schleswig,’ they had been ‘committing an unpardonable crime against the people,’ and riding against the ‘philological law of nations.’<sup>878</sup> This disagreement, on philological grounds, led to lack of intervention. According to Sandiford, the Schleswig-Holstein crisis created the ‘most emphatic defeat suffered by the Victorians, and it precipitated their eclipse in Europe during the Bismarckian age.’<sup>879</sup> Grey certainly saw it as such, an avoidable war which Britain could have easily stopped in the bud; ‘We had it completely in our power to protect Schleswig from invasion without any real risk of war’, he told the Lords.<sup>880</sup>

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<sup>874</sup> Wawn (1996), p. 84.

<sup>875</sup> Peacock, writing on the 24th June 1864, said, ‘The English people are almost unanimous in their condemnation of the conduct of Prussia and Austria and would not be sorry to see our Government take part with Denmark to resist the German powers’, Lbs. JS 143 fol.; see also Wawn (1996), p. 85. After this had clearly not taken place, several months later on the 3rd February 1865, Peacock again wrote, ‘I don’t know what is going to become of Denmark but I sincerely trust that the robbers will quarrel over their prey, and that Prussia and Austria may yet pay dear for the Duchies. As for Holstein I think the inhabitants have found out already that they have changed masters considerably for the worse, and they deserve what they have got’, Lbs. JS 143 fol.; see also Wawn (1996), p. 85.

<sup>876</sup> George Webbe Dasent, *Jest and Earnest: A Collection of Essays and Reviews*, 2 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1873), vol. I, p. 44; Dasent’s negative impressions of the German-speaking residents of Holstein had been formed while on his arduous snow-bound journey from London to Stockholm in 1841; making the way by sledge from Hamburg to Copenhagen, Dasent, likely in a foul temper, described the locals as ‘a band of the most savage peasantry it is possible to conceive’, cited A. I. Dasent, in George Webbe Dasent, *Popular Tales from the Norse, New Edition with a Memoir by Arthur Irwin Dasent* (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1903), p. xxii.

<sup>877</sup> Dasent (1873), vol. I, p. 84. ‘Grampus’ is an old term for a killer whale (*Orcinus orca*), a species which is common in the waters around the Faroe Islands, and is not to be confused with the Risso’s dolphin (*Grampus*), which is not.

<sup>878</sup> Lord Robert Cecil, Marquess of Salisbury, K. G., *Essays by the Late Marquess of Salisbury K. G. Biographical* (London: John Murray, 1905), p. 54.

<sup>879</sup> Sandiford (1975), p. 3.

<sup>880</sup> Grey (1864), p. 6.

Even more worryingly, he warned, Britain's unwillingness to act would undoubtedly be seen as a sign of timidity and weakness by the other great European powers.

Other northern Europeans shared similar views. Grímur Thomsen kept all correspondence regarding the conflict during his time in Paris, particularly accounts stressing the villainy of the Prussian forces, and followed developments closely.<sup>881</sup> The Cambridge-based Icelandic Eiríkur Magnússon wrote to a Dr Maar on 24 June 1870 that it could not 'but be galling for a nation to see its future tethered by the regardless hand of an all-absorbing and unfriendly neighbour.'<sup>882</sup> A young Henrik Ibsen, whose play *Hærmænde paa Helgeland* (1858) had matched a spirited national energy with Old Norse tropes, was furious at Norway's lack of intervention, claiming his country had given up the right to claim Norse ancestry.<sup>883</sup> National history, in Ibsen's view, was something which needed to be maintained. While their Scandinavian and Icelandic counterparts had strong opinions on the conflict, certain parties in Britain used the professed intricacy of events as something of a justification for international inaction.<sup>884</sup>

## 5.5. Conclusion: a Siegesallee for Sognefjord

Despite a lack of impact on British foreign policy, the first complete Old Norse saga in English made important impressions on nineteenth-century concepts of the North. Stephens's translation and the concurrent interest in Friðþjófr as a poetic figure had an immediate effect on English literature and culture. Previous artistic engagement with the North was largely limited to Latin-derived eddaic pieces and fanciful caricatures from early Scandinavian histories. The iconic image of the Victorian Viking had arrived, and the evidence of Friðþjófr's popularity could be seen across the next sixty years of British literature. In 1841, William Motherwell could write poems such as 'The Battle-flag of Sigurd', 'The Wooing Song of Jarl

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<sup>881</sup> Lbs. 369 fol.

<sup>882</sup> Lbs. 2181a 4to. In a much later *Saga Book* article, Eiríkur lamented the destruction of archaeological finds in Nydam, near Flensburg, during the 1864 conflict, see Eiríkur Magnússon, 'Notes on Ship-Building and Nautical Terms of Old in the North', *Saga Book*, 4 (1905), 182-237, at pp. 210-11.

<sup>883</sup> ['The Vikings at Helgeland'] Henrik Ibsen, *The Oxford Ibsen*, ed. by James Walter McFarlane (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), vol. 2, pp. 10 and 26. Ibsen complemented his play with elements of *Egils saga Skallgrímsson*, *Laxdæla saga*, *Njáls saga*, and *Völsunga saga*, see Jón Karl Helgason (2017), p. 81. On Norwegian and Swedish troops supporting the Danes in the first Schleswig-Holsteinn war see Forester (1855), p. 145.

<sup>884</sup> Even today the abiding British sentiment is that the Schleswig-Holstein Question is just too complicated a historical conflict to discuss. While there have been over three-thousand five-hundred works on the 1864 war alone in Danish and German, one would struggle to put together a hundredth of that number in English, see Adriansen and Christensen (2013), p. 2.

Egill Skallagrím', and the Friðþjófr-esque 'Song of the Danish Sea-King' – the protagonist of the latter appearing alongside more modern military heroes.<sup>885</sup> Edna Lyall's 1884 *Driftwood from Scandinavia* could use the saga as inspiration for her protagonist Frithiof, just as her *Hardy Norseman* would do five years later.<sup>886</sup> And at the close of the nineteenth century, William Morris could travel out to Sognefjord in 1896 shortly before his death, and write of 'the forbidding grimness of the black wall of precipices' which hemmed in the waters of Friðþjófr's former district.<sup>887</sup>

As demonstrated, the adaptability of the Friðþjófr narrative made it particularly inviting to authors of varying mindsets. Where Esaias Tegnér removed what he saw as farcical elements from the tale and attempted to cultivate a pan-religious notion of northern morality, George Stephens instead offered readers a quasi-encyclopaedic handbook to the far north. The saga read by the English reader in the nineteenth century was never the same as the Old Norse original and thanks to poetic license it could be very far from it. The chapter has demonstrated how the wider political events in Northern Europe were topics of extreme importance for Britain's translators of Old Norse. Norse philology and translations were not produced in a vacuum, and it is clear from Stephens's continued interaction with northern antiquities that such real-life conflict had a bearing on the continuing scholarly output.<sup>888</sup>

After celebrating victory in the newly-named Schleswig-Holstein province, the German elite continued to promote the notion of an ancestral Germanic-Scandinavian coalition, with or without the inclusion of Britain but certainly with the nineteenth-century's own depiction of Friðþjófr. Kaiser Wilhelm II summed up the prevailing *Zeitgeist* with a towering, twelve-meter

<sup>885</sup> William Motherwell, *Poems: Narrative and Lyrical* (Boston: William D. Ticknor, 1841), pp. 19-29, 30-37, and 180-82.

<sup>886</sup> See Fjågesund and Symes (2003), p. 127.

<sup>887</sup> Eiríkur Magnússon, in Snorri Sturluson, *The Saga Library, Volume VI. The Stories of the Kings of Norway Called the Round of the World*, trans. by Eiríkur Magnússon (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1905), p. xii; Morris's 1896 Norway tour marked a touching end to his long enthusiasm for the sagas: 'Off Bergen the last gleam of the Viking spirit came over him as he gazed on "the old hills which the eyes of the old men looked on when they did their best against the Weirds"', J. W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris*, 2 vols [original 1899] (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920), vol. II, p. 330. Sognefjord was described by Tozer as an area of poetic significance he but made no specific reference to the saga or Tegnér's poem, see Tozer (1861), pp. 416-17; similarly, Thomas Forester, although he held Frithiof's Norway as 'a moral picture of extreme interest,' found 'Sogne-Fjord' to be 'a grand and gloomy scene', Forester (1855), pp. 158 and 273.

<sup>888</sup> Stephens died on the 9th August 1895, in Copenhagen. In his obituary, his death is described as, 'a loss to all studies which concern the past of mankind', [Anonymous], 'George Stephens: Obituary', *Folklore*, 6/4 (1895), 412. The writer continues, 'His interest in the science of folklore was deep and abiding, and his contributions to it were important. [...] He was always ready to assist others who wanted to learn; nor was there any end to the trouble he would take even for entire strangers who were in pursuit of information on antiquarian matters', (1895), p. 412. The statements ring true with much of Stephens's later works, which show just as much interest in localised antiquarianism as they do in the fortunes of the European nation states; see, for example, George Stephens, *On a Runic Stone at Thornhill* [communicated by Rev. J. T. Fowler] (London: Yorkshire Archaeological and Topographical Association, 1884b).

high statue of *Frithjof der Stark*, at Vangsnes in Sognefjord.<sup>889</sup> It can still be seen today. The Kaiser additionally extended a not entirely peaceful olive branch to Friðþjófr's Norwegian descendants: '*Deutschland ist der natürliche Freund Skandinaviens [...]. Fällt jedoch Skandinavien auseinander und nimmt Russland den Norden Norwegens, England etwa Bergen in Besitz, so kann Deutschland gezwungen werden, die südlichen landstriche Norwegens zu besitzen.*'<sup>890</sup> Norwegian reactions were mixed. One Trondheim paper carried the remark: 'We do not want a German *Siegesallee* in the Norwegian fjords.'<sup>891</sup> The German *Simplicissimus* responded to the Kaiser's activities with a satirical cartoon of the new statue, complete with grinning political spectators: 'What amuses you so much about the statue?' asks one; 'Just that it comes from Germany,' replies the other.<sup>892</sup>

With the partially-formed German nation imposing itself on the southern and eastern fronts of Scandinavia, British northernists increasingly turned their own efforts at cultural appropriation toward the north-west. Dasent, writing in the *North British Review* in May of 1864, shortly after the Danish defeat at Dybbøl, considered the majority of Scandinavia off limits due to the ongoing dispute: 'Between us and Copenhagen,' he warned readers, 'lies that ravaging German host, whose heart is set on robbing the King of Denmark of his own.'<sup>893</sup> Instead, Dasent proposed taking his countrymen to Iceland:

No, we shake our clenched fists with a malison on the king and Kaiser who have revived a hideous German *Faustrecht* in this our nineteenth century, and pass by on the other side. [...] And yet we will take him North after all. He shall go to Iceland. "To Iceland," says the easy going man; "why should I go to Iceland, and how can I go to Iceland? I don't know the way."<sup>894</sup>

<sup>889</sup> Pål Hougen, 'Kaiser Wilhelm II og Norges heroiske fortid', in *The Waking of Angantyr: The Scandinavian Past in European Culture / Den nordiske fortid I europæisk kultur*, ed. by Else Roesdahl and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1996), 147-55, at p. 151; Stefan Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols: Indo-European Mythology as Ideology and Science*, trans. by Sonia Wichmann (London and Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 305.

<sup>890</sup> ['Germany is the natural friend of Scandinavia [...]. If ever Scandinavia should fall apart and should Russia take the north of Norway, and England take possession of Bergen, then Germany can be called upon to occupy the southern stretches of Norway'], cited in Hougen (1996), p. 153.

<sup>891</sup> "Wir wünschen keine deutsche Siegesallee in den norwegischen Fjorden", Marschall (1991), p. 87, cited Birgit Grimm, 'Wilhelm II. und Norwegen', in *Wahlverwandtschaft: Skandinavien und Deutschland 1800 bis 1914*, ed. by Bernd Henningsen, Janine Klein, Helmut Müssener and Solfrid Söderlind (Berlin: Jovis Verlagsbüro, 1997), 100-12, at p. 109 (translation my own). Siegesallee (literally 'Victory Avenue') was a broad street in Berlin, which formerly ran north to south over the area which is now the Tiergarten. The street was commissioned by Wilhelm and featured a number of statues of historical figures.

<sup>892</sup> "Was freut Sie eigentlich so an der Statue?" "Nur, daß sie aus Deutschland hinausgekommen ist!" Olaf Gulbransson 'Auf der Nordlandreise', cited Grimm (1997), pp. 108-09.

<sup>893</sup> Dasent (1873), pp. 10-11.

<sup>894</sup> Dasent (1873), p. 11.

The answer to these questions, alongside Dasent's role in inspiring numerous 'easy going' British men and women to go to Iceland, would be found in the pages of his formidable 1861 translation of *Njáls saga*.



## 6. Persistent Nationalisms: Conclusions and Reflections

In terms of notions of ethnic-nationalism, the degradation of races, and the moral definition of the North-South divide with regards to the study of Old Norse literature, there can be few mission statements more pronounced (or more disturbing) than that of Julia Clinton Jones, whose 1880 *Valhalla, the Myths of the Norseland: A Saga in Twelve Parts* sang the praises of the Norsemen on every page:

They found Rome weakened by conquest, and enervated by luxury; one by one they forced her conquests from her, plunging Europe into a state of semi-barbarism, only to raise her up at last, through their stronger northern natures, and purer institutions to a higher degree of enlightenment; infusing through her weakened frame their own bold blood, thus giving her fresh strength and vitality. [...] Planting wherever they trod, the germs of a glorious freedom, they were the revolutionists of that age, and all succeeding ages owe them a lasting debt of gratitude for the noble harvest and truth by them sown.<sup>895</sup>

Despite its extended metaphor bearing all the lexical signifiers of sexual assault (the Nordic nations forcing themselves on a submissive, feminine south; the history of northern Europe as a narrative of rejuvenating rape) Jones's book was not plying any new ideas.<sup>896</sup> The popular theories which supported her arguments (degeneration, "pure" races, heroic violence excused by a "greater good") were the same known to Blackwell, Scott, and Stephens.

The study of the reception of Old Norse literature can at times appear like Einstein's apocraphal definition of madness as a process of 'doing the same thing and expecting a different result;' the same stereotypes, theories, and academic errors appear again and again in a seemingly interminable procession of medievalisms. Yet as the conclusions to the preceeding chapters of this thesis have already attempted to demonstrate, in early nineteenth-century translations of *Íslendingasögur* the variations (however slight) in readings of the common theme of the significance of Old Norse literature to the British nation offer a much more productive subject than any superficial similarities. The ethnic-nationalism of Jones and the social-Darwinism of Kingsley might have been drawn from the same tomes, but the gulf between their implications and those intended by Scott was wider than the rifts of Þingvellir in the fantastical accounts of the first British travellers to Iceland. As such, concluding points in

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<sup>895</sup> Jones (1880), p. 9.

<sup>896</sup> Of course, one could always find the other extreme of Old Norse reception literature; R. V. Risley's 1897 *The Sentimental Vikings* dealt in similar stereotypical tropes but had all of the Norsemen killed off for their sins. The narrative ends with the protagonist's ship ice-bound and the crew gradually going insane and dying off one by one: "There is no voice of the Christian God, for I have sacked his churches. The snow is in my eyes, and I am mad", R. V. Risley, *The Sentimental Vikings* (London: John Lane, 1897), p. 169.

the current chapter are intended only as a cursory supplement to the arguments put forward already.

Firstly, it should be noted that over the course of the nineteenth century, the norsemen and their sagas provided Britain with a selection of often contradictory and inherently problematic national origin myths, involving combinations of reverence and avoidance, trade and terror, mass immigration and pre-destined ancestry, beneficial copulation and genocidal slaughter.<sup>897</sup> Yet the simple fact is that in the race for the most suitable genesis myth, Anglo-Scandinavian cultural connections repeatedly proved to be the most appealing, whether nationalist writers wished to express fears of violent migrants or glorification of a hereditary naval prowess.<sup>898</sup> When considering British writing, at least part of this lasting appeal has to be ascribed to the pioneering translations produced in the Victorian period by a seemingly eccentric collection of opinionated ex-patriots and native antiquarians, who in fact represented common societal opinions.<sup>899</sup>

From these translators, most English readers developed an idiosyncratic understanding of the *Íslendingasögur* in which the Norsemen, Britain's dashing forefathers, displayed a combination of democratic philosophy and extreme violence. At its heart, this process involved confirming views already held by the public since the eighteenth century regarding their northern ancestors. Nineteenth-century British readers fostered their own stereotypes of the north, and these stereotypes in turn affected the way in which the Norsemen were presented in the earliest works of northern antiquity. As the twentieth-century writer Edward Said observed, this phenomenon of intercultural image-creation involves 'a rather complex dialectic of reinforcement by which the experiences of readers are determined by what they have read, and this in turn influences writers to take up subjects defined in advance by readers's

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<sup>897</sup> In his over-arching description of cultural appropriation of the 'Viking' world Andrew Wawn summarises, 'The ridiculous has thus had its place alongside the sublime': 'Medieval monk, Enlightenment sage and modern advertising executive have constructed their versions of the Viking past with strikingly dissimilar priorities in mind', Andrew Wawn (ed.), *Northern Antiquity: The Post-Medieval Reception of Edda and Saga* (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1994b), p. viii. Additionally, Boyer notes, 'When it comes to representations of the Vikings, we are dealing not with the forensic truths of history but with the mist of mystery and myth', Boyer (1994), p. 71.

<sup>898</sup> 'Our civilisation teeters at the abyss. We are 8th-century Lindisfarne monks, spotting black sails on the horizon and hurrying to hide our illuminated manuscripts, before shaving our hair into tonsures to look less desirable to frustrated seafarers', Stewart Lee, 'Brexit Britain is Desperate for a Decent Genesis Myth', in *The Guardian*, Sunday 30 October (2016), accessed at <[www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)>.

<sup>899</sup> This undoubtedly holds true for Iceland and Scandinavia too; 'If the peoples of Scandinavia down to the present day still look to the traditions of the late pagan Viking period in defining their identity, this is due less to the merits of the Viking period itself than to the achievement of the high-medieval literature that reactivated these traditions and first made them available for ideological exploitation', See (2001), p. 392.

expectations.<sup>900</sup> The Icelandic Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson has applied this phenomenon to northern literature. Discussing the concept of northern identity, its effect on northerners, and their interaction with such a construction, Sumarliði writes, ‘When we create an image of ourselves, we simultaneously create images of the Other. These two aspects of identity coexist and intersect and neither can exist without the other. They are in a dialectic relationship.’<sup>901</sup> Such theoretical frameworks as Said’s model of ‘Orientalism’ (through terms such as ‘Borealism’, ‘Arcticity’, or simply ‘Nordic Orientalism’) allow further examination of the means by which different nations have viewed both the theoretical and the tangible North.<sup>902</sup> Although Sumarliði’s work concludes by suggesting that there are many versions of the North rather than one shifting concept, his evidence appears to suggest the opposite: that the North has seen a gradual transition over time and should be considered an evolving narrative.<sup>903</sup>

Secondly, this thesis has noted that in the nineteenth century the unequal categorisation of races was a topic of importance for many northernists, particularly Blackwell and later Stephens. Race was most frequently defined as a combination of all people united by one set language, a definition encouraged by proponents of Old Norse philology. Even when translators disagreed strongly with the traditional readings of comparative philology, it remained a highly popular school of thought well into the second half of the century and influenced both the choice of which sagas were selected for translation and the content of those publications in terms of their vocabulary (as in Head’s *Víga Glum’s Saga*), editorial essays (Dasent’s *Burnt Njal*), and promotion (Eiríkur Magnússon’s lectures on *Íslendingasögur*). Choices about how to present the material were often influenced by further nationalist sympathies, as was the case with George Stephens’s antipathy to the ‘Germanification’ of Old Norse. Conflicting intentions for Old Norse literature saw the material stretched to fit many purposes.

Thirdly, the thesis demonstrated how the translations themselves helped to underline nationalist themes. In the nineteenth-century volumes of the ‘*Eyrbyggja-Saga* Abstract’ or *Frithiof’s Saga*, readers encountered material which supported notions of the dominant physical prowess and psychological fortitude of the northern races. Moreover, the linguistic

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<sup>900</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2003) [original New York: Pantheon Books, 1978], p. 94.

<sup>901</sup> Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson (2011), p. 6.

<sup>902</sup> See Kristinn Schramm, ‘Banking on Borealism: Eating, Smelling, and Performing the North’, in *Iceland and Images of the North*, ed. by Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson and David Chartier (Québec: Presses de l’Université du Québec; and Reykjavík: Reykjavíkur Akademían, 2011), 305–24, p. 310; Fjågesund and Symes (2003), p. 11; Durrenberger (1995), p. 41.

<sup>903</sup> See Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson (2011), p. 18.

similarities highlighted by the translations (whether convincingly or otherwise) pointed to a shared past in which the English tongue and the Norse had been one and the same.

Finally, one can note that the concurrent emergence of these two movements – the translation of the sagas into English on the one hand and developments in ethnic-nationalism informed by both philological and evolutionary thought on the other – was mutually advantageous.<sup>904</sup> Certainly, the timing was a benefit to both parties: nationalist causes gained much support from Old Norse scholarship and popular reception of these translations was undoubtedly boosted by ethnic-nationalist intrigue and pride. As these two trends arose in parallel, and as both have indistinct potential histories stretching back far further than has been covered in this thesis, it is difficult to speculate on what variations either would have developed without the other. Engagement with Old Norse literature in English and re-defining what ‘English’ (or ‘British’) actually meant could be seen as two parts of a continuing cultural movement.

The ever-changing yet alarmingly cyclical nature of the British reception of Old Norse literature demonstrates how these pre- and early-nineteenth century theories of the Northmen are still resisting transformation to this day. Philology, after a period of post-war decline, is once more a subject of appeal to nationalist intellectuals. Harpham sees its renewed success as being a combination of three factors: narratives of origin (‘Philology has bequeathed to modern scholarship the conviction that things are explained when their origins have been identified’);<sup>905</sup> methodological duality of discourse (realised via ‘a double commitment to empirical attention to linguistic fact and a more subjective approach to questions of context, meaning, and value’);<sup>906</sup> and the aforementioned amalgamation of the notions of language and race (often redefined in modern scholarship through the simple substitution of the word ‘culture’ in the place of the word ‘race’).<sup>907</sup>

Guðmundur Hálfðanarson concludes his essay on the nationalist movements of Iceland with a word of advice: ‘The role of history is not to legitim[is]e social distinctions, but to make explicit the way in which they are structured and how they function’ – to extend this to the

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<sup>904</sup> A survey of topics of lectures at Newcastle-upon-Tyne’s Literary & Philosophical Society over the course of the nineteenth century shows the public’s predilection for topics addressing their northern ancestry: talks on arctic exploration, northern poetry, Norse religion, Iceland’s geography and literature, runes, and the ‘greatness’ of seventh- and eighth-century Northumbria sit alongside lectures on the races of men, Britain’s German(ic) ancestry, and Darwinism, see Watson (1897), Appendix B.

<sup>905</sup> Harpham (2009), p. 54. See also Hartely S. Spatt, ‘William Morris and the Uses of the Past’, *Victorian Poetry*, 13/3 and 4 (Fall/Winter 1975), 1-9, at p. 1: ‘The ruling passion of the age was displayed in men’s efforts to uncover the source, not of the Nile, but of the present.’

<sup>906</sup> Harpham (2009), p. 54.

<sup>907</sup> Harpham (2009), p. 55.

works discussed above one might say that while the translators of Old Norse sagas often regarded the proper role of their texts to be a justification or criticism of contemporary political distinctions, authorial intent could differ widely from how subsequent generations of readers came to appreciate the lessons to be drawn from the translations.<sup>908</sup> It is difficult (and arguably meaningless) to speculate on what Scott would have made of the train of thought started by his saga extracts. It is equally strange to think of Stephens's and Blackwell's unknowing role in the proliferation of a cultural movement which arguably went on to inspire some of the worst atrocities of the twentieth century. When using indistinct narratives to define current realities one plays a dangerous game, even when one's intentions are harmless.

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<sup>908</sup> Guðmundur Hálfðanarson (1995), p. 776; see also Birgir Hermansson (2005). On recent developments in nationalist rhetoric and populist politics in Iceland and Scandinavia see Eiríkur Bergmann Einarsson, *Nordic Nationalism and Right-Wing Populist Politics: Imperial Relationships and National Sentiments* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017a) and Eiríkur Bergmann Einarsson, 'Við og hinir. Þjóðernispopúlismi á Norðurlöndum', *Skírnir*, 191 (2017b), 138-65. Anne-Catherine Jungar and Anders Ravik Jupskås, in their article 'Populist Radical Right Parties in the Nordic Regions: A New and Distinct Party Family', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 37 (2014), 215-38, have suggested convincingly that the exact state of popular extreme-right movements in Scandinavia is an understudied phenomenon.

## Bibliography

Note: This thesis initially examined a much broader timescale, with a range of texts stretching from the start of the nineteenth century into the early years of the twentieth century. The bibliography below reflects the works which have fed into this wider discussion and which have contributed to the various publications which have come out of the research project. On a more practical note, the authors below are listed by their surnames with the exception of the Icelandic authors, who are ordered by first name rather than patronym.

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