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EDITORIAL

The Icelandic Connection

Embracing the Digital Age and Preserving North American Icelandic Heritage

KATRÍN NÍELSDÓTTIR—EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

In a rapidly evolving world of media and information dissemination, The Icelandic Connection, a journal dedicated to preserving the uniquely North American Icelandic culture and history, has embarked on a transformative journey. This venerable publication, which has long been a staple in the Icelandic diaspora, has transitioned from a traditional print format to an exclusively online platform. This shift marks a crucial turning point in the journal's history, offering greater accessibility through open access publication and embracing a wider range of contributors, fostering a dynamic space for the preservation of North American Icelandic heritage for generations to come.

The decision to transition from print to an online-only publication was motivated by several factors. In a digital age where information is readily accessible through the internet, the Icelandic Connection recognized the importance of staying relevant and accessible to a wider audience. By going online, the journal can reach a global audience, allowing people with an interest in North American Icelandic culture and history to access its content from anywhere in the world. Furthermore, the transition to digital reduces costs associated with print production and distribution, ensuring the sustainability of the journal in the long run.

Katrín Níelsdóttir is editor-in-chief of Icelandic Connection, in addition to being the Icelandic Special Collection and Rare Book Librarian at the University of Manitoba Libraries.

One of the most significant changes that accompany the transition to online publication is the adoption of an open access model. Open access allows readers to access the journal's content freely and without any financial barriers, aligning perfectly with the mission of culture and history preservation. Here are some key benefits of open access publication:

- Wider Accessibility: Open access removes traditional paywalls and subscription fees, making knowledge and cultural heritage available to anyone with an internet connection. This inclusivity is crucial for reaching a broader audience and ensuring the preservation of the North American Icelandic heritage.
- Global Reach: With open access, the Icelandic Connection can reach a global audience. This not only promotes the heritage within the Icelandic diaspora but also enables individuals worldwide to explore and appreciate this unique cultural legacy.
- Knowledge Dissemination: Open access accelerates the dissemination of knowledge, research, and historical accounts. Researchers, students, and enthusiasts can access valuable resources, fostering a deeper understanding of the North American Icelandic experience.
- Community Engagement: Open access encourages contributions from diverse voices, including local communities, academics, and enthusiasts. This collaborative approach strengthens the bonds within the North American Icelandic community and ensures the journal's long-term sustainability.

The Icelandic Connection's commitment to preserving North American Icelandic culture and history remains unwavering, even as it undergoes a digital transformation. Through open access and a more inclusive approach to submissions, the journal can continue to serve as a vital repository of the community's heritage. Here are some ways in which this transformation will support its mission:

- Diverse Contributors: The shift to an online platform welcomes contributions from a broader range of individuals. This means that local families, researchers, and those with unique artifacts or stories can all actively participate in the preservation process.
- Multifaceted Content: The journal can now feature a wider range of content, including local histories, research on unique artifacts, folklore, and autobiographical accounts. These diverse perspectives enrich the narrative of the North American Icelandic experience.

- Timely Updates: Online publication enables more frequent updates, keeping readers informed about the latest research, events, and stories relevant to North American Icelandic culture and history.
- Digitization of Archives: By digitizing historical archives and records, The Icelandic Connection can help preserve and protect valuable documents, photographs, and artifacts that might otherwise deteriorate over time.

The transition of The Icelandic Connection from print to an online-only publication marks an important step in its journey to preserve North American Icelandic culture and history for future generations. By embracing open access publication and inviting contributions from a diverse range of individuals, the journal ensures that the rich heritage of this unique community remains alive and accessible to all who wish to explore it. This transformation not only propels the journal into the digital age but also strengthens its role as a guardian of North American Icelandic heritage, providing an enduring connection to the past for generations to come.

ARTICLES

Valhalla in Manitoba
An Icelandic Department Trip to New Iceland

DUSTIN GEERAERT

Figure 1: The White Rock Monument on Willow Island, commemorating the 1875 arrival of Icelandic immigrants to Manitoba (Photograph by Coleman Geeraert, 2023).

Dr. Dustin Geeraert is a published author, researcher, and sessional instructor at the University of Manitoba.

This trip to New Iceland was organized as part of ICEL 3320: Old Norse Mythology by instructor Dustin Geeraert, with indispensable support from Icelandic Department Secretary Catari M. Gauthier and Department Head P.J. Buchan. Katrín Níelsdóttir of the Icelandic Collection and Ryan E. Johnson of the Icelandic Department and the University of Iceland, and Stefan Jonasson, editor of the Icelandic-Canadian newspaper Lögberg-Heimskringla, attended the event and helped guide students and guests around the various sites. The group was welcomed to the New Iceland Heritage Museum by Julianna Roberts, and guided through the museum and Viking Park by Elva Simundsson. Thanks to Coleman Geeraert for photography and video. Finally, thanks to Exclusive Bus Lines and to Gimli's Europa Restaurant, which rapidly fed our hungry group.

Figure 2: Left) Einar Jonsson's statue of Icelandic advocate for self-rule Jón Sigurðsson on the grounds of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly (Photograph from Icelandic Canadian Frón, 2022). Right) The same statue is now flanked by new pine trees; this angle also shows Einar Jonsson's work *The Pioneer* in the base supporting the statue; see *Icelandic Connection* 72.2, 54. (Photograph by Coleman Geeraert, 2023).

After a recent tunneling project required uprooting large old pine trees, new pine trees are now growing near the statue of Icelandic advocate for self-rule Jón Sigurðsson (1811-1879), the oldest statue remaining on the grounds of the Manitoba Legislative Building in downtown Winnipeg. This statue, created by Icelandic sculptor Einar Jonsson (1874-1954), "was cast in 1921 from an identical statue in Reykjavík, Iceland and erected by the Icelandic community of Manitoba" (The Manitoba Historical Society). After an early morning pickup at Elizabeth Dafoe Library, our day on September 21 began here.

Figure 3: Left) Jakob Sigurðsson's illustration of Valhalla from the famous Melsteðs-Edda, which travelled from Iceland to Manitoba and back (MyNDIR). Right) Map of New Iceland from the New Iceland Heritage Museum (Photograph by Coleman Geeraert, 2023).

In the Old Norse Mythology of medieval Icelandic books like *The Prose Edda* and *The Poetic Edda*, Valhalla is the heavenly hall which houses heroes who died in battle, the Einherjar. Located in the divine citadel of Asgard, where many generations of heroes feast, hosted by the god of war and poetry, Óðinn, and the goddess of love and witchcraft, Freyja. They battle to the death daily and are resurrected immediately, thus perpetually honing their arts of war until the world itself ends at Ragnarök.

Figure 4: Left) Members of the trip at the Viking Statue in Gimli (Photograph by Coleman Geeraert, 2023). Right) Photographer Coleman Geeraert in a more accurate Viking helmet (Photograph by the author, 2023).

The idea of "Valhalla in Manitoba" was to consider what role the myths and legends of Iceland's medieval literature may have played in the culture of the Icelandic immigrants who settled in New Iceland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whose difficult arrival on the shores of Lake Winnipeg in 1875 is commemorated by the White Rock monument on Willow Island.

Figure 3: Left) A buried time capsule is marked by stones placed in the shape of a ship in the waterfront Viking Park in Gimli (Photograph by Coleman Geeraert, 2023). Right) Blue algae on Valhalla Beach, just north of Gimli (Photograph by Coleman Geeraert, 2023).

To guide our journey, we enlisted the help of three experts in Manitoba's Icelandic-Canadian history. Our first keynote speaker was the editor of the Lögberg-Heimskringla, Stefan Jonasson, who spoke about "Placenames, Publications, and Poets drawing on Old Norse Mythology in the Canadian West" at the New Iceland Heritage Museum's Lady of the Lake Theatre. Stefan focused on New Iceland, the Rural Municipalities of Gimli and Riverton-Bifrost.

Figure 4: The Norse gods Thor and Odin above the town of Gimli, as depicted on one of the murals on the Wharf in Gimli (Photograph by the author, 2014).

In the case of Gimli, the name was suggested even before the town site had been chosen. In *The Poetic Edda*, *The Seeress's Prophecy* describes Gimli as a place in the reborn world after Ragnarök:

> A hall she sees standing, fairer than the sun,
> thatched with gold, at Gimle;
> there the noble lords will live
> and spend their days in pleasure.

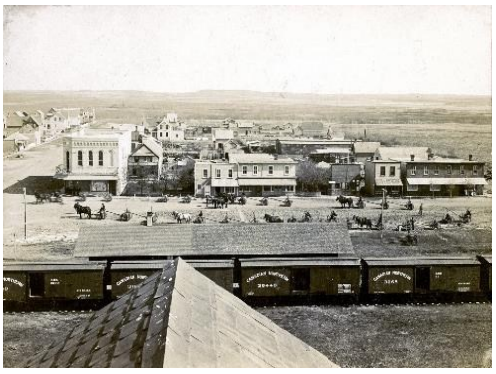

Figure 5: Left) Baldur's Brow (Tripleurospermum Perforatum), a type of Mayweed found in Asia, Europe, and North America (Photograph: Tripleurospermum Perforatum near the marina in Bo'ness, Scotland, by Thomas Skyt, Wikimedia Commons, 2010). Right) The town of Baldur around the year 1900 (Photograph from Tom Mitchell's Prairie Town, Brandon University Archives, 2018).

At another Icelandic settlement in Manitoba, Baldur, it was the local flora—the prevalence of the bright flower known as Baldr's brow—that inspired the town's mythical name. Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* explains:

> Odin's second son is Baldr, and there is much good to tell about him. He is the best, and all praise him. He is so beautiful and so bright that light shines from him. One plant is so white that it is likened to Baldr's brow. It is the whitest of all plants, and from this you can judge the beauty of both his hair and his body. He is the wisest of the gods. He is also the most beautifully spoken and the most merciful, but one of his characteristics is that none of his decisions is effective. He lives at the place called Bredablik [Gleaming Far and Wide]. It is in heaven, and no impurity may be there.

Stefan noted that while Icelandic-Canadian literature has focused more on inspirations such as nature, history, and the Icelandic Sagas, rather than Norse myth and legend, nevertheless Icelandic-Canadians published journals called *Freyja*, *Freyr*, and *Baldur*, and in Alberta, Icelandic-Canadian poet Stephan G. Stephansson included intriguing references to

legendary Norse heroes in his poetry. Stefan distinguished between names chosen by Icelandic settlers and those more recently chosen by land developers, in addition to considering names from Norse Myth that we might have expected to be used in Manitoba, such as "home of the wind," which are absent. Indeed, while Bifröst, the rainbow bridge to the realm of the gods, Ásgarður, is the basis for the placename of a historical municipality in Manitoba, the name Ásgarður itself is absent. Stefan concluded by noting that Icelandic-Canadian writers are once again drawing inspiration from the myths.

Figure 6: Left) After Baldr's death he is held captive by Hel, goddess of the underworld. Hermóðr rides Sleipnir to rescue him in the Melsteðs-Edda (MyNDIR). Right) Rainbow over the prairie (Photo by the author, 2016).

Our second keynote speaker was University of Winnipeg History Professor Ryan Eyford, author of *White Settler Reserve: New Iceland and the Colonization of the Canadian West (2016)*, who spoke about "Norse Mythology and Icelandic Immigration." Ryan noted that Canadian officials connected their own ideas about Scandinavian culture, often drawing on Norse Myth and its heroic concept of Valhalla, to the Icelanders migrating to Canada to settle New Iceland. Some officials were well-acquainted with Icelandic culture, but others held confused notions. The settlers did indeed bring books with them, and maintained a high degree of literacy, writing and publication even during difficult times of poverty, illness and tragedy. Among those books were of course the famous Melsteðs-Edda, named after the New Iceland farm Melsted. This eighteenth century Icelandic book of Old Norse Mythology contains illustrations drawn by Icelandic farmer, poet and scribe Jakob Sigurðsson (1727-1779). Ryan noted that at the Ární Magnússon Institute, where it is catalogued as SÁM 66, the Melsted farm is known as "The last manuscript home." As My Norse Digital Image Repository (MYNDIR) explains:

> The last page of the manuscript lists three names which likely represent the earliest owners of SÁM 66: Gísli Gíslason (1797-1758) from Skörð in Reykjahverfi; St. Petersen, who has not been identified; and Magnús Guðmundsson, a farmer at Sandur in Aðaldalur. Magnús' daughter, Elín Sigríður emigrated to Canada in 1876 and took the manuscript with her. Elín Sigríður's farm near Gimli, Manitoba was called Melsted, which also became the family's surname in Canada. The Icelandic consul to Minnesota, Örn Arnar, bought the manuscript from one of Elín Sigríður's descendants, Ken Melsted in Wynyard, Saskatchewan, and donated it to the Ární Magnússon Institute in Iceland on February 2, 2000.

Our final keynote speaker was Manitoba historian Nelson Gerrard, author of *Icelandic River Saga: History of Riverton, Manitoba and District* (1985) and 2023 recipient of the Lieutenant Governor's Award. At the historic Icelandic-Canadian house, Engimýri, in Riverton, Nelson spoke about "The Invisible Landscape of Local History in Riverton (Rural Municipality of Riverton-Bifrost), Manitoba." The restored historic house was an ideal setting for our last talk of the day, full of well-preserved furniture, tools, books, and artwork that gave a strong impression of what daily life may have been like for the house's original occupants. Nelson's talk focused on local history, genealogy and placenames. He discussed how the Icelandic settlers named their farms, for example: some were named after people, some were farm names transplanted from Iceland, some were named after landscape features,

Figure 7: The historic Icelandic-Canadian house Engimýri in Riverton, Manitoba (Photograph by Coleman Geeraert, 2023).

some were named after particular incidents, a few were satirical, and a few were mythical. Foremost among these is the historic local graveyard, a burial site for those who died during the smallpox outbreak of 1876, called Nástrandir, Corpse Strands.

This graveyard stands on the farmland right next to Engimýri, land that Nelson Gerrard has now been farming for 11 years. Nelson recalled seeing shifting ground conditions which revealed the remains of coffins and human bones and calling in archaeologists to help investigate and document the graves. He had on hand a nineteenth-century Icelandic copy of Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*, and a nineteenth-century English translation as well, which he quoted to explain the mythical Nástrandir that this graveyard is named after:

> What will be after heaven and earth and the whole world are burned? All the gods will be dead, together with the Einherjar [Heroes of Valhalla] and the whole of mankind. Didn't you say earlier that each person will live in some world throughout all ages?'
>
> 'There will be, at that time, many good places to live. So also there will be many evil ones. It is best to be in Gimle in heaven. For those who take pleasure in good drink, plenty will be found in the hall called Brimir. It stands at the place Okolnir [Never Cold]. There is likewise a splendid hall standing on Nidafjoll [Dark Mountains]. It is made of red gold and is called Sindri [Sparkling]. In this hall, good and virtuous men will live. On Nastrandir [Corpse Strands] there is a large, foul hall whose doors look to the north. It is constructed from the spines of snakes like a house with walls woven from branches. The heads of all the snakes turn into the house, spitting venom so that a river of poison runs through the hall, and down it must wade those who are oath breakers and murderers.

This gruesome description brings to mind the "bog people" of northern Europe, who seem to have been executed or sacrificed as punishment for a terrible crime (oath-breaking or murder might qualify). Nelson related a historical story about this graveyard and a settler who failed to respect this resting-place of the dead. Coinciding with themes explored by both earlier keynotes, Nelson considered the fascinating, eerie experience of seeing the past, for those who may know what is there to be seen, as well as the responsibility of preserving it, and the importance of a mythology for both individuals and groups. As Nelson explained, for Icelandic-Canadians the difficulties their

ancestors faced during the migration and early settlement, the beliefs that united them and the schisms that divided them, as well as their many accomplishments as they pursued new lives while maintaining links to their old country, have themselves reached a kind of legendary or mythological status. In humanity's endless search for survival, success, immortality, and living connections to departed ancestors, many forms of Valhalla can be found.

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Guðbergur Bergsson (1932-2023)

~ In Memoriam ~

BIRNA BJARNADÓTTIR

Icelandic poets used to sail the ocean in blind faith to recite poetry for kings in foreign lands. In the twenty-first century, they continue to travel; but different from the medieval bards and more in line with the current zeitgeist, Icelandic poets, novelists, and authors of crime fiction simply enjoy riding on the wave of literary festivals and book fairs around the world. For some, universities remain a destination too. As fate would have it, the University of Manitoba welcomed the writer Guðbergur Bergsson on more than one occasion. If anything, next to the University of Iceland, the University of Manitoba's Department of Icelandic Language and Literature became a leading force on the world's stage in perceiving and exploring Guðbergur's immense creativity that crosses a vast spectrum of fiction, poetry, translations, and essays.

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Guðbergur was born on October 16, 1932 in Ísólfsskáli, a farm on the Reykjanes Peninsula. He moved with his family to the village Grindavík, the now world-famous town at the center of shattering earthquakes and nearby volcanic eruptions. During Guðbergur's childhood and youth, Grindavík was mostly a habitat of fishermen and farmers, and his parents shared the destiny of those born into hard work. After receiving a Teaching Diploma from Iceland's University of Education, and having worked as a cook at the American base in Keflavík, a nurse at Reykjavík's psychiatric hospital, and a weaver in Reykjavík, Guðbergur left Iceland for Spain in 1955 where he completed a degree in literature and art history at La Universidad de Barcelona. That is where Guðbergur met his long-time partner, the publisher and writer Jaime Salinas Bonmatí (1925–2011), and for decades, Guðbergur lived simultaneously in Spain and Iceland. In Guðbergur's final years, he suffered brain hemorrhages but remained active as a writer, translator, and critic. He also learned to fly and rode a motorcycle across the European continent in the company of his then partner Guðni Þorbjörnsson, a graphic designer and pilot, whom Guðbergur also introduced to New Iceland. Guðbergur passed away in their home on September 4, 2023, in Mosfellsbær, a town north of Reykjavík.

With the novel *Tómas Jónsson metsölubók*, (*Tómas Jónsson, Bestseller*), published 1966, Guðbergur secured his place as one of the chief modernists in Icelandic literature and, simultaneously, as one of the leading inheritors of the modern Icelandic literature of Halldór Laxness (1902–1998) and Gunnar Gunnarsson (1889–1975). On the world stage, Milan Kundera (1929– 2023) brought attention to Guðbergur's novel *Svanurinn* (*The Swan*) in translation, (originally published in 1991), and to its author as one of Europe's major writers. In 2016, the novel was adapted to the silver screen by Ása Helga Hjörleifsdóttir in her film *The Swan*. Guðbergur was widely translated, including the tri-language publication (English, German and Icelandic) of the book of poetry *Flatey-Freyr* (2013). He was also a much-respected translator and enriched Icelandic culture with works of world literature, including Cervantes's *Don Quixote* and Gabriel García Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Guðbergur received many awards, including the Icelandic Literature Prize in 1991 for *The Swan*, and in 1998, the Icelandic Literature Prize again for his fictional biography *Faðir*

og móðir og dulmagn bernskunnar (Father and Mother and the Mystery of Childhood), and *Eins og steinn sem hafið fágar* (Like a Stone Smoothed by the Sea). In 2004, Guðbergur received the Swedish Academy Nordic Prize. A recipient of the Orden de Isabel la Católica, in 2010, he received the Spanish Royal Cross (Orden del Mérito Civil). In 2013, Guðbergur was awarded an honorary doctoral degree at the Faculty of Languages and Culture, at the University of Iceland.

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Guðbergur's tri-lingual book of poetry *Flatey-Freyr*, featuring Adam Kitchen's English translation and Hans Brückner's German translation, was published by Kind Publishing at the University of Manitoba's Department of Icelandic Language and Literature. The same department was instrumental in the process that led to the publication of my book on Guðbergur's aesthetics, *Recesses of The Mind. Aesthetics in the Work of Guðbergur Bergsson*, translated by the writer, translator, and artist Kristjana Gunnars. Published by McGill-Queen's University Press in 2012, Guðbergur attended the book launch in the Centennial Concert Hall in Winnipeg that was held in collaboration with the Winnipeg Symphony and its New Music Festival, featuring music by the Icelandic composers Atli Heimir Sveinsson (1938– 2019) and Jóhann Jóhannsson (1969– 2018), who were also present.

Around this time, Guðbergur visited with students of Modern Icelandic Literature in Translation and delivered a couple of lectures in the spectacular Icelandic Collection at the University of Manitoba, including the one that was organized in celebration of the department's 60th Anniversary in the winter of 2011– 2012. In collaboration with Canadians of Icelandic descent in Calgary and Edmonton, the department organized Guðbergur's visit to The Stephan G. Stephansson House in Markerville, and a lecture he gave in Calgary. In collaboration with Tammy Axelsson, who at the time served as the Director of the New Iceland Heritage Museum in Gimli, the department facilitated Guðbergur's and Guðni's visit to New Iceland where they exhibited photographs of the Westfjords in Iceland and recorded film interviews with Canadians of Icelandic descent in the Lake Winnipeg region. Last but not least, for several years, Guðbergur served as an annual guest speaker at the Icelandic Field School (2007– 2015), a summer course held in Iceland by the department in collaboration with the University Centre of the Westfjords. The site of his presentation varied between locations, including Reykjavík, Önundarfjörður (in the Westfjords), and Grindavík, of course.

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In his fictional biography, Guðbergur highlights Grindavík's nature, culture, and existential realities during the interwar years and into World War II, in context with some historic, cultural and existential realities on the world's stage. On the road to Grindavík, the Icelandic Field School participants were familiar with these characteristics of Guðbergur's aesthetics and how his perception of people's bleak yet picturesque existence amidst nature's unrelenting forces can be viewed as a centripetal force in his individual aesthetics—his gateway into Icelandic culture and society, and from there, into the fragmented remains of cultural heritage of the West. The Icelandic Field School participants were also familiar with the idea that Grindavík could be viewed as the Florence of the North, in the sense that for Guðbergur, during his childhood and youth, life there was as colorful as in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and that a description of it could only be made by the one who treads in Dante's footsteps, goes into exile, and dies far away from his Florence.

Another significant source on Guðbergur's aesthetics is a text he wrote around the beginning of this century on himself as a writer for the UNESCO programme Reykjavík – City of Literature. Evidently, the childhood surroundings shaped his perspective. In this text on himself as a writer, he also reflects on how he tried to compose a life's work that is based on his own aesthetics, regardless of the reception. Few things, he writes, are harder on the mind than the endless ocean, the barren lava, earthquakes, and villages on the edges of the world where all storms reach land. Simultaneously, he continues, seen from a certain vantage point, the peripheral surroundings can be constructive, and according to Guðbergur the writer, this outlook could explain why his work is not an experiment in evoking sympathy but reflection, wonder, rebellion against circumstances, and the question: How is a human being to endure the complex trial that nature stages in her life, in her human nature, and in the lives of others?

Our travels with Guðbergur in the transatlantic region belong to the past. Still, in our lives, we remain embraced by nature's trial and can rely on Guðbergur's adventurous experiment.

Stephan G. Stephansson's 170th Birthday Celebration

KATELIN PARSONS

Poet Stephan G. Stephansson (October 3, 1853–August 10, 1927) was only nineteen when he boarded the crowded, foul-smelling horse ship that would carry him away from his birthplace of Iceland. He belonged to the first large group of Icelanders to emigrate from the island in 1873. At the time, Canadian government land agents were heavily promoting Canada as a settlement destination for Icelanders. Most emigrants were destined for Muskoka, Ontario, where the inhabitants of a nearly treeless island were expected to transform forests into farmland.

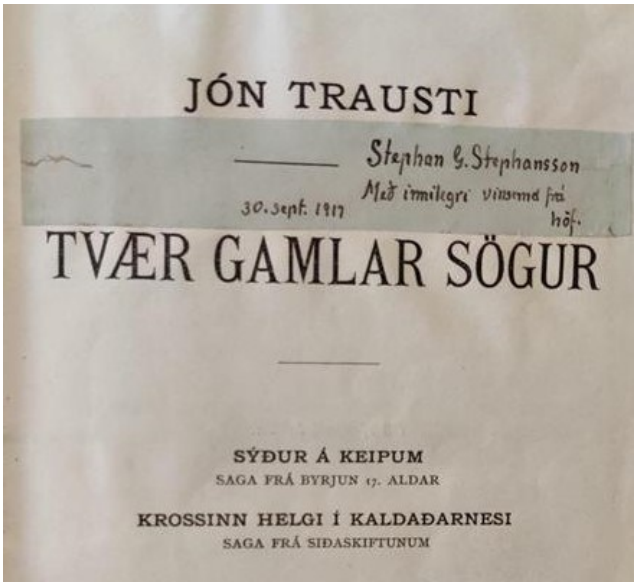
Stephan landed in Québec on August 25th, 1873, and headed with his parents and sister for the United States. He turned twenty in Wisconsin, where he spent his first years in North America. He married his first cousin, Helga Sigríður Jónsdóttir, in 1878, and their oldest son, Baldur, was born in September 1879. The young family moved to Pembina County, North Dakota, where they farmed at the Icelandic settlement at Gardar. They relocated to Alberta in 1889, leaving behind Helga's parents and extended family in North Dakota. They lived on a farm near the small village of Markerville by the Medicine River, where they built a house that later became a provincial historical site and museum. It was at their house in Alberta that Stephan wrote most of his best-known poetry. Famously, Stephan suffered from insomnia, and he would compose poetry during his long nightly waking hours. His six-volume poetry anthology, *Andvökur* [Wakeful Nights], is a product of his seemingly ever-wakeful mind.

Dr. Katelin Parsons is an adjunct lecturer at the University of Iceland and a researcher at the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies.

Stephan and Helga Stephansson had eight children: Baldur, Guðmundur, Jón, Jakob, Stephanie, Jennie, Gestur Cecil and Rosa. Their son Jón passed away as a toddler in 1887 during an outbreak of diphtheria in North Dakota. Gestur was struck by lightning in June 1909, shortly before the publication of the first two volumes of *Andvökur* in Reykjavík. These tragedies deeply affected their family, and Stephan's poetry became an outlet for his grief. The third volume of *Andvökur*, which was published in Reykjavík in May 1910, contains a memorial poem to Gestur.

Andvökur met with widespread acclaim in Iceland and in Icelandic immigrant communities in North America. In 1917, Stephan again crossed the Atlantic. He had left Iceland as an unknown, self-educated farmer's son. Now, he came to Iceland as an honoured visitor: the legendary Poet of the Rockies, whose movements were reported upon enthusiastically by the press.

An exhibition celebrating Stephan G. and his work was opened on October 3rd of this year at the Icelandic Collection at Elizabeth Dafoe Library, which preserves Stephan G.'s book collection. Stephan G. Stephansson's printed books include many gifts sent from other authors active in North America and Iceland. Many were immigrant writers who, like Stephan, continued to write in their first language of Icelandic. Others were Icelanders who admired Stephan's work. From the 1880s, publishing industries thrived both in Iceland and in Icelandic immigrant communities in Canada and the United States. Hundreds of Icelandic books crossed the Atlantic every year.


JÓN TRAUSTI

Stephan G. Stephansson
Með innilegri virðingu frá höf.
30. sept. 1917

TVÆR GAMLAR SÖGUR

SÝÐUR Á KEIPUM
SAGA FRÁ BYRJUN 17. ALDAR

KROSSINN HELGI Í KALDAÐARNESI
SAGA FRÁ SIÐASKIFTUNUM

Figure 8: Jón Trausti, *Tvær gamlar sögur* [Two Old Tales] (Reykjavík, 1916). All photographs taken by Katrín Níelsdóttir.

The following are a selection of hidden gems from Stephan G.'s collection:

Jón Trausti was a popular author who, like Stephan, grew up in poverty and was largely self-educated. He was born at Rif, the northernmost farm in Iceland, on 12 February 1873, a few months before Stephan emigrated to the United States. His birth name was Guðmundur Magnússon. His life

changed for the better when he moved to the town of Seyðisfjörður, where he began his career as a printer. His first novel was published in 1906. He died in Reykjavík on 18 November 1918 during the Spanish Flu outbreak, just a year after sending this book to Stephan.

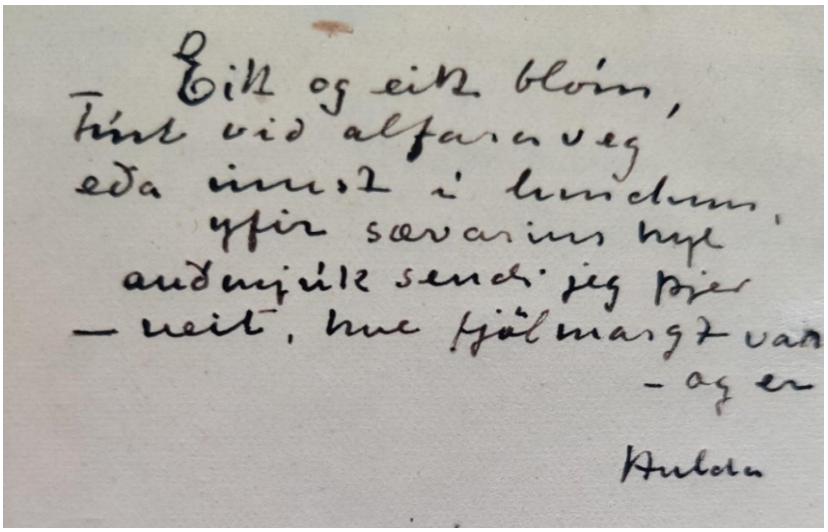


Figure 10: Inscription from Hulda, *Kvæði* [Poems] (Reykjavík, 1909).

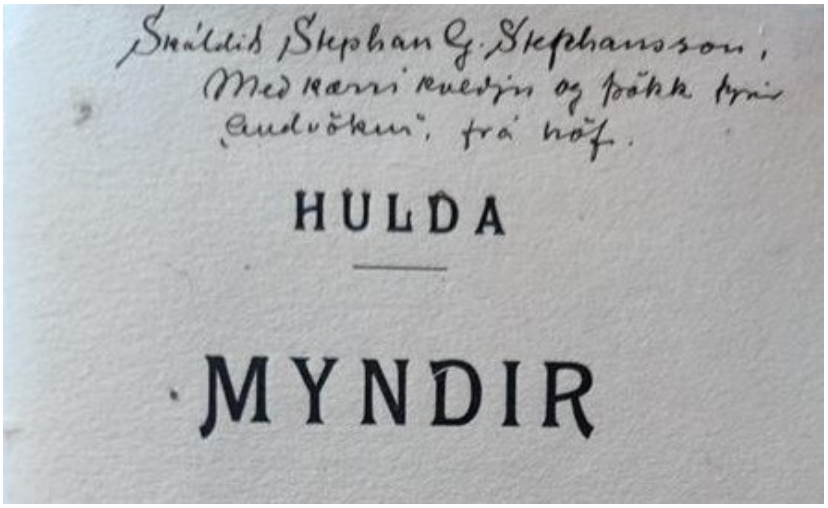
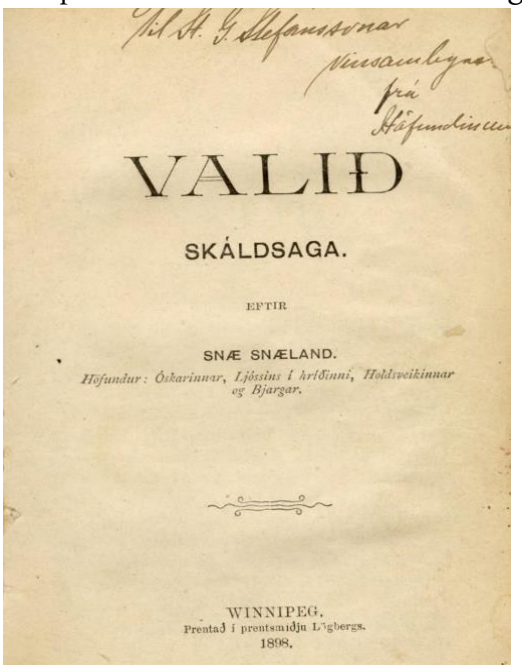


Figure 10: Hulda, *Myndir* [Vignettes] (Akureyri, 1924).

Hulda (1881–1946) was the penname of author Unnur Benediktsdóttir Bjarklind. She was heavily influenced by Icelandic folk poetry and oral traditions, particularly *þulur* poetry. Like many Icelandic women writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Hulda longed to study and to explore the world. She never came to Canada, but she made two extended trips to England and mainland Scandinavia, where she spent time

with academics and fellow writers. Shortly before her death, she won a national poetry competition held to mark the founding of the Republic of Iceland in 1944.


VALIÐ

SKÁLDSAGA.

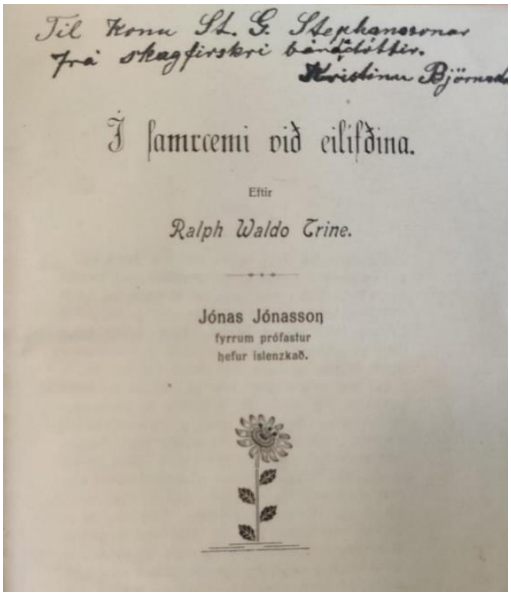
EFTIR

SNÆ SNÆLAND.

Höfundur: Óskarinnar, Ljóssins í hríðinni, Holdsveikinnar og Bjargar.

WINNIPEG.
Prentað í prentsmiðju Lögbergs.
1898.

Figure 11: Snær Snæland, *Valið: skáldsaga* [The Choice: A Novel] (Winnipeg, 1898).


Í samræmi við eilífðina.

Eftir

Ralph Waldo Trine.

Jónas Jónasson
fyrrum prófastur
hefur íslenzkað.

Figure 12: Ralph Waldo Trine, *Í samræmi við eilífðina* [*In Tune with the Infinite*], translated by Jónas Jónasson (Akureyri: Guðspekistúkan á Akureyri, 1917).

Snær Snæland (1861–1924) was a pseudonym of Winnipegger and Icelandic-Canadian immigrant author Kristján Ásgeir Benediktsson, who also published under the name Kr. Ásg. Benediktsson. He came to Winnipeg with his family in 1895 and was active as a writer in Winnipeg's Icelandic community. *Valið* was his first novel and is a romance set in North Iceland. His views on military action differed radically from Stephan's: he joined the Canadian army in 1917 but lost his sight in one eye in an accident and was discharged. He was unable to support himself after his accident and moved to Gimli, where he focused his energy on genealogy and history.

Not all books in the collection belonged to Stephan G. Stephansson. Ralph Waldo Trine (1866–1958) was an American philosopher and member of the New Thought movement, which promoted the power of human thought in influencing one's circumstances and one's personal success. This translation was published by the Akureyri lodge of the Theosophical Society. The translator, Jónas Jónasson from Hrafnagil (1856–1918), is best known today for his monumental book on Icelandic folk customs, *Íslenskir þjóðhættir*. Kristín Björnsdóttir, a self-described farmer's daughter from Skagafjörður, sent Helga Stephansson a copy as a gift.

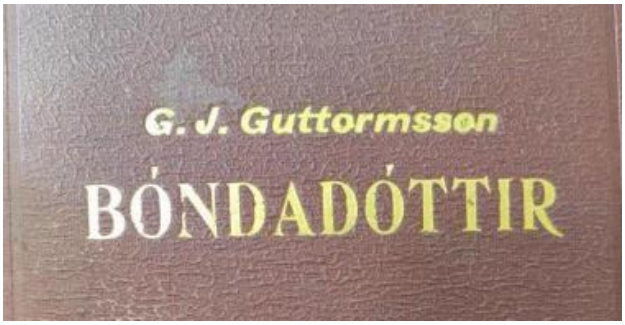


Figure 13: Guttormur J. Guttormsson, *Bóndadóttir* [Farmer's Daughter] (Winnipeg, 1920).

Poet and playwright Guttormur J. Guttormsson (1878–1966) was the Canadian-born son of Icelandic immigrant parents, poet Pálína Ketilsdóttir (1849–1886) and her husband, farmer Jón Guttormsson (1841–1896). He lived most of his life at his birthplace of Víðivellir, Manitoba, just outside of Riverton. Although he was fluent in English, he used his mother tongue of Icelandic for his writings. His family donated his personal library and writing desk to the Icelandic Collection of the University of Manitoba. This copy of *Bóndadóttir* contains a verse specially addressed to Stephan. In a letter sent 9 September 1920, Stephan thanked Guttormur for this book and responded with a verse of his own: they may have grown up with sheep and cows, but Iceland's farmers' daughters were fine ladies now.

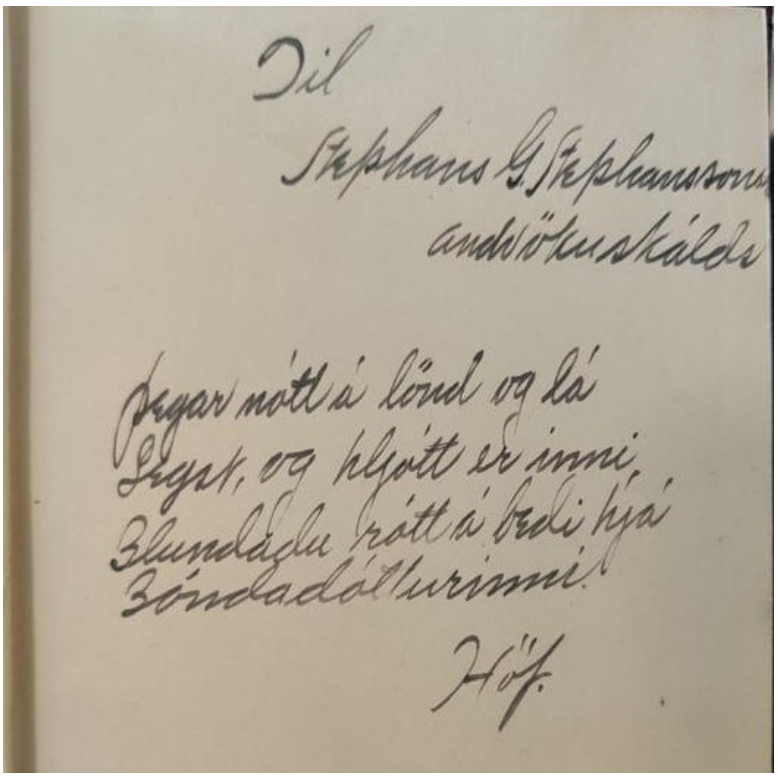


Figure 14: Inscription from Guttormur J. Guttormsson, *Bóndadóttir* [Farmer's Daughter] (Winnipeg, 1920).

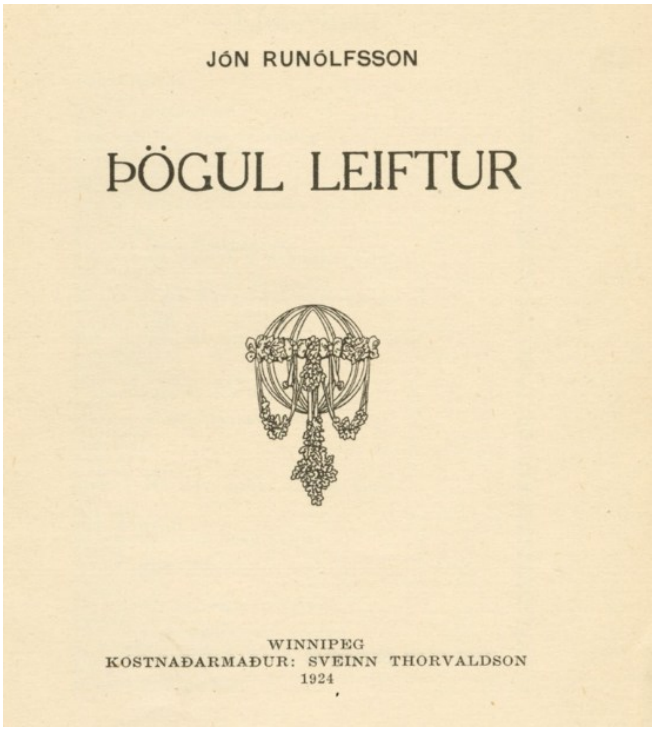


Figure 16: Jón Runólfsson, *Þögul leiftur* [Silent Flashes] (Winnipeg, 1924).

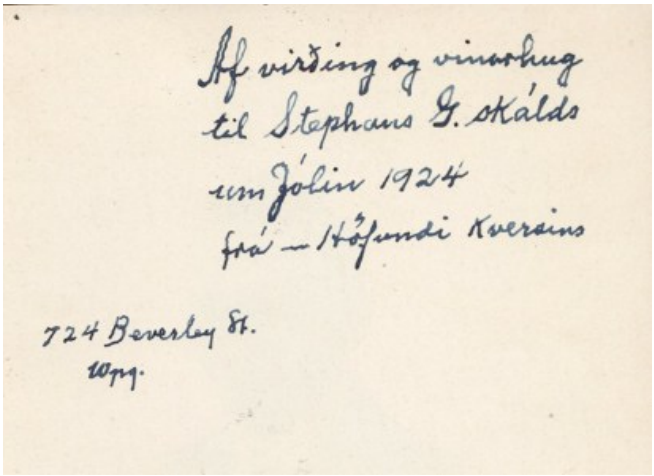


Figure 15: Inscription from Jón Runólfsson, *Þögul leiftur* [Silent Flashes] (Winnipeg, 1924).

Icelandic immigrant poet Jón Runólfsson lived in Winnipeg, where he worked as a teacher. Jón lived at 724 Beverley St. and sent Stephan a copy of his book as a Christmas present. The title of this book later inspired the name of the *Silent Flashes* exhibit on photography and Icelandic emigration, which was curated by Nelson Gerrard and first opened at the Icelandic Emigration Centre at Hofsós in 2004.

All photographs from Stephan G. Stephan's personal library were provided by the University of Manitoba Icelandic Special Collections. All books photographed as well as the original cabinet and contents can be viewed inside the Iceland Room on the third floor of Dafoe library. An exhibition built on this collection and related archival materials was hosted in the Thorlakson Gallery in the fall of 2023.

The Wolf Moon

A Viking Legend: The Descendants of Odin

AINSLEY BLOOMER

DEAR READER,

I would like to share a special night with you and what a night it was!

It was the first TGIF Dinner of the year at the Scandinavian Centre where I gave a talk about my new book, *A Viking Legend: The Descendants of Odin.* When arrangements were made for the event, little did anyone know that it would be the week of the Wolf Moon. It was a surprise because another name for Odin is Yfling or Wolf. The descendants of Odin are the Yflings, or the Wolf Clan. I was sharing a story about the Wolf Clan during the week of the Wolf Moon, and I wondered if there was a connection between Old Norse mythology and the Wolf Moon. What is the Wolf Moon and how did it get its name?

After some research, several answers to these questions came to light, although a direct connection seems illusive, as it appears the naming of the Wolf Moon happened long after the polytheistic religion was practiced or the Viking Age had ended, although, there are several similarities.

Wolves are nocturnal creatures and like the moon they come out at night. However, they are at times seen during the day. The Wolf Moon is the name of the first full moon of the new year, when the sun and moon are directly opposite each other, and the sun's rays reflect upon the moon. There have been many names for the first full moon of the year and the sources of the name Wolf Moon are believed to be Celtic, Old English and North American Indigenous. In the northern hemisphere, January is a cold dark month and people heard the wolves howling during this full moon period. They thought the wolves were howling at the full moon. Later it was found that the sound of the wolves' howl, helps them identify their locations, repel intruders, and make mating calls, as wolves tend to breed from January to early spring.

Ainsley Bloomer is an author and teacher of Old Norse Mythology, as well as an avid supporter of all things Icelandic.

Although the naming of the Wolf Moon is most likely North American, wolves play a prominent role in Old Norse mythology. Wolves were hated and loved, feared and respected, they could be brutal yet beautiful, or ferocious foes and friends of the gods. Two well known wolves Freki "the ravenous one" and Geri "the greedy one" accompanied Odin, the chief of the Wolf Clan, during battles. They were loyal and always stayed by Odin's side. As a reward they received portions of meat from Saehrimnir, (recorded as a magical boar or sea best) whose meat was given only to the warriors of Valhalla, the Einherjar. There are several wolves in the stories of Old Norse mythology. They are mysterious, and represent the cruelty of the untamed wilderness, while being fearsome hunters and savage enemies. They have become symbols of survival, life, family, loyalty, spirituality, guidance, love, as well as fear, destruction, chaos, and death.

The Scandinavian people of the past lived in harmony with nature and were well aware of its delicate and nurturing qualities as well as its terrible and treacherous unpredictability. They were also very aware of the neighbouring wolves. Wolves thrived in the cold, harsh and sometimes unforgiving environment. They were revered and thorough teachers of survival in the wilderness. Wolves lived and hunted in packs, shared their food, cared for their young, and were fiercely protective of family. The people followed suit, lived in groups or villages, hunted together, shared their food, cared for their young and were protective of family. One could not survive alone in an unrelenting environment.

A Viking Legend: The Descendants of Odin has had several family-like groups that have brought it to fruition. Members of my natural family, friends, supporters, the book club at the Scandinavian Cultural Centre in Winnipeg, the Department of Icelandic Language and Literature at the University of Manitoba along with many students, Prairie Heart Press, and as far away as the Eskilstuna City Museum in Sweden. These groups have all contributed to the survival of this project.

The reading chosen for the evening of the TGIF, was not about wolves or the moon, but about a member of the Old Norse mythological Wolf Clan. Her name is Aslaug or Kraka, and her story is in Chapter 44, entitled, "The Saga of Aslaug." It begins when a group of king's men discover Kraka, who, unknown to them is the daughter of Sigurd Sigmundarson, the dragon slayer, also a descendant of Odin and Brynhild Budladottir, the valkyrie and warrior maiden. A shorter version of the reading follows:

One evening, ships of the king and his companions came in along the coast, close to where Kraka lived. Some men, in smaller boats, were sent to the shore. The men were ordered to find an oven to bake some bread. They came across the humble hut of Grima and Aki, and asked the couple if they would allow them to use their oven.

"Kind folk, we have been sent by King Ragnar Lothbrok to bake our bread. We have many provisions we can share, if you allow us the use of your oven to bake our bread."

Grima and Aki, with hopes of receiving provisions from them, allowed the men inside to use the oven. Grima was curious and, in a tired voice, asked, "Who is this king?"

"We are from Denmark, and Ragnar Sigurdsson is our king. He was the son of Sigurd the Ring."

The men began preparing for the baking of the bread.

Kraka had finished her evening bath in the river and returned to her home to find the men inside. She was surprised to see them there, but Grima said, "Kraka, help the men bake their bread."

"Yes, of course, mother."

With that, she took off her cloak and hung it in the hall. When she entered the room, the men were dumbfounded by her dazzling appearance. Her smile filled the haggard, old, dark room with a brilliant fragrant breath of fresh air and sunshine. Her blue-green eyes shone, as she gracefully took to kneading the dough. The men, mesmerized by her magnificence, followed her every move. When she told the men to watch the bread bake, all they could do was watch her. She was beautiful beyond any other woman they had ever seen. They were all captivated, as Kraka moved about the room doing her chores. The men only had eyes for her and, unfortunately, they burned their bread. They had to go back to their ship with burnt bread. When King Ragnar asked them about the mishap of the burnt bread, they told him about the beautiful, young woman in the humble hut.

"We tell you, King Ragnar, this woman is like no other we have ever seen!" All the men blurted out a description of her as being curvy, beautiful, dazzling, magnificent, delightful and radiant, with shining skin and flowing, golden hair! One confessed, "We were all so bedazzled by her beauty, that we burned our bread."

Ragnar's curiosity was set aflame, "Since all of you describe her beauty with such zeal, I wish to see her for myself, but I also want to test her intelligence. A beauty with no brain is no beauty at all.

Approach this woman and tell her that the king requests her presence. But, tell her this: when she comes before the king, she must neither be dressed nor undressed, neither eating nor fasting, and neither alone nor in the presence of company."

Figure 17: *Ragnar Lothbrok and Kraka* by Louis Moe (1898)

The men thought these requests were rather unusual, but they did not question their king and did as he commanded. The following morning, Ragnar's men went back to the hut. They gave Aki and Grima a bountiful amount of supplies and then approached Kraka. One said, "Young woman, King Ragnar wishes for your presence on his ship. He has asked you to come before him neither dressed nor undressed, neither eating nor fasting, and neither alone nor in the presence of company."

Kraka thought the requests extraordinary yet interesting. She replied, "Dear men, you will need to give me some time to prepare, as these are strange and unusual requests."

Aslaug thought about the requests for a while, and then knew what she would do. She asked Aki for a clean, unused fishing net. He obliged and gave her a net that she dressed herself in, showing she was dressed but also undressed, as she was not wearing clothing. Her long silken locks flowed to the

ground, so her whole body was covered under the net. She gathered up an onion from the garden, cleaned it, placed it in her mouth and bit on it, showing that she was not fasting, because she had food in her mouth, but she was not eating, as the onion was only bitten and held by her teeth. For the last riddle, she took along her pet dog, thereby showing she was not alone, because she was with her dog, yet she was not in the company of any people.

When she was ready, she went with the men to Ragnar. When the king saw her arrive, he laughed out loud and was truly fascinated and impressed by her creative resourcefulness and her exquisite beauty. "You certainly have done what I have asked, and I am thoroughly impressed. Come and sit by me a while."

The young Kraka sat by Ragnar, and they laughed with one another. He found her beautiful, as his men had said, and he also found her uniquely wise. He thought that she would make a good companion for him and now looked upon young Aslaug as a future wife. He was comfortable with her. She was beautiful and charming and had proven herself very wise. He proposed marriage and, to his astonishment, the young Kraka refused the king's proposal.

"I must admit I am grateful for your offer of marriage, and I feel I could have a place by your side. Yet, this proposal comes too early in our relationship. In all fairness, Ragnar, how can I honour your proposal, when I may never see you again, because you are going to war. Might I be widowed before even knowing you?"

"Kraka, my beauty, what you say is true, as we are going on a mission. Yet, love swells within my breast for you, and I believe the gods are with us. I pledge to come back for you and, when I return, will you be my bride and my queen?"

"If you still have your breath within you and your wits about you after this battle quest, I may then consider it."

Does Kraka marry the king or is there another path for them?

In times of uncertainty, battle or conflict, the sight of a grey wolf was considered a good omen because it was believed the wolf would protect the warriors in battle and lead them to victory. Everyone needs a protector and a guide to success. We must remember that these are folktales and mythology. In real life, if one sees a wolf, it is best to get back into the car, move to safety in numbers or find a secure shelter somewhere, as one surely desires

to be home for dinner and not to be dinner for a wild wolf. Wolves are unpredictable, even with the mysterious mythology and fantastical folktales surrounding them, they can be extremely dangerous creatures. Yet, wolves need other wolves for survival, just as people need other people to survive and live in this world. Other people can help you nurture, live, grow and prosper. I am grateful to everyone who helped me and continues to help and joins me on this journey. I hope you have found your tribe, people, clan or will soon find one. I also hope you enjoyed the reading.

A Viking Legend: The Descendants of Odin is a retelling of Old Norse mythological tales from several different sources. It is available at H.P. Tergesen & Sons and The New Iceland Heritage Museum in Gimli. It is also available at McNally Robinson at Grant Park in Winnipeg or can be ordered online through prairieheartpress.ca.

Figure 18: The book cover of *A Viking Legend*

For the night of the TGIF, special thanks go to our Icelandic Consul Vilhjalmur Wiium, who held us all in stitches as he described *bóndadagur* [Husband's Day] in Iceland. He also supported my work and during the reading he read all the parts of all the king's men. I would like to thank Louise Horst, an advocate for my book, who was MC for the evening and read the part of Aslaug (with an attitude). Many thanks go to Ryan Johnson, a PhD Candidate with the University of Iceland, and an Instructor with the University of

Manitoba. Ryan has worked on many projects, including vesturheimur.arnastofnun.is or the database that houses digital access to hundreds of historically written documents owned or created by Canadians and Americans of Icelandic descent. I am grateful that Ryan accepted, edited, and supported my project, and during the reading, he read the part of King Ragnar.

Figure 19: Craig Gibb, Ainsley Bloomer, and John Robin.

I would like to thank Craig Gibb and John Robin from Prairie Heart Press who attended the evening. Craig designed the cover of the book. The landscape represents the people living in a harsh environment who did not have much but had each other. Together they shared their stories, songs, and poems beside their hearths or bonfires. In addition, the ship represents the Old Norse mythological tales. Lastly, some believe that when our ancestors die, they become the northern lights.

Also special thanks to Michael and Jolyne of Bonne Cuisine who made a wonderful chicken dinner with amazing vegetables and dessert.

Happy Reading
Ainsley Bloomer

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Also known as *Krákumál*, this poem, as legend has it, was composed by Ragnar loðbrók while imprisoned in King Ælla of Northumbria's snake pit. The French Nordic music group Skáld has recently recorded a song with excerpts from this poem.

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Óðinn Stole My Mythological Virginity

Do You Want to Know More? And What?

DIANE ALEXANDER

The space fashioned in the creation passages of the medieval Icelandic poems "The Sayings of the High One" and "The Seeress's Prophecy" offers the reader a unique understanding into Norse branches of Germanic culture during the Viking Age. Two texts, *The Poetic Edda* (a collection of eddic poetry) and Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* (a narrative which begins with gods as historical and patriarchal kings), each written during the 13th century, are vehicles of the production and reproduction of pagan mores and values. While the storyteller of *The Poetic Edda* is unknown (though Sæmundur the Wise once held the distinction), the author and compiler of *The Prose Edda* is known, Snorri Sturluson, an "ambitious and sometimes ruthless leader" who "was also a man of learning, with deep interests in the myth, poetry, and history of the Viking Age."[1] Sturluson's translation stands as an authoritative reading that influences our collective views on Norse Mythologies.

1. Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, i.

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Reader-response criticism works within a triadic relationship between the author, the work, and the reader. And they are always based within a historical context controlled by the dominant cultural biases and power systems which influences our knowledge and understanding. Only when new historical approaches are then disseminated, do the old narrative misreadings dissemble. How then, if these aspects are controlled or conditioned by such inherent structural systems (which were historically patriarchal back to pre-Christian times), can the feminine divine stand as an agency of authoritative narration? Misreading (reading against the grain) of the work contributes to unpacking knowledge and power structures that gain authority through oppressive historical repetitions. By subverting the authority of Óðinn as the main source of knowledge and inverting his authority, I give that voice, knowledge, and power back to the Seeress. Listen closer to the renowned and reanimated Seeress in "The Seeress's Prophecy," who perceives a more far-reaching vision than that of Óðinn himself. I imagine the Seeress, her back stone straight, her head tilted just so, with a searing tone (resplendent with underpinnings of scorn) asking Óðinn, "Do you want to know more: and what?"[2]

LITERARY TERMS, MAGIC, AND GENDER

Let's begin then, with the 'what'—literary terms. Remember, there is no ideal reader. Agency and authority emerge within a triadic interpretation based on cultural and historical context. There is no universal reader outside authoritative power systems. So, we must consider the story teller's imagination inverting formed identities and spaces within the constructs of both sacred text and folktale telling. Inside this paradigm, a symbiotic and sacred relationship lays encapsulated as an inherited legacy. The genre or classification of the storyteller, the work and the reader's critical response begins an ancient text's reanimation of sorts. Within this newly formed liminal space, "the meaning of texts is the 'production'" or "creation of the individual reader," then enters a realm of formed magic mirroring an informed universal consciousness.[3] At that moment, the reader's imagination, aided by the writer's words, evokes the creative power stored in the mind's eye and expresses, in form, the magic of identity. Here the narrative authority is controlled by the construction of an ideal or universal reader. The reader is now both linked to and informed by the storyteller within the written work, "with the basic conditions of our existence."[4]

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[2]. Larrington, "The Seeress's Prophecy," vv. 28, 29, 34, 35, 38, 40, 49, 59, 60.

[3]. Abrams and Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 330.

[4]. Tatar, The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales, 8.

Within this symbiotic relationship of storyteller, work, and reader, signposts signal identity (and therefore the form or traits) of the character through imagery. As Elizabeth Cowie suggests, the reader navigates "a system which produces through the articulation of signifying elements."[5] Words then act as "signposts" pointing us onward or "signalling" to us how to perceive a piece, a character, or space. Identity through imagery, however, is often shaped in a gendered landscape, one skewed by the storyteller's experience within a universal consciousness which supports his masculinized space. When magic or the use of magic occurs in medieval Icelandic literature, ("women's magic" in particular is textually denounced), it penetrates the heteronormative discourse; imagination, identity, and space emerge fractured, stolen, and subsumed within a new form of the storyteller's themes.

Figure 20: *The Norns* by Karen Johannsson

Gendered Themes Collide: Óðinn Usurps the Female Deity

These themes nestled within the storyteller's imagery, emerge as fluid forms of social mores and values expressions. In *The Prose Edda*, Snorri Sturluson's underpinnings of Christian Humanism, insert and invert female identity into a dismissive haunted mythological space of banishment. The creation theme according to Snorri, sets Judeo-Christian Patriarchal norms as the foundations of the world with, "In the beginning, almighty God created

[5]. Cowie, "Woman as Sign," 49.

heaven and earth and all that pertains to them. Lastly, he created two people, Adam and Eve."[6] This paradigm denies the female's point of view (the Seeress and other female deities), her knowledge and position as storyteller.

In earlier versions of the sagas less influenced by Christianity, underpinnings reflecting this paradigm are seen developing. In Carolyne Larrington's translations of eddic poems "The Sayings of the High One" and "The Seeress's Prophecy," concurrent themes of birth and rebirth cradle feminine magical knowledge, but within the beginnings of an intrusive narrator's view, the feminine space and place is dictated and delineated. Here, in "Sayings of the High One," Óðinn penetrates the creation myth.

> I know that I hung on a windswept tree
> nine long nights,
> wounded with a spear, dedicated to Odin,
> myself to myself,
> on that tree of which no man knows
> from where its roots run
> (v. 138)

In this space, Óðinn infiltrates the unknowable of women's wisdom. Armoured and engorged with hypermasculinity, he is now usurper of the sacred identity and form of woman. And what? He emerges as thief of feminine runes. Divine symbols of sacred place upon the image of world order, now lay shattered and out of balance. He rides upon "Yggr's Steed" (Yggdrasill, the World Tree) "hung on a windswept tree." The world tree's identity, "Yggr" (another name for Óðinn and "Steed" or stud) manifests as "the source of life and all knowledge, and all fate" from whose "fruits heal the womb ailments of women" as he awaits the birth of knowledge in the form of runes.[7] Óðinn is penetrated "with a spear," the phallic symbol of war, of destruction, of production and reproduction as he sows his body through a brutal wound, a mad, man-made vagina, he invites "[him]self into [him]self" (line 137). Óðinn, the storyteller, re-inscribes the surface and space of women's most sacred source of being—giving life.

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[6]. Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, 3.

[7]. Lecouteux, Encyclopedia of Norse and Germanic Folklore, Mythology, and Magic, 323.

While pregnant women endure the "long nights" of nine months with a mother's hope to enter the delivery room, Óðinn the "All Father" mocks feminine divinity by enduring "nine long nights," foregoing nine months, to enter the delivery room of wisdom. Irony drips with his blood, as Óðinn pronounces the use of his sacrificial spear Gungnir (quaint naming of a phallic symbol) which is fashioned from Yggdrasill's branches. These are the very same branches from which practitioners of *seiðr*, of women's magic, receive their staffs. Throughout the Eddas, there are whispers of derision should any man practise seiðr, but here? Óðinn's punishment for seeking women's magic? He, the new usurper of divine feminine identity, dons his cloak of hubris, warm in a newfound awakening and utmost authority. Óðinn, the storyteller, is rebirthed on "that tree of which no man knows/from where it's roots run" (v. 137). In Larrington's translation of "The Seeress's Prophecy," the Seeress, with grace and beauty, to whom the female reader imagines the night belongs, amongst the stars, as she dances unadorned—hands over the words of all women's magic to the Hanged Man. As the runes drift towards Óðinn's grasping hands, even as "nine times the Space that measures Day and Night is endured, the Seeress knows the God's fate can never be averted—regardless of held or stolen wisdom.[8]

Figure 21: By Steinunn Bessason (2023)

[8]. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 50.

SEIÐR AS WOMAN'S SONG

Seiðr, according to Annette Høst of the Scandinavian Centre for Shamanic Studies, "was a living tradition used for divination and transformation up until middle or late Viking age."[9] Women entered communities, escorted by a chosen man (as befitting her status), one hand on their staff and a sacred song at the ready as they waited to sit upon the *seiðhjallr* (seiðr seat). Wise women sought the story's ending to whatever plighted the people gathered in the hall. Back to the beginnings, the role of the Seeress (writer) transforms to storyteller, shaping the work for the audience (readers) before her. I remember when Haraldur Bessason told me to read *The Vinland Sagas: The Norse Discovery of America*, translated by Magnús Magnússon and Hermann Pálsson. *Grænlendinga saga* recounts a moment in time for me as a 20-year-old reading chapter 4 where "Guðrid is told her future," and I learned of Þorbjörg lítilvölva from *Eiríks saga rauða*. Imagine, being the last of nine sisters, who, according to the footnotes, "had all been prophetesses."[10] Þorbjörg's dress mirrors that of the Goddess Freyja, an homage, I believe, to the woman who gave the gods the gift of divination.

> She wore a blue mantle fastened with straps and adorned with stones all the way down to the hem. She had a necklace of glass beads. On her head she wore a black lambskin hood lined with white cat's fur. She carried a staff with a brass-bound knob studded with stones. She wore a belt made of touchwood, from which hung a large pouch, and in this she kept the charms she needed for witchcraft. On her feet were hairy calfskin shoes with long thick laces which had large tin buttons on the ends. She wore catskin gloves, with the white fur inside. (81-82)

I include this description to mark the space of honour within the works referred to as the Eddas. While Óðinn swung grasping for power—the *völva* (staff carrier), the *seiðkona*, or *spákona* (seeress)—Þorbjörg, engages the spirits with "sweet" song. A song whose listeners wonder if they, "had ever heard a fairer song," as they are embraced within a narrative wholly feminine and divine. While some songs are "strong" or "harsh" according to Høst, they do not evoke the violence of Óðinn's demand for the knowledge hidden within runic magic. Þorbjörg shares her knowledge with the community and in "The Sayings of the High One," a collection of "wisdom stanzas" to instruct the community of acceptable mores and

[9]. Høst, "The Legacy of Seiðr," 11.

[10]. Magnús Magnússon and Hermann Pálsson, *The Vinland Sagas: The Norse Discovery of America*, 81-84.

values, Óðinn inserts himself over the omniscient storyteller and emerges as narrator and booster arbitrating women's sacred knowledge.

> I know an eighteenth, which I shall never teach
> to any girl or any man's wife—
> it's always better when just one person knows,
> that follows at the end of the spells—
> except that one woman who embraces me in her arms,
> or who may be my sister.
> (v. 163)

Óðinn will trade rune magic for sex while a seeress will teach the willing seeker, destined by birth, the connection between the world seen and unseen which she honours. From the branches of Yggdrasill, her staff ground her to the earth as she seeks to share knowledge to heal the community. As I read these passages of old, I thought back to January 2018, the night Hilmar Örn Hilmarsson *allsherjargoði* (Ásatrú chief religious official) gave a lecture at the University of Manitoba in the Icelandic Collection. A composer of note, he premiered "a choir and orchestral piece, *7 Friends*" at the University of Manitoba.[11] That cold winter eve, he stood at the lectern insisting there was no music in the Eddas. With Óðinn's hubris he presented on screen four overlapping ancient magical staves that linked Winnipeg, Iceland, and Manitoba's Interlake region. Without seeking permission from seeresses in the New World, he brought shame of a particular patriarchal form. Within the Eddas, the power of prophecy, the use of magic within the walls of the Icelandic Reading Room, manage in this day and age to both honour and denigrate.

Figure 22: Icelandic actor and musician Björk as Seeress in *The Northman* (2022)

[11]. Wray Enns, "Winnipeg New Music Festival returns with more envelope-pushing pieces."

THE SEERESS KNOWS

Dated to the latter part of the tenth century and written in the *fornyrðislag* metre, "The Seeress's Prophecy" penetrates the heteronormative discourse by situating identity, space, and place outside of the storyteller's Judeo-Christian politicized imagination.[12] However, within the paradigm of storyteller, work, and listener, the one who transcribes directs the experience. The first of the poems included in *The Poetic Edda*, "The Seeress's Prophecy," situates identity in the given title with voice in the first-person narrative. The Seeress, the teller of tales foretold, predates the creation of the world. She observes Óðinn's betrayal of Ymir and all that the future will bring for Giants, Gods, Vanir, Elves, Dwarves and Humans alike. The Seeress sees the origin of imaginings, of literal space—of form's fluidity. She is the breath of magic's beginnings—of spirit's dance to become. While Óðinn in "The Sayings of the High One" hangs "on that tree of which no man knows / from where its roots run," the Seeress shares the knowledge of the ash tree, Yggdrasil, "the mighty Measuring Tree down below the earth" and of "nine worlds" and "nine giant women" with the reader, as Óðinn remains in boastful darkness.[13]

In Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*, the Seeress is both a foremost source of knowledge and a source in need of correction. As the Seeress recites the creation of the world, Sturluson's cultural colonialist conquest of authorial intent occurs in the 22nd stanza. The omniscient narrator's heteronormative discourse suggests place now acts as a politically sanctioned catalyst for paradigms of hyper-masculinity. Snorri recounts a time when, "she remembers the first war in the world," this removes the power, the place, the space, and the identity of the Seeress as a magical Goddess overseeing creation. An active agent turns a passive observer as a re-producing identity "through definitions of similarity, continuity, and different versions of identity work to include and exclude populations in specific ways."[14] In this shift, a sacred text of creation enters a dimension of a mythical folktale/legend far removed from magic as a source of feminine power. At this point, I believe writer/storyteller, work, and reader/listener use universal consciousness as bricks of imagination's bridge to embrace polytheistic religion. Divination tumbles in the reader/listener's mind from community conduct viewed from a source of magic infused to a practical application.

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[12]. Larrington, "The Seeress's Prophecy," 3.

[13]. Larrington, "Sayings of the High One" v. 138; "The Seeress's Prophecy," v. 2.

[14]. Mackey, "Death by Landscape," 125.

FROM SACRED TEXTS TO LORE

The division of sacred texts to folktale, legend, and lore negates their shared commonality. In The Book of Runes, Blum opens with "The Speech of the High One" from *The Poetic Edda*. Runic magic's "function determines form, use confers meaning and an Oracle responds to the requirements of the time in which it is consulted." First, the reader sees and intuitively acknowledges the signal of male autonomy and absolute authority in the opening page. Blum further admonishes, "that the Runes are not meant to be used for divination or fortune telling. The disposition of the future is in God's hands, not ours."[15] This follows the writing of *The Saga of Eric the Red* as a work "written under the influence of some churchmen" even though "Christians had sought out many of these *völvur* who were skilled in the art of magic" and then of course having learned a fate, "had them killed for heresy."[16] Numerology, "the branch of knowledge that deals with the occult significance of numbers" is unironically featured in numerous religious texts.[17] The Talmud, "is the record of rabbinic teachings that spans a period of about six hundred years, beginning in the first century C.E." is "made up of two separate works: the *Mishnah*, a compilation of Jewish laws [...] and the *Gemara*, the rabbinic commentaries and discussions on the *Mishnah*."[18] In the same period of time that these texts were compiled, it is believed that *gematria* began to be employed where "each letter of the Hebrew alphabet is also a number, so that every Hebrew word has a numerical value."[19]

In the Eddas, the object is signified in position as a whole and elevated into the realm of magic through a numerical standing. Of the 62 stanzas in "The Seeress's Prophecy," stanza 60 has 3 lines, stanza 22 has 5 lines and stanza 21 has 2 lines (Larrington 12). In the 21st stanza, line 83 and 84, "they laid down laws, those chose lives" and the next, "for the sons of men, the fates of men" an omniscient narrator, invokes the "male gaze" of institutional religious rights rupturing the individuality of women's magic, women's voice of origin within this hegemonic patriarchy of heteronormative discourse. The Seeress is submerged within the narrative structure of a sacred text and emerges in form briefly as "the

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[15]. Blum, *The Book of Runes*, 14-15.

[16]. "9. Thorbjorg litilvolva - Can she see the future?," Overview, Saga Museum, accessed May 25, 2024, https://sagamuseum.is/overview/#thorbjorg-litilvolva.

[17]. *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 3rd ed. (2011), s.v. "numerology."

[18]. The Talmud, Reform Judaism, accessed June 9, 2024, https://reformjudaism.org/talmud.

[19]. Potok, *The Chosen*, 128; for more information about gematria, see also Issitt and Main, *Hidden Religion*, 8-11.

silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning."[20] She transpires into a Grimm's caricature of the lackless female agency found in the works of folktales, legends, and myths. Regardless of the Judeo-Christian or Muslim religious dictates, the people choose who to elevate; and "despite being on the margins of the society in Iceland the völva was a greatly respected profession and only suffered if the prophecy did not suit the protagonist of the saga."

THEORISTS HERE, THERE, AND EVERYWHERE

Figure 23: *The Messengers* by Nicole Nixon

Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) speaks of "romantic nationalism," Max Luthi (1909-1991) speaks of folklore form and structure's "one dimensionality" of characters, and in Norse mythology, Snorri Sturluson speaks of a religious base of conduct under "one named God." Judith Butler, a post structuralist, suggests that narrative structure incorporates a "surface of permeability" for which gender is performed, an 'act,' of "corporeal style" constructed through societal "legitimation" when in fact, gender, she contends is a "regulatory fiction."[21] A nation's landscape is the production and reproduction of written work. For, "if the state is what binds, it is also clearly what can and does unbind. And if the state binds in the name of the nation conjuring a certain version of the nation forcibly, if not powerfully, then it also unbinds, releases, expels, [and] banishes."[22] The historical figures of the author, the work, and even the reader, are often assumed masculine, which is why the voice of the feminine within texts is submerged.

When the storyteller enters the realm of the imagination, the altered state of words sacred to the clan, the oral manifests into the written record. The law of the culture, the

[20]. Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 35.

[21]. Butler, "Gender Space Architecture," 96.

[22]. Butler and Spivak, Who Sings the Nation-State?

way of ascent as male or female warriors, penetrates the universal consciousness of archetypes found throughout the world. Freyja, who chooses half the slain with Óðinn, shares in their perpetual resurrection. When identity is wrapped wounded in the chanting and toning of the divine feminine, an echo of the Seeress, of Freyja, reweaves the wounds of the fallen lain dead in lands languishing upon paper. When viewed through the lens of the written creative process, a shift occurs when the oratory technique is introduced. Consider as Old Norse's musical cadence, when spoken. In tone and inflection, we listen as the storyteller takes us back to how the Sagas were shared. A place of female agency where space constructs a perpetual memory as it thrives within and without form, stretching across generations.

Now tell me, do you want to know more? And what?

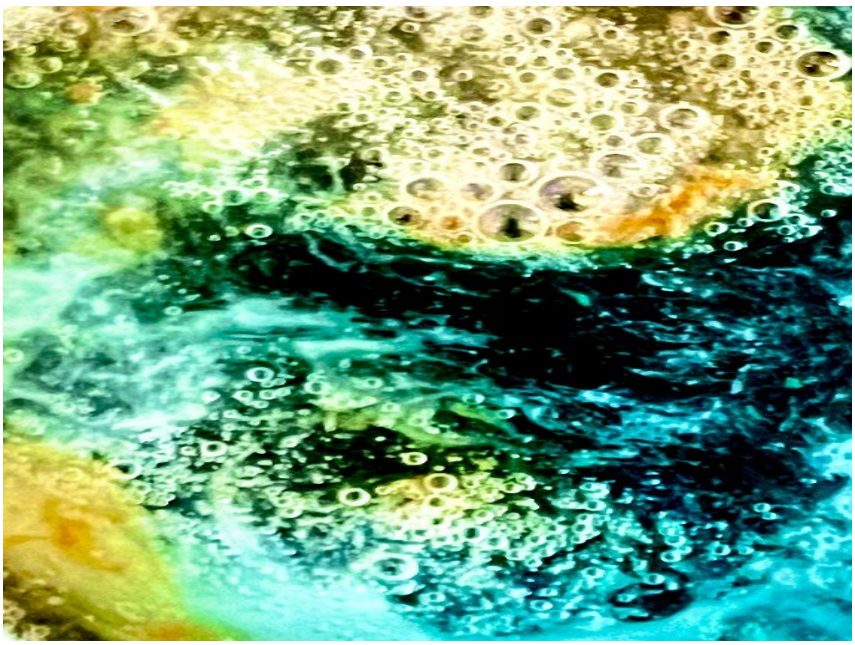

Figure 24: *Before* by Diane Alexander

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Icelanders Arrive and Strive
A Manitoba Story

ROBERT C. A. FREDERICKSON

The Icelandic emigration to North America in the 1870s, culminating in the creation of New Iceland and its capital Gimli, just north of the boundary of the province of Manitoba at the time, was a fascinating saga. Unfortunately, I didn't learn about this, and my familial connection to it, until the mid-1990s. My third-generation Icelandic father and second-generation Swedish mother were married in Winnipeg in 1940. I was born in Grace Hospital in Winnipeg in June of 1941 and spent my first 31 years of life in Winnipeg.

I want to speak a bit about my education in Winipeg because there are a few impressive things about the University of Manitoba of which many Winnipeggers today might not be aware. I obtained an extensive education in a very liberal and cosmopolitan Winnipeg starting with kindergarten in 1946 and culminating in a post doctorate in neurophysiology completed in 1971, followed by extensive academic and entrepreneurial experience worldwide. Supported by an Inco Scholarship I took a year of engineering, followed by a year of engineering physics, and then a year of architecture in the early 1960s. At that time John Russell was head of the department of Architecture, rated during his tenure as number 1 in Canada if not North America. Following this, I worked with Dutch engineer Joop Burgerjon to help build the cyclotron in the basement of the U of M Physics Department. After this I obtained a degree in Physics then joined biology professor Dr. Phillip Isaac in the new master's degree program in Biophysics that he had just created. This program provided an excellent introduction to biology, and I subsequently joined the Department of Pharmacology to pursue a PhD in neuropharmacology. I began this program in 1968 during the last year of Dr. Mark Nickerson's reign as head of Pharmacology. Mark had escaped the US during the horrors of the McCarthy era and established a Department of Pharmacology in Winnipeg in the mid 1950s. This was recognized during his tenure as the number one Department of Pharmacology in North America, if not the world. Russell and Nickerson brought significant stature to the University of Manitoba and Winnipeg, and I was very lucky to benefit from this.

Robert Frederickson is a third-generation Icelandic descendant who contributes to several related projects. He holds a PhD in Neuropharmacology from the University of Manitoba.

As mentioned above, my extensive formal education did not include anything regarding the history of New Iceland. I didn't learn about my connection to the Icelandic emigration to Canada in the 1870s and the founding of the town of Gimli, during the fascinating saga of New Iceland, until the mid 1990s. My father, Robert Harold Frederickson, was a senior photographer with the Manitoba Government in the summer of 1952 when he died in a government float plane crash at Beren's River in northern Manitoba. There is a plaque (Fig. 1) hanging in the Manitoba Legislative Building to commemorate the 7 government employees who lost their lives in that terrible accident. I was 11 years old at the time and had 3 younger sisters.

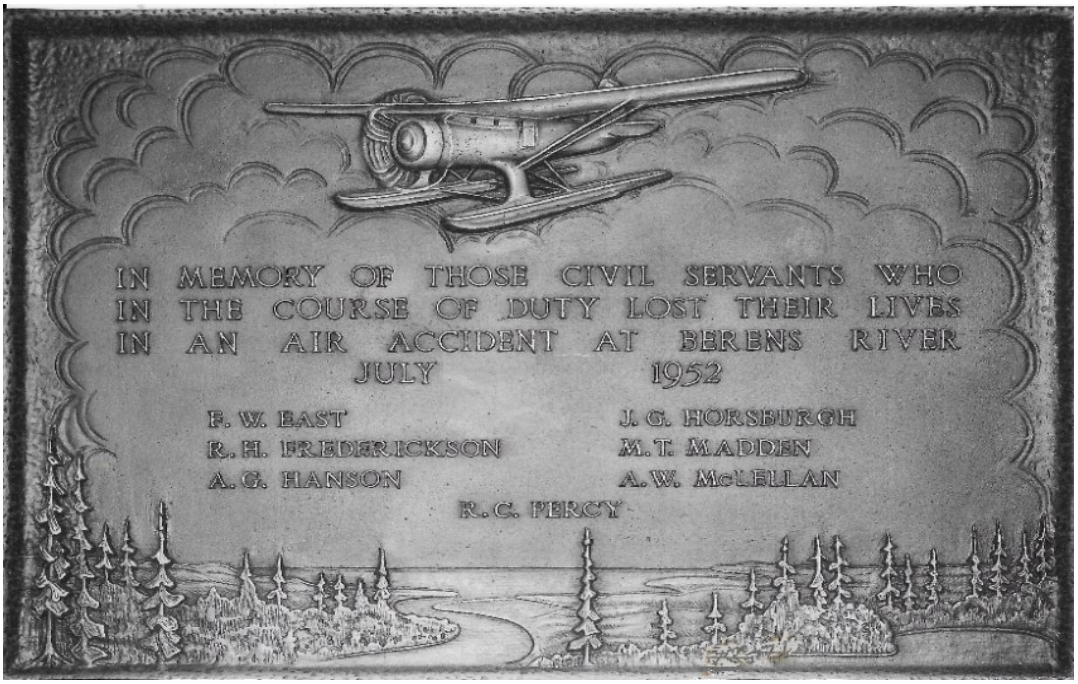

Figure 25: Plaque in the Manitoba Legislature in Winnipeg.

Our little family visited Gimli often when we kids were growing up, not knowing we had a strong connection to it. After graduation from the University of Manitoba I was hired by Eli Lilly & Co in Indianapolis and spent 26 years working in the US, and I would return often to visit Winnipeg and Gimli. During one such visit in the mid 1990s the family wanted to do some shopping at Tergesen's General Store in Gimli. I perused the book section while they shopped. In the book *The Icelandic People in Manitoba* by Wilhelm Kristjanson I found a picture of a Fridjon Frederickson (Fig. 2). There was a lot written about Fridjon in

Figure 26: Picture of Fridjon Frederickson in Wilhelm Kristjanson's The Icelandic People in Manitoba.

this book and back in Winnipeg checked in the Manitoba Archives and discovered that Fridjon was in fact my great grandfather.

The next summer I returned to Gimli and knocked on the door of the Gimli Information Centre. There was no answer so I turned to walk away when the door suddenly opened—two men appeared and asked: "What do you want—can we help you?" One of them was Rick Lair who was leading the initial stages of planning for the New Iceland Heritage Museum to commemorate the founding of New Iceland. I replied, "I'm trying to find information regarding my great grandfather." "Who was your great grandfather?" they queried. When I responded, "Fridjon Frederickson," they grabbed me and pulled me inside claiming that they had been looking for a relative of Fridjon as he had been such an important pioneer in the creation of New Iceland and Gimli.

I became heavily involved in this project, providing funding for the Museum and for a display commemorating *Framfari*, the Icelandic newspaper published for 2 years in New Iceland. I had proposed creating a diorama for the Museum consisting of a partial replica of the log house on the Icelandic River in Lundi (now Riverton) where *Framfari* was printed, with replicas of Sigtryggur Jonasson, Fridjon Frederickson and Halldor Briem, the founders and Directors of *Framfari*, standing in front, but this was maybe a bit too ambitious and never got done. At any rate, I learned that my Icelandic great-grandparents, Fridjon Frederickson (né Friðriksson) and Gudny Sesellja Frederickson (née Sigurðardottir), were founding pioneers of New Iceland and had built the first house there that was also the first store and first post office in Gimli. In the Manitoba Archives I

Figure 27: Photograph of Fridjon and Gudny's historic house in Gimli taken by their grandson Robert Harold Frederickson (in picture) in the summer of 1952.

found a picture (Fig. 3) of their house that my father had taken in the summer of 1952 just a month or so before he died in the plane crash. Dad appears in the picture, published in the Winnipeg Free Press at the time, and in Walter Lindal's book, *The Icelanders in Canada.*

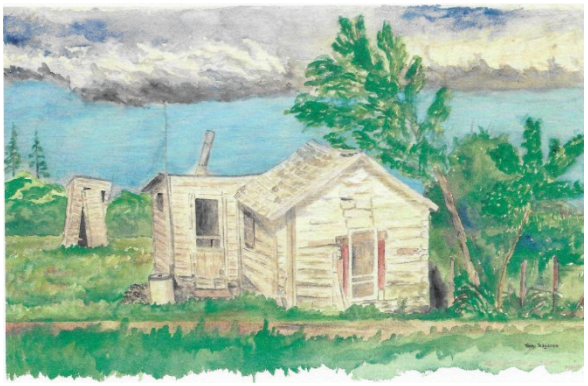

Figure 28: Painting of Fridjon and Gudny's historic house in Gimli from 1950 by Terry Tergesen. Figure 29: Robert C.A. Frederickson and his twin sisters, Shirley and Nancy, standing next to the painting hanging in the Icelandic Reading Room at the University of Manitoba.

Fortunately, I was also very lucky to connect with Terry Tergesen, owner of Tergesen's General Store in Gimli, before his untimely death in 2013, 100 years after Fridjon's death, and Terry kindly gifted me another important picture that he had painted of this historic house in 1950 at the age of 16 (Fig. 4). I donated this important historical painting to the Icelandic Collection in the Elizabeth Dafoe Library at the University of Manitoba where it hangs in the Reading Lounge that I had dedicated to the Collection in honour of Fridjon and Gudny. My lovely twin sisters, Nancy and Shirley, are pictured with me in front of the painting hanging in the Lounge (Fig. 5). We were meeting with the Director of the Collection, Katrin Nielsdottir, who I have been working with since the untimely death of Sigrid Johnson, the Icelandic Librarian at the time I donated the picture.

Involvement with the New Iceland Heritage Museum connected me to Valgeir Þorvaldsson in Iceland, who was at the very same time creating the Icelandic Emigration Centre in Hofsós, Iceland. The Centre (Fig. 6) is situated on a beautiful Arctic Ocean fishing harbour in northern Iceland. I first met Valgeir in the summer of 2001. I was there with my wife and daughter, and while our daughter Kristin was unexpectedly riding a horse through the mountains of northern

Figure 30: The Icelandic Emigration Center in Hofsós, Iceland.

Iceland with the visiting European Riding Group, I visited the Icelandic Emigration Center in Hofsós where Nelson Gerrard introduced me to Valgeir. That was my first trip to Iceland, but I have returned once or twice a year every year since. In 2006, during a tour of Iceland provided to me by Atli and Rúnar Hreinsson—Atli, former Consul General for Iceland in Winnipeg, kindly provided me with a very informative introduction to Iceland.

Figure 31: Nelson Gerrard, Robert Frederickson, Atli Ásmundsson and Valgeir Thorvaldsson meeting at the Emigration Center in Hofsós in 2006. Figure 32: Valgeir at the starting point of the emigration presentation at the center.

Valgeir and I became very good friends and have been working together on several interesting projects ever since. One of those projects was the bed and breakfast guest house at our northern resort Kolkuós near Hofsós. Figure 9 shows the area with an old farmhouse and slaughterhouse, on the 300 hectares of land surrounded by a salmon river on one side and the Arctic Ocean on the other, pictured before we started renovations.

Figure 33: Old farmhouse and slaughterhouse on the 300-hectare Kolkuos property. Figure 34: The Kolkuós property after renovations started showing the site of the oldest Viking village in Iceland.

Figure 10 shows more of the property after renovations were started. The little island used to be connected to the spit of land projecting north of the house and was the site of a Viking Age harbour and trading place. The University of Falun, Sweden, the Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde, Denmark, the nearby Skagafjörður Heritage Museum and Hólar University College carried out an archeological dig that confirmed this (Fig. 11).

Figure 35: Valgeir at the site of the archeological dig on the Kolkuós property.

The government in the area was going to turn this site into either a garbage dump or an oil refinery. Valgeir enlisted me, and more importantly former President Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, to help convince the government to abandon these ideas and lease the property to us for 55 years (free of cost if we renovated and looked after the property). Figure 12 shows Valgeir in front of the old farmhouse, and Figure 13 shows it after Valgeir and his team of carpenters had renovated it. The site is now a very popular bed and breakfast that Valgeir runs.

Figure 36: Valgeir in front of the old farmhouse before the renovation. Figure 37: Kolkuós guesthouse after the renovation.

During my many visits to Iceland I met many impressive Icelanders, including relatives descended from siblings of my great-grandparents who had remained in Iceland. One of these is Þorsteinn Ólafsson who like me is retired now, but who was founder and former chairman of Iceland's largest and most valuable company, Marel HF. He and I are no longer just *frændi* (cousins) but best friends. During these many visits I also had a chance to visit my great-grandparents' family farms on the Melrakkaslétta Peninsula in northern Iceland, Hóll and Harðbakur, and learn how beautiful and interesting Iceland is. Given what I learned during these visits, my interaction with Valgeir's Icelandic Emigration Center, involvement in the preparation of the New Iceland Heritage Museum in Gimli, and in the

archives in Iceland and Manitoba, as well as boxes of historical family material, including old pictures and letters, I decided I should pull it all together to provide as complete a picture as possible of the remarkable lives of Fridjon and Gudny. I chose to write a two or three book series entitled: *New Iceland and Beyond: A 175-year Icelandic-Canadian Saga.* The first book *Icelanders Arrive and Strive: A Manitoba Story* has now been published by Friesen Press. This book and my first book, on quantum mechanics, and the rest of the Icelandic-Canadian series are discussed on the website: www.RobertCAFrederickson.com. The books are available from several publishers worldwide and can be ordered on the website.

A Few Excerpts from and Comments on Icelanders Arrive and Strive: A Manitoba Story

Back-cover copy:

Since the Viking era, Icelandic emigrants have been forging new paths and communities. Icelanders Arrive and Strive – A Manitoba Story shares, through the journey of one family, the story of how Icelandic emigrants settled in Canada and shaped the country's history.

Author Robert C. A. Frederickson connects a personal history – full of memorable characters at momentous moments – to the broader story of how Canada came to be. His great grandparents, Fridjon and Gudny Fridriksson, played a significant part in Manitoba's development through pioneering, community building, interacting with key historic figures, such as Lord Dufferin, and paving the way for the legal and political contributions of their son-in-law, Thomas Hermann Johnson, who became one of Manitoba's most popular politicians and contributed to major liberal legislative achievements.

Set shortly after Confederation, between 1872 and 1927, this epic of nation building is a model for modern times, showcasing strength, courage, liberalism, humanitarianism, and moderation in leadership and governance. The first historical chronicle of the series, New Iceland and Beyond – A 175-year Icelandic-Canadian Saga, this book sets the stage for recounting the ongoing adventures of Icelandic descendants in Manitoba and across the country and globe.

On the scale of the universe, the earth is a very small place. From the point of view of a nineteenth century earthling, however, the earth might have seemed a rather large place. Of course, even on the latter scale, the earth still contains many small places. One such small place is an island, called, in fact, Island (pronounced eesland), known in English as Iceland. […] This unique little island (i.e., its native Icelanders) boasts the distinction of having created the first parliamentary democracy in the western world. The Icelandic Althing was established around AD 930 […]

The Northern Quarter of Iceland has been further divided into various sections, the northern most of which is called Thingeyjarsysla. In the furthest northeast corner of Thingeyjarsysla is the Melrakasletta Peninsula, which juts bravely into the Arctic Ocean […]. One of the northernmost towns on this northernmost peninsula is a little fishing village called Raufurhofn.

Bracketing this little village are two farms, the first called Holl, the second called Hardbakur. These farms are not small. When the farmer-owner of Holl in the twenty-first century, approximately 130 years after this story began, was asked by the author about the size of this farm, he responded, "I don't now, it goes forever." Holl is about five kilometers south of Raufurhofn and is blessed with a trout lake and a salmon stream, and more recently, a small airfield. It is a sheep farm on which the sheep are allowed to roam "forever", until they are rounded up in the fall. Some of these sheep are black, as black as the sand on the beaches that form the eastern boundary of "forever", beaches that are lapped by the waters of the Arctic Ocean.

Hardbakur is twelve kilometers north of Raufurhofn, on the most northeastern shore of Melrakesletta, the most northeastern peninsula of Iceland. The shores of the Arctic Ocean on this farm are covered with stones and littered with driftwood […] from Arctic regions that have forests (including Norway, for example). There are no forests on these northern Iceland farms, and not much grows on them. The folks survived by raising sheep and catching seals and fish when possible. […] Besides the farmhouse and barns at Hardbakur, there is a special hut filled with life-saving equipment, and which bears a plaque stating that this structure was dedicated to the folks at Hardbakur by the Queen of England in gratitude for their having saved British sailors after a shipwreck that occurred offshore during one of the storms in the 1900s (Fig. 7).

Thomas went on to become one of the most popular politicians in Manitoba's history. He served from May 1915 to November 1917 as Minister of Public Works, part of 1916 as acting premier, from November 1917 to June 1922 as Attorney General […] as well as Minister of Telephones and Telegraphs. He was the father of the bill providing Proportional Representation, and many of the reforms he introduced benefitted women. These included the Dower Act, which was the creation of a board to fix minimum wages for female employees, and legislation to give women the right to vote in provincial elections and to hold political office.

Excerpt from the Foreword

For nearly 30 years I have run a museum and genealogy center in Hofsós, Iceland called the Icelandic Emigration Center, and as a result I have heard many stories of those who left Iceland in the late 1800s and early 1900s, all hoping for a better life in a new land. New Iceland and Beyond is a story that stands out strongly amongst the others. […] I want to thank Robert Frederickson for documenting this remarkable history and giving us the opportunity to learn about the lives and struggles of a couple who led so many people to a better life in their new country. I know others will enjoy reading this tale as much as I have.

Valgeir Þorvaldsson
Founder and Executive Director
The Icelandic Emigration Center

Excerpts from the Foreword of Clarion Book Review

A story of a community's hardiness, willpower, and perseverance, New Iceland and Beyond extols the successes of a generation of Canadian settlers.

Robert C. A. Frederickson's New Iceland and Beyond is a stirring history of an unsung migration movement and its legacy.

Centering Frederickson's great grandparents, Fridjon and Gudny, the book uses their stories as a window onto the larger history of Icelandic-Canadian immigration at the turn of the twentieth century. It opens with a panoramic history of Iceland's Norse founders, cycling through tales of courageous adventurers whose exploits and bodies of literature left an outsized impact on world culture.

There is a strong sense of Icelandic exceptionalism in the book, which goes a long way toward validating that judgment.

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A Note on the University of Manitoba Icelandic Special Collection

SIGFÚS HAUKUR SIGFÚSSON

Hallowed is the place where history converges, and where ancient books rest, while waiting for a passing soul to open them up so that they can retell their tales of time long past. During my sojourn into the Icelandic Reading Room, I had the privilege and honour of meeting the great people whose work in cataloguing and protecting priceless documents is commendable.

Katrín Níelsdóttir was a wonderful host who happily gave me enough material to read as well as supporting me in doing research for the Icelandic National League of North America. My stay here was magical, to say the least. My small notebook became filled to the brim with a variety of information regarding the Western Icelanders.

Reading the first issue of *Framfari* was a highlight of my stay. *Framfari* is a newspaper that was published on the 10th of September 1877 in Lundi, Manitoba. While reading it I found myself transported into the past. The editor puts it forth in the issue that their main mission is to keep the Icelandic language and Icelandic national identity alive in the new world.[23]

1. 'Til kaupenda og lesenda Framfara'; Houser, *Framfari*, 2.

Sigfús Haukur Sigfússon was the 2024 Snorri West Alumni Intern and is a teacher (*umsjónarkennari*) at Álfhólsskóli.

The quality of the news written impressed me; they did a good job being precise and covered events all over Iceland. What we should realize and never take for granted is that *Framfari* was a community effort; even though the community suffered the past autumn in 1877 from "sickness," the community pulled through and brought the dream of having an Icelandic magazine published into reality. Due to the printing press they bought being an English model, the *Framfari* people had Icelandic characters specially made for it (there were no ð Ð þ or Þ in the standard English press) in addition to Æ æ Ö ö and the accented letters.[24]

No river was too wide to cross and no mountain too high to climb; they kept going no matter what. We should be proud of this heritage of ours. The more I read about the Icelanders who moved west, the more I begin to think they were our best and brightest the country had to offer. Some of the articles tell of Hjörtur Þórðarson, who was also known as Chester Thordarson. And there are others, Stephan G. Stephansson, Káinn (Kristján N. Júlíus), and Margrét Jónsdóttir Benedictsson. They are people we should be proud of.

They all left Iceland never to return. And while there are thousands of people who left, to highlight only a few says very little about the rest. Also to say they were the best and brightest, while some may not agree—any writer can always say so and so was bright, look at these articles about them. Regardless, they all kept a bit of Iceland in their hearts. We should be proud of our heritage and ancestors, as I am sure that the ancestors of this generation of Western Icelanders' smile down on us as we fan the flames of our Icelandic traditions, and wherever our ancestors are, we keep a part of Iceland alive with them.

2. 'Til kaupenda og lesenda Framfara'; Houser, *Framfari*, 1.

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Baldrs draumar

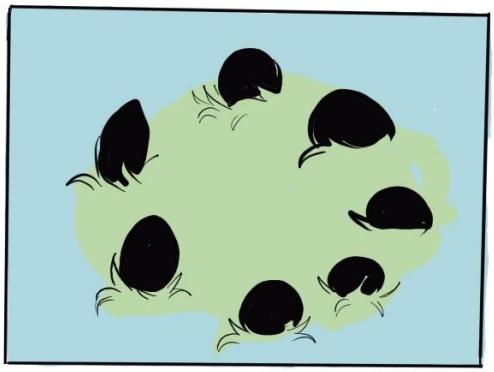
ELLA WOOLFORD

Ella Woolford is an undergraduate student at the University of Manitoba. This piece was created as a freeplay assignment for ICEL 2470 “The Viking Age” during Winter Term 2024.


HE MET A WHELP, THE ONE WHICH CAME FROM HEL. IT WAS BLOODY ACROSS THE FRONT OF ITS BREAST, AND IT BAYED LONG AT THE FATHER OF INCANTATION


FORWARD RODE ODIN, THE EARTH-WAY RESOUNDED

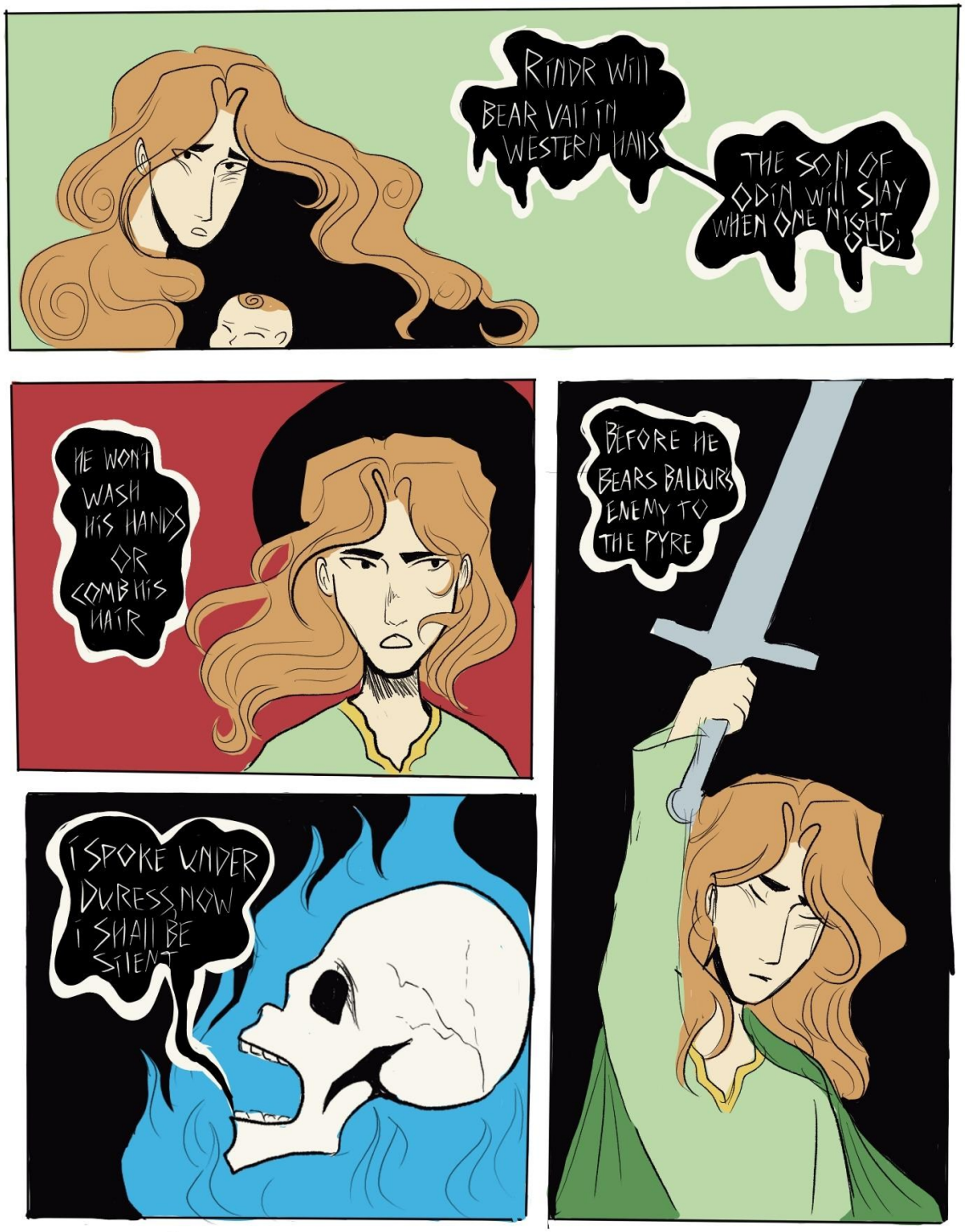

HE CAME TO THE HIGH HALL OF HEL
THEN ODIN RODE EAST OF THE DOOR, TO WHERE HE KNEW A SEERESS'S GRAVE TO BE.




INCANTATIONS FOR THE SLAIN
HE SPOKE TO THE ONE WISE IN WITCHCRAFT UNTIL SHE ROSE UNDER DURESS AND SPOKE A DEAD BODIES WORDS
WHAT KIND OF MAN IS IT UNKNOWN TO ME, WHO HAS MADE ME UNDERTAKE AN ARDUOUS JOURNEY? I WAS SNOWED IN WITH SNOW AND LASHED WITH RAIN AND DRENCHED IN DEW - LONG WAS I DEAD
I AM CALLED VEGTAMR I AM THE SON OF VAFTAMR, TELL ME NEWS FROM HEL - I REMEMBER THINGS FROM HOME
FOR WHOM ARE THE BENCHES STREWN WITH ARM RINGS THE FLOOR BEAUTIFULLY FLOODED WITH GOLD?


HERE STANDS MEAD BREWED FOR BALDR - SHINING DRINKS - A SHIELD LAYED OVER THEM
AND THE SONS OF THE AESIR ARE IN GREAT ANXIETY
I SPOKE UNDER DURESS AND NOW I SHALL BE SILENT!
DON'T BE SILENT SEERESS!
UNTIL ALL IS KNOWN I WANT TO KNOW MORE
WHO WILL BE BALDR'S SLAYER?
AND ROB ODIN'S SON OF LIFE?


HODR WILL BEAR THE HIGH GLORY TREE THERE
HE WILL BECOME BALDR'S SLAYER
AND ROB ODIN'S SON OF LIFE
I SPOKE UNDER DURESS AND NOW I SHALL BE SILENT
DON'T BE SILENT SEERESS I WANT TO QUESTION YOU
UNTIL ALL IS KNOWN I WANT TO KNOW MORE!
WHO WILL AVENGE HODR'S HATEFUL DEED AND BEAR BALDR'S SLAYER TO THE PYRE?


RINDR WILL BEAR VALI IN WESTERN HALLS
THE SON OF ODIN WILL SLAY WHEN ONE NIGHT OLD;
HE WON'T WASH HIS HANDS OR COMB HIS HAIR
BEFORE HE BEARS BALDURS ENEMY TO THE PYRE
I SPOKE UNDER DURESS, NOW I SHALL BE SILENT


DON'T BE SILENT SEERESS
UNTIL ALL IS KNOWN I WANT TO KNOW MORE
WHO ARE THE MAIDENS WHO WILL WEEP FOR THEIR LOVED ONE AND CAST THEIR NECK'S CORNERS TO THE HEAVENS
YOU'RE NOT VEGTAMR AS I THOUGHT
RATHER YOU'RE ODIN THE OLD GAUTR
YOU'RE NEITHER A SEERESS NOR A WISE WOMAN


RATHER YOU'RE THE MOTHER OF THREE GIANTS
RIDE HOME ODIN AND BE PROUD
MAY NO ONE COME BACK AGAIN TO VISIT ME THUS
WHEN LOKI SLIPS LOOSE FROM HIS BONDS
AND THE DOOM OF THE POWERS COMES TEARING DOWN

For my freeplay project I adapted the poem "Baldrs draumar" (Baldur's Dreams) as featured in the dual-language edition of the *Poetic Edda*. I find this poem in particular to be very interesting, due to its significance to the Ragnarök legend, which may be one of the most important legends in Viking Age culture. It gives additional context to Baldur's death and Loki's imprisonment, which is helpful for those who wish to further understand the myth. On a practical note, it is not incredibly long, and thus lends itself to a mini graphic novel format.

I find that using visual illustrations is helpful for enhancing how a poem is read and understood. The combination of eye-catching visuals can help some readers, like myself, to better understand the text. While coming up with ideas for the panels, I referenced the analysis of the poem included in the text whenever I was confused about the meaning of a line. One example of this is the line where Óðinn refers to the Seeress as the "mother of three giants." I was originally confused about how to illustrate this, but when I read through the analysis, one of the proposed explanations was that the seeress was Angurboða, mother of Fenrir, Jörmungandur, and Hel. This seemed to fit well with the poem's other references to Ragnarök. These came to be the giants I chose to illustrate, adding another level of visual explanation for the poem.

This freeplay project required both surface level, and some further research into an important poem from the Viking Age. It engages with both the story and the readers' visual sensibilities to create a new adaptation of a classic Norse myth.

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REVIEWS

A Glimpse Through Their Eyes
The Sunshine Children by Christopher Crocker

Crocker, Christopher W. E. *The Sunshine Children*. Reykjavík: Hin kindin, 2023. 145 pages. ISBN: 978-9935-916-55-6.

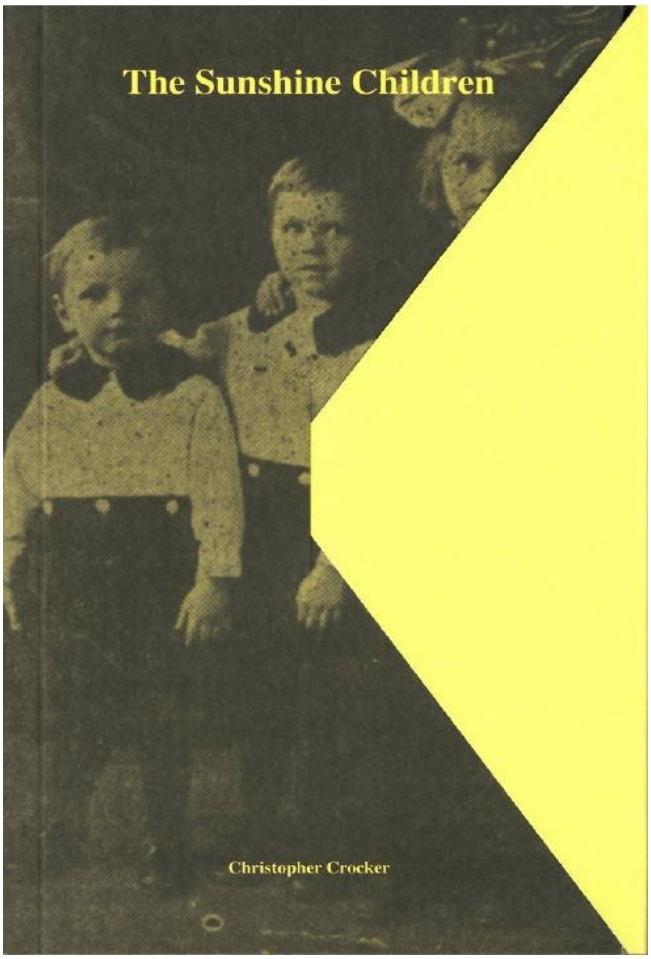

Figure 38: Front cover of *The Sunshine Children*

The Sunshine Children, written by Christopher Crocker, gives a unique overview of the Icelandic language press in Manitoba by shining light on the publications aimed towards or written by the children of the time. This overview includes how the children's publications were related to the regular periodicals to which they were attached, explores the target audience, and shows how the views of the editor shaped these children's newspapers.

The book cover itself, designed by Ólafur Þór Kristinsson and Helgi Páll Melsted, won an award for Book Cover Design from Félag íslenskra teiknara. *The Sunshine Children* is available for purchase through Bóksala stúdenta (University of Iceland book store) or the New Iceland Heritage Museum in Gimli, Manitoba.The children's

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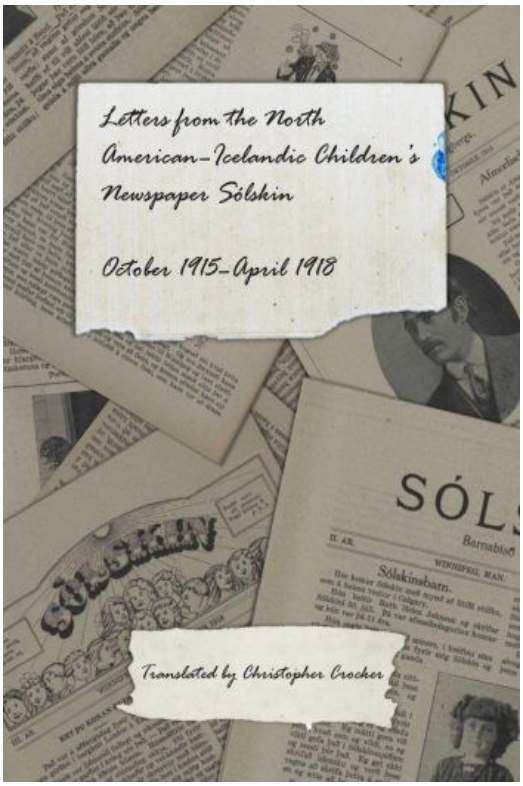

Figure 39: Cover from the book *Letters from the*

letters have been added to an Open Educational Resource through Pressbooks making them publicly available to read or work with. *Letters from the North American-Icelandic Children's Newspaper Sólskin* is a collection of 155 letters that were sent to the editor of the Winnipeg Icelandic language newspaper *Lögberg* from children of various ages, between October 1915 and April 1918. The letters are grouped by publication year and within these groups you can find the names and dates of each submission with both the original Icelandic text as well as the English translation.

The Icelandic and English texts on each page are a useful resource for Icelandic language students as they can compare the language used in Icelandic to an English equivalent.

On a historical note, it is intriguing to see the values and priorities of the young Icelandic speaking population in North America during these times. The topics range from their favorite pets to more serious topics such as the war. While the use of Icelandic language has declined in North America since the last century when these letters were written, with the English translation decedents and historians now have an open window through the eyes of the Sunshine Children.

Katrín Níelsdóttir
University of Manitoba

A Viking Legend

Reviewed for Old Norse Mythology at the University of Manitoba

Bloomer, Ainsley. *A Viking Legend: The Descendants of Odin*. Winnipeg: Prairie Heart Press, 2023. 324 pages. ISBN: 978-1998-055-23-4.

A Viking Legend by Ainsley Bloomer is one of the best books I have read regarding the retelling of *The Saga of the Volsungs*. *A Viking Legend* not only contains the actual stories but also some interpretations by Bloomer to complete the information given to the reader. There was so much information that was presented to the reader that while writing this essay I struggled a little to figure out precisely what to focus on as I could have focused on anything within the book. For this essay I decided that I wanted to write about the use of magic and curses by humans and gods. I approached the whole book by breaking it down into sections so the first section will be the introduction to chapter 19, the second section will be chapters 20 to chapter 39, and the final section is chapter 40 to the sources, and then picking one story from each section to focus on. Before we dive into the "meat and potatoes" of this book it is important to view the introduction as it provides the readers with the background knowledge about the book and what the author has taken inspiration from while writing. Magic has been a consistent topic within sagas. *The Saga of the Volsungs* is not lacking in the use of magic and curses. Although magic and curses could be used for bad deeds, but magic could be used for good deeds. This essay will view how the use of magic and curses have influenced and changed the paths that heroes in the sagas have taken as well as what challenges they face due to the magic that influenced them. Magic and curses cause many issues for the characters within the sagas because there are ways in which the curses can carry on from one generation to the next. The use of magic and curses brings about bloodshed and chaos for many of the lives that sorcery is involved in. *The Saga of the Volsungs* is one tale in which readers can follow the deadly tracks of magic and how it can turn a man

The reviewer Mackenzie Stewart is a multimedia artist and researcher working towards her MA at The University of Manitoba and The University of Winnipeg.

into a monster with ease. The first chapter is titled "The Golden Curse" and this chapter discusses the story of Fafnir and how he was transformed from a twisted dwarf to a dragon filled with a lust and obsession for gold. The chapter begins with Odin sitting in his throne Hlidskjalf, while on his throne Odin can see into and over every realm on Yggdrasil. One day while on his throne Odin was unable to see into a forest which was between the human and the dark elf realms, as if the forest had a magic spell over it so that no one could see inside of it[25].

This is the first instance where we see magic brought into the story which gives the reader the impression that sometimes even the gods are subject to not understanding or lacking the ability to figure out the origin and purpose of the magic. As the story progresses, Odin takes Loki and Haenir into the forest with him after having his two ravens Hugin and Munin scouting out the forest. While wandering the forest Loki, Odin and Haenir came across an otter with a salmon and Loki kills the otter taking both for their dinner and moved on, after continuing their way they came upon a house in dis- repair[26]. Odin and his companions knocked and being greeted by Hreidmar the dwarf who lived in the home, he allowed the men to take refuge in his home but was horrified at the death of his son, Ottar. The sons Fafnir and Reign came to their fathers' side and saw their brother slain, they negotiated and Hreidmar said that the bag made of Ottars skin was to be filled with red gold and the exterior covered in gold (Bloomer 9). Loki is the one who is sent to retrieve the payment, he gets a net from the goddess ran and traps Andvari, Odin's dwarf son who was turned into a pike by a Norn, Loki takes all Andvari's gold to save Odin and Haenir. Andvari begs to keep a ring which can duplicate itself but Loki refuses and Andvari curses it "Since the ring will not be with me, I put a curse on it and all the gold you carry will bring death to whomever possesses it, and it will be of no use to anyone" (Bloomer 11). However, this gold would not bring happiness and peace to the dwarf family, instead the curse on the gold had altered their fate to be cruel and bring about death and bloodshed.

The family is satisfied when they have the all the red gold and gold and the cursed ring of Andvari, Hreidmar wants to keep the gold for himself but Fafnir in a rage kills his father and threatens to kill his brother as well. Regin tries to reason with his brother but it is of no use as Fafnir threatens to kill him again, with Regin's retreat Fafnir takes his gold to a

[25] Bloomer, *A Viking Legend: The dreadful and Divine Designs of Destiny,* 5

[26] Bloomer, *A Viking Legend: The dreadful and Divine Designs of Destiny,* 8

cave where he can bask in his riches and while the ring duplicates the gold by its own magic, the curse works in a cruel way by turning into a dragon/ serpent. This chapter is full of the use of magic and curses, the interactions between Hreidmar and Fafnir when they have all the gold shows how curses can turn men into monsters by their actions and their words. Fafnir's reaction of killing his father and threatening to kill his brother twice shows that the curse of the gold made him greedy, and lust filled for his hoard.

Though this is only the first chapter there is a lot of magic and curses which are present, from the forest that Odin cannot see into, The Norn which cursed Hreidmar and his sons, Andvari's ring which would duplicate on its own, the curse Andvari placed on all his gold, the curse on Andvari himself, and the curse that befell Fafnir following his obsession with the cursed gold. In the case of this story the curses and magic that were used lead to death and brought about much misfortune to those who encountered the curses and spells. All characters of this story were affected by the curses however the characters who got the brunt of the curses were Ottar, Hreidmar, Regin, Fafnir, and Andvari as these four had been permanently cursed by Norn's and could not escape their curses, but Hreidmar, Regin and Fafnir encountered another curse which was put onto the \gold by Andvari, which doubled the misfortune that befell Hreidmar, Regin, and the soon dragon formed, Fafnir. Fafnir slayed by Sigurd Sigmundson, but the use of magic and curses does not end with the death of Fafnir. In the second section will be focusing on the story of Sigurd Sigmundson and Brynhild Budladottir, and how curses ravaged and destroyed their relationship ending in the death of Sigurd.

The next story I have chosen is the story with Sigurd Sigmundson and Brynhild Budladottir, and the curse that is placed upon Sigurd before his marriage to Brynhild. This is chapter 21 of the book by Bloomer. Our story on this topic begins before Sigurd slays Fafnir, he heads to his uncle, King Gripir, to see what his fate is as his uncle holds the magic/gift of prophecies. Gripir provides his nephew information with his sight on Sigurd's fate, and in-between bouts of information Gripir tells Sigurd that he cannot and does not want to say anymore to his nephew. Sigurd hard-headed as his father and grandfather pushed to have all his questions answered. His uncle tells him he will slay Fafnir and, on his way, back he will find a woman by the name of Brynhild Sigr-drifa Budladottir. It is said he will instantly fall in love with this shield-maiden/ Valkyrie, and she too will fall in love with Sigurd.[27] When Sigurd finds Brynhild, she was wrapped in her chainmail coat and laid in a deep sleep, Sigurd noted the look of her in her chainmail coat and cuts it away

[27] Larrington, *The Norse Myths A Guide to the Gods and Heroes*, 143

to alleviate any pain she may have (Bloomer 107). Once she is free of her coat she wakes and Sigurd s content to help the very beautiful woman, as many heroes do, and Sigurd askes how she ended up in that position. Brynhild tells her story of how she disobeyed Odin by providing a victory to the wrong king and Odin had pricked her with a magical sleeping thorn which put her to sleep for so long and that she had asked Odin to protect her body while she slept and so there were magical flames which protected her until the right person could come and wake her (Bloomer 108- 109). Sigurd and Brynhild were written as a real Romeo and Juliet kind of romance, so smitten and in love yet fate had other plans, plans that would keep them apart and eventually led to the death of Sigurd. The story continues that Sigurd goes to ask for Brynhild's hand, her family agrees but she can see that they were not fated to be together, Sigurd continues to swear an oath that he would only marry Brynhild and he gives her the ring that Andvari had cursed as her wedding ring and they shared wedding vows again.

The next instance of magic is when Sigurd travels to King Gjuki's kingdom and the king's wife, Queen Grimhild, enjoys Sigurd and wants him to marry her daughter but there is one problem, Sigurd's heart belongs to someone else! Queen Grimhild gives Sigurd a cursed mead, the mead will force him to forget his oath to Brynhild and instead he will marry Gudrun, the daughter of Queen Grimhild. Brynhild was then betrothed to Gunnar, magic took shape as Queen Grimhild taught Sigurd and Gunnar how to shape shift and Sigurd turned into Gunnar and Gunnar turned into Sigurd, this was the only way that Gunnar was able to attract Brynhild, and they spent three nights together[28]. Sigurd marries Gudrun and Brynhild marries Gunnar and they both come to realize what has happened, in a reconciliation attempt Sigurd goes to Brynhild offering to leave his wife and marry her, but Brynhild betrayed by her husband and love wanted revenge[29] . Her husband, Gunnar, distraught by her sorrows, asks what she wants to allow him to be her husband and do husbandly duties, Brynhild tells him "You will not enter the same bed as me until you kill Sigurd"[30]. To satisfy his wife, Gunnar got his youngest brother Guttorm to slay Sigurd while he slept. Sigurd, mortally wounded, killed Guttorm with his sword and died in the arms of his wife and love Gudrun, with his dying breath imploring her to take their children and leave.

This story is not found in one chapter but from Chapters 21 to 34. Due to this being a very detailed story, I had to extend my focus for this saga. This story is far more gruesome

[28] Bloomer, *A Viking Legend: The dreadful and Divine Designs of Destiny*, 130

[29] Larrington, *The Norse Myths A Guide to the Gods and Heroes,* 144-145

[30] Bloomer, *A Viking Legend: The dreadful and Divine Designs of Destiny,* 152

than the last, as the magic and curses not only created love but also destroyed it. This story shows how the manipulation of spells and curses can change the fates of men, the changes lead Brynhild into a madness fouled with revenge and cause Sigurd to die for a curse that was placed on him of which he had no recollection. In this case the magic and curses came in the form of a drink while in the next story the curses will come in the form of a young woman named Aslaug.

I am no stranger to the stories of Ragnar Lothbrok since I had been told them as I was growing up. I have also seen the drama television series *Vikings* and have my own thoughts about the relationship between Ragnar and Aslaug. Ainsley Bloomer included the story of Ragnar Lothbrok and Aslaug in chapter 41 on page 167, titled the "Saga of Aslaug". Aslaug is the daughter of Brynhild and Sigurd, although she was raised by her foster parents King Heimir and Queen Bekkhild. Her foster parents worried with the death of her parents if perhaps death would befall Aslaug as well, her foster father carved a hiding spot into a harp to carry her and hide her, he kept her safe until one night he allowed a poor couple into his home where they saw the harp and killed the king as they though he had wealth inside. The couple felt horrible for this action upon finding the little girl and they raised her as their own. She was kept hidden until one day King Ragnar Lothbrok came and Aslaug's new adoptive parent told her to help the warriors make their bread. The men were bewitched by Aslaug's beauty and were unable to bring back an edible loaf of bread for their king[31]. Ragnar, made curious by the descriptions his men provided, wished to see this maiden who had distracted his men from their baking. Ragnar did not consider her beauty, rather he wanted to test her intellect and he said to his men "Since you all describe her with such zeal, I wish to see her for myself, but I also want to test her intelligence. A beauty with no brains is no beauty at all. Approach this woman and tell her the King requests her presence. But tell her this, when she comes before the king, she must be neither dressed nor undressed, neither eating nor fasting, and neither alone nor in company". Aslaug follows Ragnars instructions, and this impresses the king, he asks her to marry him. She only agrees if he is smart in the upcoming battle he plans to partake in. Ragnar survives and she tells him she is cursed, that if they do not take caution when they make their marriage official, she would have a son with no bones. Ragnar did not wait, and she gave birth to the 'boneless' child and Ragnar left it out to die, but Aslaug retrieved him from the woods, and they named the boy Ivar. Aslaug concerned for her husband's safety gave him a shirt that would protect him from

[31] Bloomer, *A Viking Legend: The dreadful and Divine Designs of Destiny,* 169

any weapon which always allowed him to come home to her. Aslaug could see the future much like her mother and she sees that while in Sweden Ragnar gets an offer from the Swedish king for Ragnar to marry the princess Ingiborg and divorce his current wife[32]. In trying to convince her husband to stay she tells him that King Sigurd and Queen Brynhild were her parents, and she relays her whole story to Ragnar, he does not believe her, and she provides and prophecy, Aslaug tells her husband "If you do not believe me, ask Aki and Grima. As a child they hid me as best they could by covering me in tar and soot and making me wear cloaks with long hoods. But your men discovered me when they came to our hut. I can prove to you that I am the daughter of Sigurd, as I know from my Fylgia and from Odin, that I will bear you a son whose eye will show the resemblance of the serpent that my father Sigurd fought. We will call our son, Sigurd, Snake in the eye"[33]. Aslaug's prophecy came true and indeed had another son and he bore the serpent in his eye. Ragnar stayed with Aslaug and eventually her enchanted shirt was stolen from his possession. I am unaware of when and where Aslaug became cursed that gave way to Ivar, however she had the gift of foresight like her mother, and she could make prophecies. She did not inflict any curses, but it does make me question if perhaps she put a spell on Ragnar to make him fall in love with her, which shows how deceptive something can truly be.

Overall, it may be said that the use of magic and curses are abundant within Old Norse Mythology. This essay has gone over three different stories, and all had magic and curses used in some form, our first story where Fafnir turns into a dragon because of cursed gold, our second story where Sigurd Sigmundsson forgets about his marriage oath by drinking cursed mead of forgetfulness, and finally in the story between Ragnar and Aslaug where Aslaug herself is the cursed object. Each story has themes which remain the same, a betrayal, a desire or obsession with something, the use of a magic spell or a curse, and finally for some if not most characters death. Fafnir is tormented by his obsession for gold, and it causes him to shift into a serpent whose greed and hunger for gold keeps him trapped in his own personal Hel. Brynhild and Sigurd are the old Norse Mythological version of Romeo and Juliet to an extent, star-crossed lovers, fate tears them apart, and in the end, both end up dead. Brynhild much like Fafnir is driven mad, but it is not gold which fuels her madness but rather the love lost between herself and Sigurd and having to watch her lover be with

[32] Bloomer, *A Viking Legend: The dreadful and Divine Designs of Destiny,* 172

[33] Bloomer, *A Viking Legend: The dreadful and Divine Designs of Destiny,* 173

another woman. Aslaug is not a cursed ring or a enchanted horn of mead, rather she is a princess who is cursed with a boneless son and the magical ability to see the future. Old Norse mythology and is full of blood feuds, magic, kinship bonds, trials and tribulations, interference of the gods in human affairs, and death of significant and important characters. Throughout the essay I examined the used and consequences of magic and curses as well as how they altered and impacted the lives of the characters who were affected. There were different ways in which these curses and magic appeared throughout the Sagas. Some curses took the form of different objects and people, which shows that old Norse civilization thought that anything could be cursed or enchanted and that nothing is as it appears.

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“But watch out for monsters”

A Review and Discussion of Chadwick Ginther’s Thunder Road Trilogy

Ginther, Chadwick. *Thunder Road*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 2012. 386 pages. ISBN: 978-0-8801-400-9.

Ginther, Chadwick. *Tombstone Blues*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 2013. 418 pages. ISBN: 978-0-88801-445-0.

Ginther, Chadwick. *Too Far Gone*. Winnipeg: Ravenstone, 2015. 352 pages. ISBN: 978-0-8801-541.

The Thunder Road trilogy is a series of books by Winnipeg author Chadwick Ginther, which tells the story of one possible outcome to the question “what if the Norse gods actually came back again after Ragnarök?” In this case, long after Ragnarök – so recent that the books could be said to be set in modern times. This essay will discuss how the author has incorporated the Norse myths into a very modern work of fiction while still maintaining continuity with the original sources of this material, such as *The Poetic Edda* and *The Prose Edda*. Ginther creates a compelling story sure to grab the attention of fans of the speculative fiction genre. The trilogy consists of the books titled *Thunder Road*, *Tombstone Blues,* and *Too Far Gone*. One characteristic that stood out right from the start, between this series and those that might typically come to mind when thinking of works that are either inspired by or reimagined tellings of Norse mythology, is that the series is set in modern times, as opposed to being set in a fantasy pseudo-medieval setting, such as Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* series, or in the time when the Norse myths originated, such as retellings like Gerður Kristný’s *Bloodhoof*.

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The first book, *Thunder Road*, was published in 2012, and right from the prologue the reader is met with modern terms and concepts such as pipes and steel, a welder's torch, as well as cigarettes (*Thunder Road*, 1). We later learn that this part of the book is set in the oil patch of northern Alberta. Indeed, this was done intentionally by the author, as he stated himself in a brief talk about the books presented during the "Tolkien, Fantasy and Northern Legend" event in the Icelandic Reading Room at the University of Manitoba on November 9, 2023. He stated that his intention was to be able to tell a story in the same world as the Norse myths, without needing to ask the reader to ignore parts of established mythology as he created events involving the gods that ran contrary to what is said in the original mythology (paraphrased). When considering the details of the original Norse myths found in works such as the Poetic and Prose Eddas, he successfully does this with one major exception, without which the series could not exist in its present form. In order to include the characters in the story, Ginther finds ways to bring a number of the Norse Gods who were killed at Ragnarök back to life. Part of Norse mythology is the event Ragnarök, which kills most of the major gods in the pantheon, including Odin, Thor, Heimdall, Tyr, and Frigg[34] and without at least some of these deities, there would be no Norse mythology to incorporate into the books.

Throughout all three books, the writing is filled with little details that allude to the Norse myths, as well as things from the cultures that once believed in them, especially if the reader is familiar with the mythology and the Icelandic or Old Norse languages at all. For example, our protagonist, Ted, is contacted by a company called "Svarta Mining and Smelting". "Svarta" is a modernization of the word "svartr" in Old Norse (and the modern Icelandic word "svartur"), which is the word for the colour black. Then in chapter 5, we learn that Loki has returned. His character had actually been introduced earlier in the story, in chapter two, but other than a physical description (which is irrelevant when it comes to Loki, as this trickster god is also an adept shapeshifter) and a private nickname of "The Smiler" that Ted assigns him in his head, we don't actually know who this character is. In chapter 5, the Smiler finally introduces himself to Ted and we become aware that he is Loki in disguise. This is very on-character for Loki, who appears in various stories in the Eddas shape-shifted into a number of other forms, such as a salmon ("Loki's Quarrel," in *The Poetic Edda*, page 92), and a horse (chapter 42 of "Gylfagynning," in *The Prose Edda*, page 51). This makes it especially intriguing for Loki to be the one who warns of oncoming monsters,

[34] Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 9-12

uttering the words of the present review's title quote within the story. By the time the reader has finished the third book in the series, we find out that Loki has been around Ted for much longer than he realizes—Ted visits his parents back in Edmonton in *Too Far Gone* and sees a picture of his mother from many years prior in which Loki can be seen in his original form. We also learn that the dog that Ted had owned with his ex-wife Susanna, whom they had coincidentally (and ironically) named Loki, actually was Loki shapeshifted into dog form. We encounter Loki many times over the course of the three books. He continually provides Ted with assistance, but not without leaving plenty of chaos in his wake.

The basic premise of the first book is that after witnessing an explosion at the oilfield where Ted was working, and seeing the fire giant Surtr, Ted has been chosen by the *dvergar* (dwarves) to prevent Surtr from burning the world. He is kidnapped by some of these dwarves, tattooed against his will with magic tattoos, and then launched into (mis)adventure. On the drive from Alberta to Winnipeg, Manitoba, where Ted has decided to move to get a fresh start, he picks up a hitchhiker named Tilda (after nearly hitting her) who turns out to be a Norn, one of the three witches/goddesses who control the fate of humans. She is returning home to Gimli, Manitoba, which fits the mythology quite well, considering it is one of the places in the Manitoba Interlake region which was founded by Icelandic immigrants in the late 1800s. In fact, the name Gimli itself comes straight from Norse mythology, even though the average Lord of the Rings fan would probably immediately think of the dwarf of the same name upon hearing the town name. His quest to deal with the dwarves and giants ends up bringing him and Tilda north to Flin Flon, Manitoba, which is where Svarta Mining is apparently based. This is an appropriate place for a dwarven-owned mining company to operate from, as the town is located on the Canadian Shield, which is a geologic shield, a large area of exposed Precambrian igneous and high-grade metamorphic rock. In Flin Flon, they fight with the dwarves, giants, and Tilda's amma (grandmother) who are all vying to control Mimir's head, as it is a powerful magical item. By the end of the book, Ted and Tilda are a couple, Tilda is pregnant with the next generation of the Norns, and although they did not kill him, they have managed to drive Surtr off.

Considering how much of Loki we see in the first book, it came as no surprise that the second book of the trilogy (Tombstone Blues) was centered mainly around a storyline involving Hel, who is Loki's daughter. She rules over a place also called Hel, which despite the similarity of her name, is not the same as the concept of Hell in Christian mythology. Hel is more of an underworld, and receives a portion of the dead, but it is not required to be a

terrible person to end up there. We quickly learn that she is coming for vengeance, as she is angry that Ted has taken "her belongings". One of Ted's tattoos is of the Gjallarhorn, which in Norse mythology was a horn associated with Heimdallr, and it was said that the sound of the horn would herald the coming of Ragnarök. In Ted's case, activating his Gjallarhorn tattoo would summon the einherjar, who are the Honoured Dead, to fight alongside him. These weren't, however, just the nameless, faceless dead of long ago, but rather it had been somehow enchanted to summon a number of Ted's ancestors who had fought in World War I. Vengeance is a recurring theme in many, many of the Norse Sagas, so it follows that it would make a logical theme to center a modern story involving the Norse Gods around.

Through Ted's adventures in Tombstone Blues, we encounter Valkyries, Thor, a jötunn, Odin's brothers Vili and Ve, and Tyr. The Valkyries are working for Hel, and act accordingly. Tyr has been bound by Hel, so his behaviour is guided by that and thus we cannot really compare him to Tyr in the Eddas. Thor, at first glance, seems very odd compared to the sagas, as he appears to be in some sort of relationship with Hel, but if we look at all of Thor's characteristics in the Eddas, he is not just a protector of Asgard and Midgard. He is also very short-tempered, impulsive and easily provoked. These characteristics are seen in his choice to involve himself with Hel and her affairs, and the way he comes after Ted trying to regain Mjölnir from him.

By the end of the second book, Ted has vanquished Hel—not by killing her, but by turning her into a mortal woman rather than the half-living/half-dead goddess she was before. But this hasn't happened without the events leading up to her becoming mortal wreaking havoc all over Winnipeg. Ted and Tilda are also no longer a couple, and Tilda has had a miscarriage and lost the baby. Hel has also told Ted what he needs to do to deal with Surtr.

This brings us to book three, Too Far Gone, in which Ted's attention has returned to Surtr. He is also on his way back to Alberta, as Surtr has apparently camped out back in the oilfields once again. However, on his way through Saskatchewan, he sees a sign for a "black metal" concert and feels compelled to check it out, even without any bands listed. Once he arrives at the site, it turns out that the band is called Surtsúlfar, or "Wolves of Surtr". As a matter of fact, the concert is set up specifically to summon Surtr so he can burn the world. Ted successfully thwarts this attempt by summoning up heavy rainstorms with the powers of his tattoos that put out all the fires and prevent any new ones from being started. Once this fiasco is finished, Ted continues to Edmonton, where he also plans to attend his best friend's wedding.

The third book is significantly bigger than the first two, but the extra volume does not seem frivolous the way it has in other series by other authors. Much of this is done to include significant character development alongside the battles that move the story forward. Eventually we learn that Loki has been controlling almost everything right from the start. We also learn that the goddess Freyja is alive and is going to play a key role in helping Ted defeat Surtr. In the end, Ted does manage to vanquish Surtr, but the state that things are left in afterwards are quite different from what the writer would have normally expected from a fantasy novel.

In the end, the writer enjoyed the Thunder Road trilogy immensely, more than she can remember enjoying any other fiction book she has read in the past few years, and the fact that the characters were believable as being the same deities she had just read about in the Prose and Poetic Eddas made it even more enjoyable. The series is complex and action-packed enough to entertain even a reader who is not familiar with Norse mythology at all, but with so many references to the mythology that a reader with significant knowledge about it will be entertained by both the action and the literary allusion. At one point, Ginther has one character threaten another with a Blood Eagle (a particularly gruesome, horrifying method of torture which always ends in the recipient's death), to which the writer thought "Wow, he really did his research!". This is the kind of series that you start one evening and then find yourself finishing an entire book at the wee hours of the morning, despite needing to go to school or work the next day. The only possible complaint would be that it is only a trilogy, and not a longer series.

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