

The Walking Icelanders: Revenants in the *Íslendingasögur*

By Devon Rose Bristow

APPROVED BY:

Advisor

Date

Graduate Program Director

Date

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By

Devon Rose Bristow

A thesis submitted to the Department of English of Salisbury University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in English

May 20 2022

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By

Devon Rose Bristow

2022

Dedication

To my enchantments.

To my mother who never questioned them.

And to my friends who egged me on.

Acknowledgements

I am eternally grateful to my advisor, Dr. T. Ross Leasure, for his encouragement and support as I completed this thesis.

Abstract

This study analyzes the revenants found in six different sagas from the *Íslendingasögur*, or Icelandic Family Sagas. Revenants are those people who die and then reanimate post-mortem to haunt the living, or pre-mortem. This analysis contains seven categories. The first is Post-Mortem Rising, which examines the four most common reasons that revenants return in the Icelandic Family Sagas. The second is Corporeality, otherwise understood as a revenant's physicality or lack thereof. The third is Ambulation and refers to a revenant's ability to wander. The fourth is Articulation, which examines a revenant's ability to speak. The fifth is Detriment, or a revenant's ability to harm the pre-mortem whether through physical or nonphysical means and in an offensive or defensive manner. The sixth is Vampirism, or the way Icelandic revenants can infect the pre-mortem and create more revenants through physical attacks or simply existing in close proximity to a pre-mortem person. Finally, the seventh category is Removal, which refers to the different avenues through which either the revenant itself or the saga's protagonist can disanimate that revenant for good. Each category helps illuminate the functions the Icelandic revenant serves within the sagas. Together they provide a framework for other scholars to perform similar analyses on the *Íslendingasögur*, other medieval liminal beings, and analogous entities in contemporary American media.

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1. Introduction

Death surrounds mankind even if we often prefer to forget it. Those of us who hold fast to the reality of *memento mori* can use creativity to process our mortality. A myriad of cultures have used art as an instrument to ask both implicit and explicit questions about life, death, and what may follow. The Paleolithic cave paintings of Lascaux provide one of the earliest examples of those investigations. This painting exists in a section of the caves known as “The Shaft of the Dead Man” and depicts an “ithyphallic bird-man” lying before a bison and with a broken spear by his side who “is the climactic, ecstatic, instantaneous male principle confronting the enormous, slow, bovine, and enduring principle of the eternal feminine in her epiphany as the bison” (Thompson 129-130). This painting reveals “a vision of the higher consciousness that comes from the interface between life and death in the orchestration of the brain and the genitals through the spine in states of trance and meditation” (Thompson 130).¹ While scholars have formed different interpretations of this painting, a valid one maintains that this image reveals not only the inescapability of mortality but also the liminality that haunts the moment of death.

Questions regarding death and the possibility of an afterlife still linger. Some contemporary artists investigate human mortality and that which may exist beyond the realm of the living—or rather, the pre-mortem—through the use of different media such as novels, films, and television series. In some of these depictions, the dead return to the

¹ According to Paul Barber, erections are a common feature of the continental vampire due to the bloating that occurs to the body during decomposition (9).

pre-mortem world through divine intervention, disease, or some other ill fate. Sometimes, different aspects of a person—those traits which made them *them*—also return after their death, whether in spirit or in their post-mortem body. However, with that comes the damning question of how much of the pre-mortem individual actually returns in their post-mortem form, and whether or not they remain the same person they once were.

Fans of the television series *The Walking Dead* may recall several instances where the narrative both implicitly and explicitly put forth this question to the audience. In the opening scene of the first episode, Rick Grimes meets a young girl on the road who has changed into a walker—the show’s version of a zombie, or a person who has become infected with whatever makes the bodies of the dead rise again. The young girl seems to walk aimlessly between the abandoned cars on the highway until she comes across a teddy bear on the pavement. Instead of stepping over or around the toy, however, she picks it up even though she has no use for it in her current state. The girl does not grasp the teddy bear because of her post-mortem body’s instincts—she grasps it because of a lingering habit or an active desire. Her action therefore indicates that some pre-mortem psychological element remains post-mortem.

Later in the same episode, Rick meets survivors Morgan and Duane Jones. He soon encounters Jenny Jones—Morgan’s wife and Duane’s mother—as a walker. She repeatedly tries to return to the home that she and her family took refuge in after the outbreak as though some part of that which made Jenny *Jenny* still remains, just like the little girl. This question returns several more times in the first few seasons of the show as the survivors begin to understand the unfortunate reality that the walkers are no longer the people they were pre-mortem and that no cure exists for their current state. Two of

the most notable moments are when Andrea, one of the survivors from the camp Rick finds outside Atlanta, places the mermaid necklace she retrieved for her sister Amy around the corpse's neck just before Amy turns into a walker, after which Andrea disanimates her. In season two, the group discovers the barn full of walkers that some of the Greene family maintain on their farm due to their belief that—though their bodies actively rot—the walkers are infected with a disease that scientists will cure or God will stop, and thus allow their post-mortem friends and family to return to their pre-mortem state.

Between Paleolithic France and the contemporary vision of zombies explored within media such as *The Walking Dead*, *iZombie*, *World War Z*, and *Warm Bodies*, similar narratives exist across the world and across time. This study investigates the zombie- and vampire-like creatures known as revenants within the *Íslendingasögur*, or Icelandic Family Sagas. Recorded in the thirteenth century about events that took place in the ninth, the *Íslendingasögur* present an interesting case study regarding the belief in post-mortem beings and their functions within history and art, as well as the influences of Christianity upon pagan beliefs in Iceland after the official conversion in the last year of the tenth century. This study explores seven different characteristics of the Icelandic revenants to investigate how Icelanders understood death and the return of humans post-mortem in the thirteenth century. These aspects are as follows: Post-Mortem Rising, Corporeality, Ambulation, Articulation, Detriment, Vampirism, and Removal. Each category helps illuminate the functions the Icelandic revenant serves within the sagas. Together they provide a framework for other scholars to perform similar analyses on the

Íslendingasögur, other medieval liminal beings, and analogous entities in contemporary American media.

2. Problems

2.1 Origin

There are seven primary historical events that most heavily influenced this study. The first is the settlement of Iceland. According to E. Paul Durrenburger and Dorothy Durrenburger, historians generally accept 870 CE as the first permanent settlement of Norwegian travelers in Iceland (2).² While Norse pagan beliefs are at the center of Icelandic beliefs and therefore at the center of the sagas, these sagas are still Icelandic and tell the narrative history of the Icelandic peoples. The Icelandic sagas would not exist without the settlement of Iceland. The second notable historical event is the creation of the *Alþing*, which became the first parliament of Europe when the Icelandic chieftains established it in 930 CE. The chieftains made landmark decisions for the whole country at those assemblies, and, as revealed in the sagas, the laws formed through those decisions were so respected among the medieval Icelanders that they applied to both the living and the dead. The third event came to pass 70 years later when in 1000 CE Iceland converted from their traditionally held Norse pagan beliefs to Christianity at the *Alþing* “as a result of an arbitrated settlement between disputing pagan and Christian factions” (2). The fourth and fifth events are intrinsically tied, namely the Sturlung Era of political and economic strife followed by the cession of Icelandic chieftains to the rule of the King

² All historical details in this section come from *The Saga of Hávarður of Ísafjörður* by E. Paul Durrenburger and Dorothy Durrenburger.

of Norway. Together, these events changed the political structure of the country in 1262 CE. Finally, the sixth and seventh events are the recording of the *Landnámabok* and *Íslendingasögur*. The *Landnámabok*—or the “Book of the Settlements”—was written in the twelfth century and concerns the historical settlement of Iceland in the first two hundred and fifty years. The *Íslendingasögur*—or Icelandic Family Sagas—were recorded in the thirteenth century and focus on the familial disputes among those people between the ninth and twelfth centuries. Together, these works allow scholars and medieval buffs alike to understand some element of the past, whether that past is historically accurate or merely artistic.

Unquestionably, a great deal of time and history has passed between the events of the ninth century, the Christian conversion of the tenth, and the recording of the *Íslendingasögur* in the thirteenth. Scholars must therefore interrogate the belief that the sagas are historically accurate not only because of all that time, but also because the origins of the sagas themselves are uncertain. According to Denton Fox,

The question of the historical accuracy of the sagas is a matter closely linked with the problems of their origins. Scholars have generally belonged to one of two opposing camps: the advocates of *freiprosa*, to use Heusler’s term (in *Die Anfänge der isländischen Saga*, Berlin, 1914), who believe that the sagas were formed early, shortly after the events which they describe took place, were handed down orally for generations before they were put into writing, and are historically accurate; and the advocates of *buchprosa*, who hold that the sagas were composed, in writing, by individual authors at a comparatively late date, and are historically inaccurate. (291)

Unfortunately, both sides of the debate are fallible. Fox notes that scholars who favor *buchprosa* believe that the sagas are historically inaccurate due to the potential adjustments the recorders may have made to those events recorded—if they are indeed based on historical events to begin with—in order to better fit the artistic narrative they

wished to represent. However, those who favor *freiprosa* may also find that the sagas are inaccurate because they must rely on the historicity of the saga's original oral narrative, on those oral retellings remaining the same across history, and then upon the accuracy of the transcriber.

Jesse Byock similarly discusses the problems with using the sagas as accurate historical sources. He states, "since the mid twentieth century historians and social scientists have shied away from using them as sources" due in large part "to a series of theoretical obstacles against historical analysis raised by a group of Icelandic scholars who have come to be known as the Icelandic school" (*Viking Age Iceland* 149). Byock elaborates upon these ideas and states,

The Icelandic school championed 'bookprose', a term derived from German *Buchprosa* and first employed by the Swiss scholar Andreas Heusler to denote belief in the written rather than the oral origin of the sagas. The theoretical positions of the bookprosisists formed the foundation of saga studies in the second half of the twentieth century. In particular, the forceful position of Sigurður Nordal has dominated the issue of the sagas' historical value. While serving from 1951 to 1957 as ambassador from his newly independent country to Denmark, he prepared a detailed position paper, aptly entitled 'The Historical Element in the Icelandic Family Sagas'. Nordal's view leaves the historian (or any other social scientist) with little option but to ignore the sagas; it has successfully discouraged analysis of the social substance in the sagas and of indigenously derived creative elements in Icelandic society. In the past, scholars have disputed specifics in Nordal's arguments, but the basic bookprosisist position against historical use of the sagas remains intact, inhibiting the innovative kinds of socio-literary and socio-historical analysis which could deepen the study of saga and society. (*Viking Age Iceland* 149-150)

Though scholars could indeed deepen their understanding of the sagas and medieval Icelandic society by approaching the sagas outside of Nordal's framework, there is a risk of accidentally transforming a narrative truth into a historical truth. Therefore, the sagas are A Truth—as opposed to The Truth—and scholars must treat them as such.

2.2 *Authorship*

The problem of origin also influences the problem of authorship. If the Icelandic people created and passed down the sagas orally, there is no chance to discover who first brought them together, just how much changed across the centuries as they shared those sagas, and who adapted what parts—and perhaps only a slightly better, yet still minute chance to discover who transcribed them. Likewise, if the Icelanders shared only the historical events two centuries prior to someone taking quill to parchment and recording them within the narrative, scholars may have a better chance of knowing who that person or those people were, but it remains difficult to make and prove those conjectures. While some scholars still attempt to trace particular sagas to particular creators, others agree that proving that authorship is unproductive. Hallvard Lie, for example, questions “both the methodology and the ultimate value of attaching names to sagas,” as does Steblin-Kamenskij, who believes that “efforts to discriminate fact from fiction in the sagas are anachronistic and pointless, as is the assumption underlying the tracing of literary borrowings (1973:49-68; 1967)” (Clover 246, 260). Scholars do not know whether the creators of any individual saga were one or more transcribers, or one or more recorders. Due to these confounding circumstances, this study will henceforth refer to all such persons as the sagas’ authors.

2.3 *Christianity*

Christianity also plays a tremendous role in the arguments concerning the sagas’ origins due to the timeline of related events in Iceland. The conversion of the tenth century sits between the events that may have actually happened in the ninth century and when authors recorded those events within the sagas in the thirteenth century. Though

some Icelanders were already Christian, Iceland legally converted in 1000 CE and their previously held belief systems intermingled even more with their new official religion. However, it is difficult to determine exactly which Christian beliefs the Icelanders held at any given place or time. Contrary to popular belief, medieval Christianity varied greatly even on local levels on the continent, and Iceland itself is no exception given its removal from Europe and insular existence. According to Thomas A. DuBois, different religious orders disseminated “Latin religious knowledge to the masses” across Europe—to include Nordic countries—in the thirteenth century and therefore,

Scholars have debated the extent to which the Icelandic texts of the thirteenth century, our most valuable sources regarding the pre-Christian religions of the North, are influenced by this extensive ecclesiastical literature. (36)

These orders had different beliefs which interacted with local pagan religions in Iceland and thus forged new variations of religion. In addition to those local variations, however, the variations of Christianity across time also present a problem. DuBois argues that

Scholars have too often relied on later notions or configurations of Christianity as a basis for understanding the religion as it existed in the Middle Ages, depicting in their studies a Christianity somehow static and well defined, ignoring both historical and local variations. (33)

While it is difficult to determine what variations of Christianity influenced the different locations in and people of Iceland at any given time, contemporary scholars must remain aware that the variations of modern Christianity are not the same as those which existed in the thirteenth century.

Even beyond that, however, scholars may read the very influence of Christianity upon pagan beliefs as “an aspect of Christian theology, as von See has shown in his examination of Christian euhemerism (reading myths as history) in relation to pre-Christian deities” (DuBois 36). This blending, or attempt at syncretism, allows different

elements of pagan and Christian beliefs to coincide—such as those regarding Odin and Jesus being hanged from a tree or a cross, respectively. However, when one takes the problem of origin into account, it is nearly impossible to discover what specific versions of Christian belief may have influenced any given oral retellings or written recordings of the sagas. Unfortunately, any attempt to uncover this influence solely through the sagas also ends up within the realm of a historical reading of the text, the difficulties with which have already been discussed.

2.4 Audience

Like the problems of the sagas' origins and often lack of clear authorship, similar questions arise regarding the influence of the intended audience, particularly after the Christianization of Iceland. Though scholars may not succeed in fully tying all of the sagas to their respective authors, they must also remember that the audience's lives and desires may have influenced the author's work. Scholars should question what the authors felt their purposes were in recording the sagas and what social pressures they faced in adapting them for a Christian world. These aspects and more may have led to those authors altering elements of the text that had once been historically accurate and shaped them into something different in an effort to protect the saga as a whole or to otherwise please their audience.

2.5 Translation

Finally, there is the problem of translation. Durrenburger and Durrenburger offer two solutions to the problem at the heart of translation—how to achieve a translation

“that reflects the original and is still intelligible to a modern reader of English” (36).³ The first “solution is not to translate,” but “to simply suggest that if you want to read sagas, you should learn medieval Icelandic” (37). However, this takes time and discipline that many people do not have, and hinders access to the artistry that the sagas represent. The alternative is therefore to translate, but “The problem is how to bring the subtleties of haiku from Japanese into English when the very structure of the languages is so different. And so for any translation” (37). Durrenburger and Durrenburger explain that some scholars and artists believe the best translation is the most artistic one, or the one that adheres to “some canons of literary beauty,” while others strive to produce translations nearer to modern novels (37). By contrast, “Others intentionally try to alienate the saga from the reader by using purposefully archaic language to suggest a time of long ago” (37).

Depending on the translator’s background, desires, style, and other underlying biases, the translations of the sagas may shape the understandings of those in the audience who do not speak medieval Icelandic even more than the span of time between the twenty-first and thirteenth centuries. Durrenburger and Durrenburger describe how they

have not smoothed out the rough edges of [*The Saga of Hávarður of Ísafjörður*], but we have tried to leave them as we found them. We have no interest or stake in trying to improve this artifact any more than we would a work in an art museum. Rather, we wish to convey as closely as we can, a sense of the artifact. We therefore try to neither to convert the saga into a novel nor to make it seem romantically archaic. (38)

³ All quotations in this section come from *The Saga of Hávarður of Ísafjörður* by E. Paul Durrenburger and Dorothy Durrenburger.

This “sense of the artifact” is an important aspect of translating and retelling narratives. “Sense” reinforces the idea that there is perhaps no single accurate truth—or at least not a historically factual truth that is more meaningful to the narrative than an artistic sense of the truth. Instead, this “sense of the artifact” reveals that the narrative has become a truth unto itself as it moves between storytellers, media, and audiences—a work of art pieced together across history.

3. Study Overview

This study stands on the shoulders of all Icelandic historians, storytellers, and scholars. The framework of this analysis relies on the work of two notable Icelandic scholars, Ármann Jakobsson and Arngrímur Vídalín. Jakobsson describes the three primary approaches to investigating the revenants of the Icelandic sagas. In “The Fearless Vampire Killers: A Note about the Icelandic *Draugr* and Demonic Contamination in *Grettis Saga*” he states,

The first would be the most common one; that is, to simply accept the nineteenth-century definitions of scholars such as Konrad Maurer and Jón Árnason (see, for example, Jón Árnason 1862, 222-4 and 317-20) and to use them to categorise the mediaeval [sic] *draugar*. The second way would be to take every instance of the word *draugr* in mediaeval [sic] texts and to analyse carefully what type of creature it seems to indicate, and then to examine the vocabulary used about those creatures. The third is the approach I will be taking in this study; that is, to focus on the function of the *draugr*, which means that there is no need to distinguish sharply between this Icelandic undead and other supernatural creatures that serve a similar function.” (308)

Like Jakobsson, this study favors the third approach, but with an additional touch of the second. This study did not begin with a search for every mention of the word *draugr* in the *Íslendingasögur*, but instead initially focused on identifying any notable being who returned from the dead. Contemporary translations of those sagas were then analyzed for the revenants’ different characteristics in order to understand their functions within the

Íslendingasögur. Some of these characteristics included their pre-mortem personalities, pre-mortem physical characteristics, causes of initial death, desired burials, the burials they received, post-mortem personalities, and post-mortem physical characteristics. These analyses aided the organization of the revenants within seven overarching categories: Post-Mortem Rising, Corporeality, Ambulation, Articulation, Detriment, Vampirism, and Removal. Together, these reveal the roles of the revenants in their respective sagas.

Additionally, two of Vídalín's concepts are useful in furthering this analysis for three different reasons. These concepts are the narrative middle and Vídalín's attempt to redefine the supernatural as the paranormal. Vídalín defines the narrative middle as "the protagonist's place of residency, permanent or temporary" and explores throughout his analysis how "*draugar* are always bound to the narrative middle" (*The Supernatural in Íslendingasögur* 12, 69). The concept of the narrative middle provides a useful framework to analyze the functions of the revenants within their physical locations and alongside the protagonists they encounter. These stories would not exist—or perhaps just exist differently—if the revenants never encountered the pre-mortem within that narrative middle.

When the revenant interacts with the living in some fashion, and especially when these encounters happen near the home, there is an additional element of fear and terror that influences how the pre-mortem react to the post-mortem. Jean-Claude Schmitt similarly takes note of the home in *Ghosts in the Middle Ages* and explains how that location is one of the places that individual ghosts (as opposed to troops of ghosts) visit the most—though both types of ghosts haunt the home in the *Íslendingasögur* (181).

Specifically, Schmitt writes that individual ghosts often return to their own homes, a concept that the revenants of the *Íslendingasögur* both support and challenge (181). These homes provide an initial space for the revenants to function within the narratives that have been recorded, even if they eventually move outside of those narrative centers. Comparatively, David Keyworth explains that “In the Icelandic sagas, *draugrs* wandered far and wide whereas revenants in the tales of Norway and Denmark tended to remain near the barrows where they were buried” (*Troublesome Corpses* 32). While this does not necessarily negate Vídalín’s concept of the narrative middle, it does help place the wanderings of Icelandic revenants in conversation with those on the continent. Therefore, the narrative middle provides an initial boundary wherein one can observe and analyze the Icelandic revenant and begin to understand the terror felt by those whom the revenant attacked, and thus is the first reason Vídalín’s study informs this one.⁴

Vídalín also argues for a reconfiguration of what scholars generally consider the supernatural, the fantastic, and the paranormal in conversations regarding medieval belief systems. He first argues against the use of “the supernatural” because

it means forcing modern conceptions of what the supernatural is on societies that mostly did not share our understanding of what it is, but if used correctly it restricts our analysis to the Christian dichotomy between good and evil, divine and demonic, and the interplay between these two greater powers behind and above nature. (“Some Thoughts” 21)

⁴ In his discussion of Glam haunting *Thorhallsstadir* before his battle with Grettir, Paul Barber encourages readers to “Note the disparity between the assertion and the evidence: we are told that ‘terrible things happened,’ but they consist solely of someone walking about or beating his heels against a roof” (85). Thus, not all who interact with the sagas believe that such terror is warranted.

He also explains that “the fantastic” is not a suitable replacement because

it also forces us either to impose our modern ideas of fantasy or the believable onto societies that most certainly did not share our understanding of the real as opposed to the imagined, societies in which actual belief in imaginary beings was widespread or, on the other hand, if we employ the fantastic as Todorov intended, we are anachronistically analyzing literary motifs and techniques which we have no indication of being consciously in use at the time. Indeed they probably were not. (“Some Thoughts” 21)

Instead, Vídalín argues that scholars should replace both terms with “the paranormal”

because this term

may be understood as that which is out of the ordinary, that which threatens the boundary of the explicable, that which lies outside of normal experience. The paranormal does not imply a belief or lack of belief in the phenomena it is used to describe; it does not impose on the subject a cultural or anachronistic layer of meaning, even though it is a modern term and is a very self-conscious one at that. (“Some Thoughts” 22)

Vídalín’s reminder that scholars must beware anachronistic judgments provides the second reason this study is informed by his. Every scholar approaches these sagas with biases which may influence their interpretation of the text, just as the authors of the sagas in the thirteenth century were likely influenced by ways the conversion of the tenth century interacted with the previously held Norse pagan beliefs of many of the Icelandic people. Contemporary scholars must remain cognizant of such biases and always keep in mind that the twenty-first century is far from the thirteenth, and the tenth, and the ninth.

The third reason Vídalín’s study is useful is because, when he focuses on those anachronistic judgements, he illuminates a discrepancy in his own terminology. Vídalín argues that “the paranormal” “does not impose on the subject a cultural or anachronistic layer of meaning” (“Some Thoughts” 22). However, it does. For a medieval Icelandic person, there was nothing truly out of the ordinary about meeting an entity that contemporary scholars would deem supernatural, fantastic, or paranormal as Vídalín

defines them here. Though “uncommon” is still an irritatingly imprecise word for this concept, it is more useful than any other word Vídalín discusses. While it may be uncommon to meet a revenant, a witch, or a troll when one steps outside their door in medieval Iceland, it certainly would not be shocking, or so far from the ordinary that it becomes supernatural, fantastic, or paranormal either. Still, the present analysis does not rely on the appropriateness of these terms. Vídalín’s work helps shape one’s understanding of different scholarly beliefs concerning the supernatural, the fantastic, and the paranormal as the terms relate to the *Íslendingasögur*, but they do not serve the purpose of this analysis. Instead, this study focuses on the revenants’ functions within their sagas and their effects on the pre-mortem world.

4. Categorization

4.1 Post-Mortem Rising

Noted Augustinian and English historian William of Newburgh details the risings of the dead in eleventh- and twelfth-century England in *The History of William of Newburgh*. However, he specifies that he does not know what causes the dead to rise and terrorize the pre-mortem (658). By contrast, there are several characteristics that increase the likelihood of a revenant’s rising within the *Íslendingasögur*. According to Keyworth, “The most likely candidates to become a *draugr* included individuals who had led a depraved life, or suffered a cruel and bloody death, or lay unburied outdoors, or who died in mysterious or unnatural circumstances” (*Troublesome Corpses* 28). He later expands upon this list and states,

Nordic tradition was just as encompassing when it came to likely revenants. This included former child murderers, perjurers, those who moved boundary-stones, witches and those who stole wafers from church or consorted with the Devil, drunkards, and even card players. So too if

the deceased had been dressed improperly for burial, left unburied or buried in a wet place or buried against their final wishes, those bewitched or who had been murdered, and stillborn and unbaptised children. In addition, those who were grieved over too long or not mourned at all, who were unfulfilled or had left things undone in life, mothers who had died in childbirth, jealous husbands, those with social/economic responsibilities or had hidden money; and even those who had been treated badly in general, were in danger of becoming a revenant. (*Troublesome Corpses* 155)

Careful analysis of the *Íslendingasögur* reveal these and more causes for post-mortem risings. This study divides those risings into four primary categories, much like Paul Barber divides his into predisposition, predestination, events, and nonevents (29).

One of the most commonly shared characteristics of the Icelandic revenants is a bad attitude in their pre-mortem lives—or as Keyworth phrases it, living “a depraved life” like Glam and Killer-Hrapp (28). For example, Byock explains that “While alive, Glam was a large, surly man who shunned company and neglected Christian traditions. These character traits foreshadow his post-mortem existence, intensifying his antisocial qualities” (*Grettir’s Saga* xxii). Similarly, Jakobsson specifies that “A frustrated man is more likely to become a ghost than one who is satisfied” and “Most mediaeval [sic] Icelandic ghosts are evil or marginal people. If not dissatisfied or evil, they are unpopular” (“Vampires and Watchmen” 295). What is merely unfriendly in the Icelandic pre-mortem being evolves into murderous tendencies in the post-mortem, especially when one takes into account the belief that Icelandic revenants return as a version of themselves and not simply empty husks. Keyworth also notes that “some individuals deliberately chose to become undead” and references both Kar the Old and Killer-Hrapp (*Troublesome Corpses* 155). Both revenants do harm to the pre-mortem in order to maintain some control over the land they owned before their initial death. They therefore remain in line with their pre-mortem mindsets.

Second, there is the ill-fated death. DuBois describes how

Þorsteinn Þorskabítr (“Cod-biter”)—generous to the end and a vigorous defender of his clan’s sacred site—is depicted as being welcomed into Helgafell, his family’s holy mountain. His death leads to no hauntings. On the other hand, the embittered Þórólfr Twist-foot—manipulative and unkind to his son Arnkell—dies an unsettled death, rising soon from his cairn to plague the countryside with his haunting. (88)

Thorgunna’s death in *Eyrbyggja Saga* is another example of an unsettling death due to the strange happenings that befall *Frodriver*, such as the blood rain. Similarly, Glam’s death in *The Saga of Grettir the Strong* is unsettling because a revenant likely kills him and Glam soon becomes one himself. All revenants possess the ability to create more revenants, and therefore any kind of unsettling death for one person may in fact spark multiple post-mortem risings.

Third, there is the improperly performed initial post-mortem burial, most notably when that burial goes against what the revenant desired in their pre-mortem life. As DuBois points out, “Issues of the care and disposal of the body were tied integrally to concepts of afterlife and a recurrent, if not ever-present, fear of subsequent haunting” (70). Two of the most notable examples of this are found in *Eirik the Red’s Saga* and *Eyrbyggja Saga*. In *Eirik the Red’s Saga*, one reason Thorstein Eiriksson returns from the dead is because he has a message regarding proper Christian burials in Greenland. In *Eyrbyggja Saga*, Thorgunna returns—at least in part—because her bed clothes were not burned after her death as she requested.

Finally, there are also examples from the sagas where the dead rise by a deity’s will, such as Thorstein Eiriksson in *Eirik the Red’s Saga*, Thorkel Eyjolfsson and his men in *Laxdæla Saga*, and Thorodd the Tribute-Trader and his men in *Eyrbyggja Saga*. Though Thorstein Eiriksson rises with a message regarding Christian burials in

Greenland, he only does so because God has made him a messenger. Thorstein soon lies back down of his own volition and returns to his initial post-mortem state. Nobody has to disanimate whether with a weapon to the chest or by beheading him and placing his head by his buttocks. Where many other revenants harm and otherwise bother the pre-mortem, Thorstein Eiriksson is one of the few who actually helps them instead and does not cause any problems. He is therefore aligned with the common belief that Christianity and God's will are constructive powers. Similarly, the groups following Thorkel Eyjolfsson and Thorodd the Tribute-Trader both return home with Ran's permission after they have drowned.

4.2 Corporeality

The physicality of the Icelandic revenant is a unique element of this study because of the enmeshment of Christian and Norse pagan beliefs in medieval Iceland. Before 1000 CE, one of the places a dying person with Norse pagan beliefs may expect to find themselves in the afterlife was *Valhöll*, a spiritual location still full of bodily experiences such as feasting and doing battle (DuBois 80). Despite the belief in a corporeal, material existence within *Valhöll*, those who embark to such a place are not considered revenants (though, as DuBois explains, "Nordic paganism was subject to extensive local variation and a fair degree of intercultural rivalry" much like Christianity [42]). After 1000 CE, however, *Valhöll* may have lost an element of its associated corporeality and been likened to a version of Heaven as the Icelanders began to understand and integrate the Christian beliefs regarding Heaven and Hell, particularly in relation to how this new religion emphasized the longevity soul far more than the body.

Still, the Icelandic revenants found within the sagas remain physical, tangible beings who rise post-mortem in the bodies they died in. According to N. K. Chadwick,

The peculiarity of Scandinavian and Icelandic ghosts lies in the fact that they are corporeal—not wraiths, disembodied spirits, but the incorporate spirits of the dead. They are animated corpses, solid bodies, generally mischievous, and greatly to be feared. (50)

Similarly, Jesse Byock describes the Icelandic revenant as a

physically strong, corporeal walking dead. Unlike in many other cultures, revenants of the sagas are not shades of former individuals or ghost-like apparitions, but large, dangerous, animated corpses who return to terrorize their former local communities. (*Grettir's Saga* xxi)

Finally, Keyworth paints a terrifying picture of the revenant's physical capabilities and appearance. He writes,

Given their portrayal in the textual sources, there is little doubt that the Scandinavian *draugr*s and the revenants of twelfth-century England were believed to be the actual reanimated corpses of the deceased, given that they indulged in very corporeal activities. Scandinavian *draugr*s, for example, killed livestock, brutally murdered their victims and even cooked dinner in the case of Thorgunna. Notably, Scandinavian *draugr*s and the revenants of twelfth-century England displayed all the characteristics of normal bodily decomposition, be it their bruised and blackened appearance, the horrible stench they emitted or their swollen, corpulent corpse, and their association with the spread of contagion, features not so apparent with the revenants of the pre-modern period. (*Troublesome Corpses* 38)

Due to their common physical and terror-inducing nature, these revenants are often associated “with the fear and power of darkness and reflect the possibility of continued material life of the individual after death” on the same physical plane as the yet-living (Byock, *Grettir's Saga* xxi). Furthermore, because “Issues of the care and disposal of the body were tied integrally to concepts of afterlife and a recurrent, if not ever-present, fear of subsequent haunting” across the Nordic world, the pre-mortem feared that the body

would rise and wreak havoc on their lives if they buried that body under improper circumstances (DuBois 70).

Translators commonly replace the words associated with Icelandic revenants such as *draugar* with “ghosts” in English. However, in the Western Christian tradition, ghosts are often not tangible. According to Schmitt, one foundational Christian belief states that

Man was made of a composed and mortal body and of a composed but immortal soul. When a person died, when the vital principle that had “animated” the person was extinguished (for expediency’s sake, let us name this *anima*), the body (*corpus, caro*), the carnal and transient envelope of the soul, was interred and destined for a rapid deterioration. According to Saint Augustine, as we have said, the dead body observed no “concern” (*cura*) beyond reasons of social conventions. On the other hand, the soul, the divine principle that was in man (*animus, spiritus*), did not die: as soon as it “separated” from the body, the soul, unless it was immediately saved or damned, endured “purgatorial” trials (or even, after the twelfth century, went to purgatory after an individual judgement) while awaiting final salvation. It was during this more or less lengthy time, conceived and even measured in the same proportions as terrestrial time, that apparitions of the dead were most likely to occur. (25)

Schmitt explains that there were many narratives concerning just what aspect of the person appeared to others post-mortem. Some people believed they saw the physically recognizable spirit of a dead person who appeared “*quasi*” or ““as if” they were alive” (Schmitt 25). Others argued that they perceived only shadows. According to Saint Augustine, neither the true spirit nor the true body of the person appeared after the death of the body. Instead, the soul—as opposed to the eyes—witnessed “an *imago*, a ‘spiritual image’—not ‘corporeal’—that had only the appearance of a body” (Schmitt 26). Even a ghost’s ability to speak led to a debate over whether the speech was born out of a corporeal or incorporeal body.

Still, scholars must also not confuse “ghosts” with demons or devils. Byock describes the religious landscape of Iceland and states

the revenants in Iceland were recognized and exorcized by the church. Icelandic practices, as known from medieval writings, were frequently different from church practices on the mainland. Christian teachings treat soulless bodies as animated by the devil or demons, whereas Icelandic ghosts (*draugar*) come back to life by their own volition and not by external possession. Icelandic sources portray a nuanced and extensive picture of what might once have been beliefs concerning the living dead and life after death in northern Europe before Christian theology took hold. (*Grettir's Saga* xxi)

Keyworth also discusses ideas of agency and external possession. He explains that there was a common debate across medieval England regarding whether one's soul or the Devil piloted the undead. He writes,

While there seemed little doubt in pagan Scandinavia and early medieval Europe that undead-corpses were empowered by the entrapped soul of the deceased, by the late medieval period, many theologians argued that troublesome corpses were instead occupied and reanimated by the Devil, pretending to be the deceased, in the same manner the Devil might possess and manipulate the body of a living person, that is, unless the corpse was marred by putrefaction. (*Troublesome Corpses* 169)

The corporeality and pre-mortem personhood associated with the Icelandic revenants survived the arrival of Christianity. Contemporary translators of the *Íslendingasögur* similarly preserve these characteristics despite commonly translating *draugar* and related words to “ghosts” in English.

Still, according to Keyworth, the Christian belief in an immortal soul as opposed to an immortal body did not eliminate the belief that post-mortem bodies could walk the earth at all. In fact, “the medieval Church readily accepted the notion of reanimated corpses” though this belief later waned “among the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and the educated elite” and was mostly entirely gone by the eighteenth century (Keyworth, “The Aetiology of Vampires and Revenants” 159). This change provides an example of DuBois' argument that Christian beliefs are not always static over time or between locations.

William of Newburgh illustrates one such encounter with a reanimated corpse in twelfth-century Christian England. He states that

It would not be easy to believe that the corpses of the dead should sally (I know not by what agency) from their graves, and should wander about to the terror or destruction of the living, and again return to the tomb, which of its own accord spontaneously opened to receive them, did not frequent examples, occurring in our own times, suffice to establish this fact, to the truth of which there is abundant testimony. (658)

William of Newburgh describes the events following the death of “a certain man” who “On the following night, however, having entered the bed where his wife was reposing, he not only terrified her on awaking, but nearly crushed her by the insupportable weight of his body” (656). The man returns on the second night, and on the third the wife “took care to remain awake herself, and surround herself with watchful companions” (William of Newburgh 656). The man leaves due to the companions’ shouting, however,

he harassed in a similar manner his own brothers, who were dwelling in the same street; but they, following the cautious example of the woman, passed the nights in wakefulness with their companions, ready to meet and repel the expected danger. (William of Newburgh 656).

When he fails to terrorize them, he turns instead against animals.

The entire street soon keeps watch for the man at night, and he transitions to terrorizing his neighbors during the day. The victims go to the church for help, the members of which first direct them to dig up the man’s body and burn it—perhaps in reference to the hellfire they believed such a creature would face after death or the common pagan burial practice of cremation. However, this “appeared indecent and improper in the last degree to the reverend bishop” and instead they open the tomb where the man stayed when he was not causing terror and place a charter of absolution upon his breast (William of Newburgh 657). Nowhere in the Icelandic sagas studied here do the pre-mortem impose godliness upon a revenant to disanimate them. Instead, the Icelanders

used physical force, the elements, and systems of law if they must take action, and as such this draws a comparison between medieval Christian Iceland and medieval Christian England.

There is an interesting overlap between the beliefs of the pagan and Christian Icelanders found within the sagas as it relates to the corporeality of the revenant. One such example exists within the revenant-focused episode that takes place at *Frodriver* in *Eyrbyggja Saga*. DuBois explains,

Local ghosts who have died on land and at sea return to the hall in the evenings, driving away the living even from the warmth of the yuletide fire. Their appearance is first said to be viewed as a sign of approval from the goddess Ran, who allows the sea dead to attend their own funerals if she is pleased to welcome them to her realm. This detail finds no counterpart in any other account of pre-Christian Scandinavian belief and seems created to underscore the conflict of old and new understandings of death during the era of conversions. (90)

In the scene referenced above, Thorodd the Tribute-Trader and his men arrive at *Frodriver* after they drown. They appear soaking wet and dripping water before they try to warm themselves by the fire because Ran has given them permission to return to land. The era of conversion in Iceland therefore brought together Norse pagan and Christian beliefs about the body and the reanimation of that body, and both sets of beliefs maintained the space for revenants to rise as the subsequent enmeshment occurred.

Finally, the idea that a body would not decompose post-mortem was sometimes viewed as a positive sign because “bodily incorruptibility was often attributed to divine favour” and related to saints and martyrs despite the similar connection with vampires (Keyworth, “The Aetiology of Vampires and Revenants” 164). As Keyworth argues,

the apparent incorruptibility of deceased Catholic saints can also be compared with eighteenth-century vampires, given the reputed lack of decomposition associated with the latter, while the copious amounts of

blood that poured from the corpses of particular saints can be equated to the voluminous quantities of blood supposedly shed by vampires when impaled or injured. (“The Aetiology of Vampires and Revenants” 165)

Furthermore,

The supposed existence of vampires also mirrored Christian belief in a future bodily resurrection at the Last Judgement, when each individual would be reunited with their physical body and face final judgement, remembering too that Jesus himself arose from the dead three days later. (“The Aetiology of Vampires and Revenants” 172)

Keyworth elaborates upon this concept elsewhere and explains that

the reanimated corpse of a vampire is an obvious affront to Christian belief in bodily resurrection and that Jesus rose from the dead three days later. The esoteric notion that vampires might continue their undead existence by feeding upon the blood of the living, or rather the vitality or life-force that resides in the blood (Leviticus 17: 10-14), is in effect, the antithesis to Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, whereby the Eucharistic bread and wine becomes the literal flesh and blood of Christ (John 6: 54-57), the consumption of which guarantees eternal life in the hereafter for those that partake. (*Troublesome Corpses* 164)

The physicality of the Icelandic revenant is therefore associated with both vampires and saints or saint-like beings but takes on a negative connotation due to the fear and sense of danger that the Icelandic revenant strikes in the hearts of their victims as opposed to the sense of godliness invoked by the saint.

4.3 Ambulation

Scholars often separate Icelandic revenants into two subcategories based on their post-mortem ambulation and articulation or lack thereof. The *haugbúa*, otherwise known as “barrow-dwellers,” are those that remain within or near the places they were buried after their deaths and often speak to the living. The *aptrgangar*, or “again-walkers,” are those that wander wordlessly and cause mindless destruction. Some revenants fit neatly into one subcategory or the other. For example, Gunnar of *Njál’s Saga* is a *haugbúi* because he remains within his cairn and inspires his loved ones to take revenge for his

death through his articulatory prowess. Similarly, Thormodur from *The Saga of Hávarður of Ísafjörður* is clearly an *aptrgangr*. He does not speak, but instead roams and wreaks havoc on the pre-mortem.

However, many more revenants do not settle easily into the categories of *haugbúa* and *aptrgangar*. Thorstein Eiriksson in *Eirik the Red's Saga* is not buried before he rises, speaks, and falls back again. Kar the Old from *The Saga of Grettir the Strong* remains in his burrow but does not speak and only physically attacks Grettir when he tries to steal Kar's treasure. Glam, also from *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*, uses both his ambulatory and articulatory powers to do harm to his victims, including the saga's protagonist.

Of the two subcategories, the *aptrgangr* often inspires more fear in their victims because they actively haunt the living and do not remain in one place. *Aptrgangar* and other wandering revenants leave trails of human and animal bodies alike in their wake. While they attack most often in winter and at night, these revenants will still attack in warmer seasons and during the daytime. The Icelandic sagas pay little attention to the speed with which the *aptrgangr* moves (which differs greatly from the slow but inescapable walk of the zombies in *The Walking Dead* and extreme speed associated with these creatures in the film adaptation of *World War Z*), but those whom the revenant haunts are left living in fear because they are not sure when the *aptrgangr* will attack next until someone disanimates them for good.

4.4 Articulation

As previously stated, some of the Icelandic revenants possess an impressive ability—articulation. When those revenants speak, they always do so in ways that leave lasting impacts on the pre-mortem (and in some cases, the other post-mortem as well).

Some articulatory revenants simply speak, some sing, some offer prophecies or bring forth a change in a practice of pre-mortem people, and some use their ability to speak to curse their enemies. Regardless of how the revenant uses their voice, the ability to speak is commonly assigned to depictions of ghosts (the common English translation of the word *draugar*) but not often assigned to depictions of zombies and zombie-like creatures. This ability to not only understand spoken words but also to communicate back to the living through speech is therefore unique to the medieval Icelandic depiction of revenants.

The framework of Christianity removes this capacity for articulation from the body and places it within the soul. According to Schmitt, “the fact that the dead person spoke and that the words were most often reported in a direct style continued to add to the impression of a physical presence” (200). One example of that direct style concerns the ghost of Gui de Corvo as he explains to Johannes Gobi how,

In a living body, the tongue does not have the power to speak by itself; it is but the tool of the soul, in which all power resides, including that of speaking. Thus when the soul is separated from the body, it has no trouble speaking, nor do the incorporeal angels. (Schmitt 201)

Within many Christian beliefs, articulation is a characteristic that belongs entirely to the soul. However, the Icelandic revenant is neither a ghost nor a soul but instead exists within its own pre-mortem body. The revenant’s ability to not only take in the words that others speak to them and understand what they say, but also to speak in return relies on their corporeality and the fact that the Icelandic revenant returns, in at least some capacity, as the person they were in their pre-mortem life.

4.5 Detriment

Contemporary depictions of zombies and zombie-like creatures often divide those beings into two categories: those who are fairly harmless and those who are destructive. Two examples of those relatively harmless creatures exist in the television series *iZombie* and the film *Warm Bodies*—the creatures in both of which maintain some element of pre-mortem personhood within their post-mortem form. In contrast, both the television series *The Walking Dead* and the film *World War Z* showcase worlds where zombies are vicious, terrorize the pre-mortem, and are nothing like they were before they transitioned into post-mortem beings.

Unlike those creatures, however, the Icelandic revenant often maintains much of their pre-mortem personality after they rise post-mortem and also causes detriment—or harm—to pre-mortem persons and creatures. For the purpose of this study, harm falls into four different categories. The first two types of harm are physical and nonphysical. Physical harm is that which a post-mortem body causes to a pre-mortem body. Often, Icelandic revenants fight against a pre-mortem being, most commonly the saga's protagonist. Within those fights, the revenant inflicts physical harm by beating their enemy's body like Glam beats Grettir in *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*. In some instances, however, there is no real fight through which the revenant inflicts harm. Instead, the revenant harms the pre-mortem body of their victim through other forms of contact or close proximity, such as those analyzed more thoroughly within the category of vampirism. Nonphysical harm is that which is not caused by contact or close proximity at all, such as harm caused by articulation. Two examples of nonphysical harm are

Glam's curse upon Grettir and Gunnar's lyric that inspires revenge killings in *Njál's Saga*.

The third and fourth types of harm are defensive and offensive. Defensive harm occurs when a revenant attacks only because they have been attacked first in some fashion. For example, a revenant may attempt to defend their territory if a pre-mortem being passes by or enters their cairn, such as when Grettir infiltrates Kar the Old's barrow. Offensive harm occurs when the revenant in question attacks the pre-mortem characters without provocation. Thormodur's attacks in *The Saga of Hávarður of Ísafjörður* are an example of such harm.

Some of the revenants in the *Íslendingasögur* fall into more than one category of harm. Glam, for example, does both physical and nonphysical harm, and while Kar the Old certainly does defensive harm, Audun states he also previously caused offensive harm. Similarly, there are some revenants that do not cause harm at all, such as Thorstein Eiriksson in *Eirik the Red's Saga* and Thorkel Eyjolfsson and his men in *Laxdæla Saga*. However, those harmless revenants are few and far between.

4.6 Vampirism

Though Icelandic-to-English translators often replace the word *draugar* with "ghosts," the continental vampire is one of the closest relations to the Icelandic revenant other than the zombie. When one thinks of contemporary vampires, they may conjure images of blood-thirsty, sun-hating creatures who create undead armies out of small towns in Maine—such as those in Stephen King's *Salem's Lot*—or those who have sparkling skin—such those in Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight*. However, medieval Icelandic revenants are not characterized by these vampiric qualities. The genuine connections

between these two creatures are threefold: the corporeality of both Icelandic revenants and continental vampires, the similar causes of post-mortem risings, and most notably the Icelandic revenant's ability to infect the living with revenantism.

Throughout *The Vampire, His Kith and Kin*, classic occultist Montague Summers describes different origin stories for vampires or creatures like vampires, be they African, Chinese, Arabian, Roman, Australian, Slavic, and more. He takes the three necessary elements of witchcraft ("the Devil, the Witch, and the Permission of God") and extends this formula to explain the three necessary elements of vampirism regardless of culture: "the Devil, the Dead Body, and the Permission of God" (32). Summers describes how "The vampire has a body, and it is his own body. He is neither dead nor alive; but living in death. He is an abnormality; the androgyne in the phantom world; a pariah among the fiends" (6). Both the continental vampire and the Icelandic revenant are affiliated with corporeality and the return of their pre-mortem person in a post-mortem form because in neither case does the spirit of the deceased person suddenly jump ship, nor does a demonic or devilish entity pilot the post-mortem body.

In addition to these necessary elements, Summers argues that vampires may also arise due to the person having been excommunicated, buried prematurely, been a victim of either suicide or murder, or even leading "a life of more than ordinary immorality and unbridled wickedness" (77). As detailed previously, such events are similar to the common reasons Icelandic revenants rise. These are a poor pre-mortem attitude, an unsettling death, improper burial rites, and a deity's will.

Finally, the third connection between the Icelandic revenant and the continental vampire is the revenant's ability to infect the pre-mortem with revenantism much like

vampires can infect the pre-mortem with vampirism. According to Barber, “Characteristically, vampirism occurs as an epidemic,” and such epidemics occur in several of the sagas (7). The Vampirism category in this study specifically relates to the revenants who are commonly, though not always, “intent on injuring the living and infecting them with the same curse of haunting,” and therefore fulfill a vampiric role (DuBois 85). However, the Icelandic revenant does not infect others with “vampirism.” The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* defines “vampirism” as “The collective facts or ideas associated with the supposed existence and habits of vampires.” That definition is inadequate for this study because it does not convey the concept of infection at all. Instead, this study uses the term “revenantism” to convey the vampiric nature of the Icelandic revenant. Revenantism consists of two linguistic elements, the base word “revenant” and the suffix “-ism.” The *OED* defines “revenant” as “A person who returns from the dead; a reanimated corpse; a ghost” and “-ism” as a suffix “Forming a simple noun of action . . . naming the process, or the completed action, or its result.” Thus, the neologism “revenantism” as a noun of action refers to the process by which one becomes a revenant whether through physical contact or close proximity to another revenant, or the result of such a process.

In several of the revenant-focused episodes of the *Íslendingasögur*, one revenant creates another whether through that close proximity or physical contact. An unnamed revenant is responsible for Glam’s death in *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*, Sigrid is responsible for Thorstein Eiriksson’s death in *Eirik the Red’s Saga*, and much of the group who walk at *Frodriver* are responsible for the deaths of their townspeople in

Eyrbyggja Saga. Each of these revenants infects their victims with revenantism and thus fulfills the role of a vampire.

4.7 Removal

The easiest revenant to disanimate is the one who never rises. There are several methods that those who care for the body employ when they wish to prevent the deceased person from rising post-mortem. According to Keyworth,

Various countermeasures were also used to confine particular corpses to their coffins, in the event they became a revenant, or to at least hamper their progress should the deceased break free from the grave. A widespread practice was to remove the corpse from the house feet first through a window or hole knocked in the wall, or even a gap dug under the door sill, in order to confuse the corpse should it try to return home. (*Troublesome Corpses* 122)

Some of these countermeasures prove successful. For example, in *Egil's Saga*, Egil must prepare the body of his father Skallagrim after his death. He first

went through to the bench and stood behind Skallagrim, taking him by the shoulders and tugging him backwards. He laid him down on the bench and closed his nostrils, eyes and mouth. Then he ordered the men to take spades and break down the south wall. When this had been done, Egil took hold of him by the head and shoulders, and the others by his legs. They carried him like this right across the house and out through where the wall had been broken down. They carried him out to *Naustanes* without stopping and covered his body up for the night. In the morning, at high tide, Skallagrim's body was put in a ship and they rowed with it out to *Digranes*. Egil had a mound made on the edge of the promontory, where Skallagrim was laid to rest with his horse and weapons and tools. (Scudder 108)

Skallagrim does not rise as a revenant and thus reveals that, on occasion, such countermeasures may in fact work—though it is possible Skallagrim would not have risen post-mortem regardless of Egil performing these countermeasures. However, these measures do not always succeed. Thorolf Twist-Foot provides one such example in

Eyrbyggja Saga when he rises and terrorizes his pre-mortem home despite his son covering his head and removing him from the home through a hole in the wall.

Some revenants need not be disanimated at all, as depicted in the tales of Thorgunna in *Eyrbyggja Saga* and Thorstein Eiriksson in *Eirik the Red's Saga*. Both rise from the dead and perform necessary tasks or deliver news from the afterlife, but both also disanimate, return to their post-mortem existence, and remain sufficiently dead on their own terms. However, if the pre-mortem cannot prevent a revenant from rising and must act against those post-mortem haunters, the sagas contain several methods for removing them.

Most often, revenants can only be disanimated for good through physical interaction. One such method focuses on the body. In some of these cases, the revenant's pre-mortem enemies deal blows to their walking corpse that would take the life of their pre-mortem selves. Anything from an axe to the chest (perhaps reminiscent of the vampiric stake to the heart) or decapitation may successfully disanimate that revenant. Additionally, the motif of not only decapitating a revenant but also placing "the revenant's head alongside the buttocks" is "perhaps a reflection of ritual actions associated with permanently killing revenants" (Byock, *Grettir's Saga* xxi).⁵ This occurs

⁵ Robert Egger's film *The Northman* features such an action when Amleth, portrayed by Alexander Skarsgård, ventures into a revenant's cairn to retrieve a mystical sword named *Draugr*. When Amleth grasps the sword in the revenant's lap, the revenant reanimates. Amleth successfully beats the creature back and decapitates him, then places his head by his buttocks to disanimate him.

twice in *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*. Sometimes cremation or drowning follows the revenant's final death, the former occurring with Hrapp in *Laxdæla Saga* and Thorolf Twist-Foot in *Eyrbyggja Saga* and the latter with Thormodur in *The Saga of Hávarður of Ísafjörður*.

Speech—or more specifically adherence to the laws of the land—are another interactive method of removal. The large group of revenants in *Eyrbyggja Saga* who leave *Frodriver* because the court verbally orders them to share this unique characteristic. Though they articulate their disappointment, the revenants adhere to the court's ruling. This method of removal requires that revenants not only possess the ability to listen and understand what the pre-mortem tell them, but also to respond in kind. This interaction therefore reaffirms that the Icelandic revenants are, in some capacity, still very much themselves.

Finally, some revenants return not only once in their post-mortem state, but twice, and therefore must be disanimated a second time. In those cases, they must often battle with a pre-mortem enemy again. These revenants include Hrapp, Thorolf Twist-Foot, and Thormodur. In each of these cases, their final killer calls upon the elements to disanimate them for good: Thorolf Twist-Foot and Hrapp's bodies are cremated, and Thormodur's spine is broken before his body is sunk to the bottom of the ocean.

5. The *Íslendingasögur*

5.1 The Saga of Grettir the Strong

The Saga of Grettir the Strong contains two primary revenants, Kar the Old and Glam. Each provides the saga's hero, Grettir, with two very different experiences. Early in the saga, Grettir sees a flame near Audun's farm at *Vindheim* and tells Audun that such

a flame normally signifies buried treasure. Audun attempts to wave Grettir off and explains that the light comes from Kar's mound. He tells Grettir that Kar "has haunted the island and frightened away all the farmers who owned land here. Now Thorfinn owns the entire island and no one who is under his protection is harmed by Kar" (Scudder 38-39).⁶ Despite Audun's warning, Grettir still invades Kar's mound and attempts to steal the revenant's treasure. When Grettir attempts to leave, "something grabbed him tight. He dropped the treasure and fought back, and the two of them grappled violently, knocking everything over that was in their way" (39). The pair "fought with all their might" and soon Grettir pulls his sword, Jokul's Gift, and decapitates Kar the Old (39). Then, he "placed the head up against the mound-dweller's buttocks" (39).

Kar the Old physically harms the pre-mortem in both offensive and defensive manners. Audun does not specify why exactly Kar harmed his previous victims or whether or not they disturbed Kar in some way. Therefore it is possible that his victims were intrigued by the lights as Grettir was, approached the burial site, agitated the revenant, and provoked a defensive attack. However, the word "haunted" suggests that Kar left his cairn to hunt his victims down and firmly places those attacks within the offensively harmful category (39). Kar also branches into the defensively harmful category because of his encounter with Grettir who invades his cairn and attempts to steal his treasure. Additionally, Kar the Old does not speak, wander, or turn other pre-mortem beings into revenants. He is simply a strong corporeal being who protects the possessions

⁶ All saga quotations in this section come from Bernard Scudder's translation of *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*.

he still owns from thieves and Grettir must harm his physical body to disanimate him. Kar the Old is therefore a prime example of an almost-*haugbúi* because he does not wander from his cairn, but he does not use any articulatory powers, either.

Glam is the second revenant found within *The Saga of Grettir the Strong* and one of the most renowned in all of Icelandic literature. In his life, Glam is a foul-tempered Swede who works as a shepherd for Thorhall at *Thorhallsstadir*. He is a large and strange-looking man, with “wide blue eyes and wolf-grey hair,” and is not afraid of hauntings (76). On Christmas Eve, Glam expresses his dissatisfaction with the Christian custom of not eating on the holiday and demands that the farmer’s wife bring him food. Then, Glam leaves.

A storm soon falls over *Thorhallsstadir*, and Glam does not come home. When a search party goes out, they find Glam “dead, black as hell and bloated to the size of a bull” (78). The party suspects that it was the previous unnamed wight haunting the area that killed Glam. They try for several days to move Glam’s body but cannot. On the third day, a priest goes to see the body but it is missing. Eventually the group finds Glam again and buries him where he lies. However, “Shortly afterwards, people became aware that Glam was not resting in peace” and those he haunts consider him “a terrible plague” (78). While in life he was a physical force to be reckoned with, the bonder says Glam is now “different from any human form” (83).

Glam returns to haunt *Thorhallsstadir* day and night and terrorizes Thorhall’s residents when he stomps across the roof and bangs on the doors. He soon kills the people who live at and near the farm. Thorgaut then takes over Glam’s previous job and says that Glam must do more to scare him. A few days after Thorgaut leaves to care for

the sheep, a group of people find him dead next to Glam's cairn: "his neck was broken and every bone in his body crushed" (80). Glam continues to wreak havoc on *Thorhallsstadir*, causing everyone to flee except Thorhall, his wife, and the cowherd. Glam soon kills the cowherd by breaking his spine and Thorhall finally flees, leaving his livestock behind to die by Glam's hand. Glam then travels all over the valley and continues destroying different farms. Thorhall returns to *Thorhallsstadir* in the spring but finds it difficult to hire farmhands. Though his attacks lessen, Glam still haunts the area. The hauntings return in full force in the autumn and Glam kills the farmer's daughter.

Eventually, Grettir Asmundarson hears of the events that occurred in the valley, and though Jokul tells him not to, "for this is a great test of fortune and you are an important man in your family.... And it's much better to tackle human beings than such evil beings," Grettir ventures anyway (82). Grettir waits at *Thorhallsstadir* for Glam to attack, and Glam soon kills Grettir's horse. Finally, Grettir catches sight of Glam during the night when he sticks his "hideously big" head with its "grotesque features" in through the front door after he tramples across the roof of the hall (84). Though it takes Glam a moment to spot Grettir's form hiding beneath his blankets, the two begin to battle.

Glam tries to drag Grettir out of the hall, but Grettir "saw he would be even harder to handle outdoors, so he struggled with all his might to stay inside" (84). Glam succeeds in moving the fight outside and as Grettir looks up from the ground at the revenant,

The clouds drifted away from the moon and Glam glared up at it. Grettir himself has said that this was the only sight that ever unnerved him. Suddenly Grettir's strength deserted him, from exhaustion and also because of the fierce way Glam was rolling his eyes and, unable to draw his sword, he lay there on the brink of death. (85)

Glam, who is “endowed with more evil force than most other ghosts,” gives a momentous speech and curses Grettir (85). Glam says,

“You have gone to great lengths to confront me, Grettir, . . . and it won't seem surprising if you do not earn much good fortune from me. I can tell you that you have attained half the strength and manhood allotted to you had you not encountered me. I cannot take away from you the strength you have already achieved, but I can ordain that you will never become any stronger than you are now, strong enough as you may be, as many people will find out to their cost. You have become renowned until now for your deeds, but henceforth outlawry and killings will fall to your lot and most of your deeds will bring you misfortune and improvidence. You will be made an outlaw and be forced to live alone and outdoors. And this curse I lay on you: my eyes will always be before your sight and this will make you find it difficult to be alone. And this will lead to your death.” (85)

Suddenly, Grettir regains his composure and strikes at Glam. He decapitates the revenant and places his head by his buttocks. The people of *Thorhallsstadir* burn Glam's body and bury his ashes, and he never harms anyone else again.

Glam rises for two apparent reasons. The first is because of his poor pre-mortem attitude. It is easy to draw a line from that attitude to his post-mortem desire to see Grettir and others suffer because these traits often linger within the Icelandic revenants, and “He was not given to worship and had no faith, but was peevish and rude. Everyone found him obnoxious” (77).⁷ It would not have been surprising if Glam died a somewhat peaceful death as an old man and still became a revenant. However, the second reason Glam rises post-mortem is because he was likely killed by the aforementioned but

⁷ The adjectives presented here are only one translator's rendering of the original Icelandic found in chapter 32: “Hann var ósöngvinn og trúlaus, stirfinn og viðskotailur. Öllum var hann hvimleiður.” Several other translations exist which characterize Glam in various fashions.

unnamed revenant previously haunting the area and therefore contracted revenantism.

Though his victims describe him as “a terrible plague,” Glam does not infect any other pre-mortem beings with that revenantism (78). Therefore, Glam does not fulfill the role of a vampire, no matter how many problems he otherwise causes for those he haunts all across the valley.

Glam’s ambulation across that area is another notable trait. He does not remain in a single narrative middle as one might expect. Instead, his desire—or perhaps simply his post-mortem nature—is to instill fear and terror far and wide. Some scholars have therefore challenged Vídalín’s concept of the narrative middle and argue that Glam is an exception to the rule because “the hauntings take place in farms far away in secluded valleys” (*The Supernatural in Íslendingasögur* 69). However, Vídalín explains that he “chose to not take geographical location of the farms into account and rather define the farms as designated narrative middles” (*The Supernatural in Íslendingasögur* 69). He argues instead that he does

not see this as a contradiction in terms as, however secluded the farms may be, which itself is a matter of debate, they are still the center of their inhabitants’ everyday lives, and as such supernatural occurrences [sic] would not be commonplace there. If they were they would not be considered supernatural, but ordinary, and ordinary events do not invoke wonder.” (*The Supernatural in Íslendingasögur* 69)

Glam, by Vídalín’s standards, still holds to the narrative middle even as he wanders to other locations to harm others.

Glam’s attacks against those homes are an important aspect of his function within the saga. As Schmitt explains,

The concrete limits of the house—the door, the threshold, the edge of the window—also played a remarkable role. The contrast between the interior (*intus*) and the exterior (*foris*) was a fundamental schema of medieval ideology. Here it was a matter of separating, even protecting, the living

who were *inside* from the dead and the evil spirits who were *outside* and whom the living wanted to repel. (182)

Glam not only rides the roof of the hall but he also enters those halls to do battle with Grettir. During their battle, Grettir fights Glam's attempts to take him out of doors or across that threshold that reflects a barrier between potential life and potential death. Though Glam dies his final death outside that home, Grettir still suffers both the short and long term consequences of Glam's attack.

Other than the easily discernible physical harm that Glam causes, he also possesses unique articulatory power and uses it to do nonphysical harm. The possession and use of that power further supports the idea that Glam's post-mortem intelligence and awareness evolved from his pre-mortem personality. Glam uses this ability to curse the saga's protagonist. As Byock states, "Grettir tastes fear for the first time and acquires his tragic weakness: his inability to be alone because of his fear of the dark" during this encounter with Glam (*Grettir's Saga* xxii). Therefore Glam's verbal attack leaves longer lasting effects on Grettir than his physical attack. All of this harm takes on the form of an offensive attack and contrasts with Grettir's experience with Kar the Old. Though Glam may have defended himself against the revenant that the search party believes killed him and does fight back once he battles Grettir, post-mortem Glam does not sit by and wait for the pre-mortem to goad him. He actively roams, terrorizes, and murders those who live in the valley—man and beast alike. Because of his combined characteristics of destruction, wandering, and speech, Glam is neither *haugbúi* nor *aptrgangr*. Instead, he simultaneously fuses and transcends both common categories.

5.2 *Laxdæla Saga*

Laxdæla Saga contains another revenant named Killer-Hrapp. Pre-mortem Killer-Hrapp is a man “so aggressive that his neighbours could hardly stand up to his attacks” (Kunz 297).⁸ He becomes “increasingly difficult to deal with” in his old age and eventually “Hrapp’s strength waned until he was confined to his bed, but his malicious nature remained the same” (297). Killer-Hrapp has never been so ill before, so he calls to his wife Vigdis and states his desires for his burial: ““When I’m dead I want to be buried in the kitchen doorway. Have me placed in the ground upright, so I’ll be able to keep a watchful eye over my home”” (297).

Vigdis follows through upon his desires because she “dared not go against his wishes” (297). Soon, Killer-Hrapp returns post-mortem, and

if it had been difficult to deal with him when he was alive, he was much worse dead, for he haunted the area relentlessly. It is said that in his haunting he killed most of his servants. To most of the people living in the vicinity he caused no end of difficulty and the farm at *Hrappsstadir* became deserted. Vigdis, Hrapp’s wife, fled to the west of Iceland to her brother Thorstein Surt, who offered her a home and took charge of her property. (297-298)

Hoskuld promises to find a solution “and, taking several men with him, went to *Hrappsstadir* to disinter Hrapp and move him somewhere far away from sheep and men alike” (298). Hoskuld’s actions lessen but do not eliminate Hrapp’s terrorizing. Hrapp’s son Sumarlidi then inherits all of Hrapp’s wealth but dies soon afterwards and his death transfers the wealth to Vigdis, which then gets transferred again to Thorstein Surt.

⁸ All saga quotations in this section come from Keneva Kunz’s translation of *Laxdæla Saga*.

Eventually, Thorstein seeks to take the land of *Hrappsstadir* but drowns. Then, Olaf takes the land for himself.

Olaf sets up his home and one evening a farmhand comes to ask for other work, telling Olaf that ““Hrapp is standing there in the doorway, reaching out for me, and I’ve had my fill of wrestling with him”” (317). Then,

Olaf approached the door and prodded with his spear in Hrapp’s direction. Hrapp gripped the spear just above the blade in both his hands and gave it a wrench, breaking the shaft. Olaf made a run at him, but Hrapp let himself sink back down to where he had come from, putting an end to their struggle. Olaf stood there with the spear shaft in his hand, for Hrapp had taken the blade.

Olaf and the servant tied the cattle in their places and returned to the farm where Olaf said the servant would not be punished for complaining. The following morning Olaf went out to where Hrapp had been buried and had him dug up. Hrapp’s body was perfectly preserved and Olaf found his spear blade there. He then had a large bonfire prepared, and had Hrapp’s body burned and his ashes taken out to sea. (317)

After Olaf performs these actions, Hrapp never bothers the pre-mortem again.

Killer-Hrapp is indeed a troublesome man both pre- and post-mortem. The placement of his desired and received burial therefore suggests he “deliberately chose to become undead” so he could keep an eye on his home (Keyworth, *Troublesome Corpses* 155). As mentioned before, the pre-mortem take various steps to confuse the post-mortem and prevent them from haunting the area if they rise, to include digging a hole beneath the doorway when they remove the corpse from the home (Keyworth, *Troublesome Corpses* 122). Killer-Hrapp’s desire for his family to bury him in the space normally reserved for preventing a revenant from rising combines with his pre-mortem attitude and therefore leads to his rising wherein he wreaks havoc and proceeds to watch his home in some fashion. When Killer-Hrapp kills his pre-mortem servants, *Hrappsstadir* becomes

deserted (or, to draw upon Schmitt's views, a haunted house [181]) as though the revenant wanted to be the only creature around.

Eventually, when Olaf seeks to remove Killer-Hrapp for good, he sees that Hrapp's corpse still remains buried in the place where he'd been moved to and is undecayed. This lack of decay is grotesque, particularly when understood in connection to saints whose bodies were said to remain in a similar state but who serve a wholly different purpose. Still, Killer-Hrapp is no saint, and his hauntings do not stop until Olaf burns his physical body to ash to prevent him from rising again and doing more harm.

Killer-Hrapp does offensive physical harm to his enemies with his corporeal post-mortem body but never speaks, nor does he pass on revenantism to anyone else. He does not fulfill the role of a vampire, much like Glam. However, where Glam escapes the bounds of both *haugbúi* and *aptrgangr*, Killer-Hrapp is clearly presented as an *aptrgangr* due to his wordless yet destructive wanderings.

Another revenant in *Laxdæla Saga* is Hallbjorn Slickstone-eye—son of Kotkel and Grima—who rises as a revenant after Hrut and his sons drown him. Just before his death,

Hallbjorn looked landwards with anything but a gentle gaze, saying, “It was no lucky day for us, when my family approached Thorleik here on *Kambsnes*. I lay this curse that Thorleik will know little enjoyment here for the rest of his days, and that anyone who takes his place will know but ill fortune.” Events are thought to have proved how effective was his curse. They then drowned him and rowed back to shore. (341)

Afterwards, “Slickstone-eye's body washed up on the beach a short while after he was drowned. He was placed in a shallow grave at the spot called *Knarrarnes*, and haunted the area frequently” (343). Thorkel the Bald eventually battles him “and, just when

Thorkel least expected it, he slipped out of his hands and let himself sink down into the ground” and never harms anyone again (343).

Hallbjorn’s murder—or ill-fated death—likely causes his post-mortem rising. Because his body washes up on shore and he battles Thorkel, Hallbjorn is a corporeal revenant. The use of the term “haunted” and the offensive physical harm that the text alludes to during that battle reinforces Hallbjorn’s categorization as an *aptrgangr*. The curse that Hallbjorn utters against Thorleik does not occur in his post-mortem state and therefore does not qualify as the same offensive nonphysical harm that Glam does to Grettir with his curse. Hallbjorn never speaks post-mortem and therefore is not an articulatory revenant, nor he does not fulfill a vampiric role. Hallbjorn even disanimates himself when he returns to the earth during his battle with Thorkel, and therefore causes little inconvenience to those still living within the pre-mortem world outside of that battle.

Later in *Laxdæla Saga*, Gudrun sees the ghosts of her husband Thorkel Eyjolfsson and his drowned men when she goes to visit the church. On her way there, one of the ghosts speaks to her and says ““News of great moment, Gudrun,”” but she replies that he must keep silent (418). When Gudrun arrives at the church, she sees that “Thorkel and his companions had arrived home and stood outside the church. She saw the seawater dripping from their clothing” (418). Gudrun does not speak with them, but makes her way inside. When she leaves, the ghosts are gone. After her husband’s death, Gudrun becomes a Christian and the first nun in Iceland.

Though Thorkel Eyjolfsson and his men do not physically contact any pre-mortem beings, they seem corporeal due to the presence of the water dripping off of their

clothes. One of these revenants speaks but does not have the chance to relay his full message to Gudrun before she walks by them and into the church. And, though these revenants do not seem to wander or cause any sort of terror or harm the same ways many other revenants do (to include infecting others with revenantism), this group must have returned from the sea to show themselves to Gudrun outside of the church. As DuBois points out in relation to *Eyrbyggja Saga*, some medieval Icelanders believed Ran gave drowned men permission to return to their funerals on land if she was pleased with them (90). The revenants do meet Gudrun outside the church, but they do not arrive with the intention to attend those funerals. Instead, they attempt to deliver the news of their deaths. Finally, these revenants do not require any pre-mortem being to disanimate them. They simply respect Gudrun's request for silence as she journeys to the church and leave before she exits. These revenants are neither quite *aptrgangar* nor *haugbúa* because, while they wander in some capacity like the *aptrgangr*, they also speak like the *haugbúi*. Thorkel Eyjolfsson and his men therefore resemble Glam's ambulatory and articulatory nature but they do not harm the pre-mortem in any way.

5.3 *Njál's Saga*

Gunnar is a famous warrior from *Njáls Saga*. After his death, he is buried upright within his cairn. Soon, Skarphedin Njálsson and Gunnar's son Hogni travel by the cairn in the evening as the stars and moon shine in the sky. They see the cairn open, four lights shining in its darkness, and Gunnar looks happy. Then, Gunnar "recited this verse so, and

so loudly that Skarphedin and Hogni could have heard it clearly even if they had been standing farther away” (Bayerschmidt and Hollander 153).⁹ He sings,

“Said the gold-ring-giver,
gladly who in the sword-fray
fought with fearless heart, and
father was of Hogni:
He would rather, helm clad,
Holding to his shield aye,
Fall upon the field than
Flee, thou tree-of-combat,
Than flee, thou tree-of-combat.” (153)

Then, the cairn closes again.

Gunnar speaks from his place in the burial mound. Though the cairn opens and he turns his face to the moon, he does not actually leave that cairn, inflicts no direct harm to those who pass by his burial place, and never infects others with revenantism. In his post-mortem existence, Gunnar influences the world purely through articulation, and while that articulation may be considered a form of offensive (or, arguably, even defensive) nonphysical harm, it is a step removed because Gunnar does not take revenge for himself—Skarphedin and Hogni do. Gunnar’s powers of articulation and lack of ambulation make him a prime example of a traditional *haugbúi*. His corporeality is not specified within the text, but given the common physical nature of the Icelandic revenants and his role as *haugbúi*, scholars may reasonably assume that Gunnar, too, is a corporeal post-mortem being. After Gunnar has spoken, the cairn closes on its own, and Gunnar removes himself from the pre-mortem world.

⁹ All saga quotations in this section come from Carl F. Bayerschmidt and Lee M.

Hollander’s translation of *Njál’s Saga*.

As Skarphedin points out, Gunnar's verse is a call to action, and perhaps the sole reason he rises post-mortem. Skarphedin states, "There is great significance to this apparition . . . for Gunnar, who would rather die than yield to his enemies, has shown himself to us and given us this counsel" (154). The men agree to take revenge for Gunnar with one another's support. Hogni retrieves Gunnar's halberd and tells his grandmother he is leaving it at his father's grave so Gunnar may take it to *Valhöll*, but his grandmother sees through the lie of omission and knows he seeks revenge first. Hogni and Skarphedin journey to Oddi and kill both Hróald and Tjorvi, followed by Starkad and Thorgeir. Then, the two find Mord who asks to make a settlement, but Skarphedin reminds him that Hogni will set the terms. In the end, Hogni accepts Mord's offer for settlement, and that cycle of revenge seems to have ended as Hogni exits the saga. Without Gunnar's post-mortem verse, Hogni would not have taken revenge for his father's killing, nor accepted settlement, nor settled down with his wife, and thus passed the narrative of *Njál's Saga* over to Njál's family. Gunnar provides assistance to Skarphedin and Hogni and the narrative at large through his powers of articulation but also influences several other deaths. Therefore these lyrics function much like Glam's curse upon Grettir.

5.4 Eirik the Red's Saga

In chapter six of *Eirik the Red's Saga*, a fever descends upon *Lysufjord*, an estate co-owned by Thorstein Eiriksson, his wife Gudrid, another man named Thorstein, and his wife Sigrid. The fever hits early in the first winter they live there together and begins with the foreman named Gardi. Sigrid and Thorstein Eiriksson soon become sick and one evening Sigrid sees a group of dead people, herself and Thorstein Eiriksson among them.

Sigrid dies before the sun rises and the residents of *Lysuffjord* prepare a coffin for her body. That evening, Thorstein Eiriksson calls for Thorstein to return to the homestead from his place at the fishing locations because post-mortem Sigrid is trying to crawl into bed beside him. When Thorstein arrives, he “took hold of her and drove an axe into her breast” (Kunz 663).¹⁰

Thorstein Eiriksson dies before sundown that night. After his death, he too returns in a post-mortem state, “saying that he wished Gudrid to be summoned and wanted to speak to her: ‘It is God’s will that I be granted an exception for this brief time to improve my prospects’” (663). When Gudrid arrives, Thorstein Eiriksson “seemed to her to shed tears” and says “that those men rejoiced who kept their faith well and it brought mercy and salvation. Yet he said many kept their faith poorly” (664).

Thorstein explains that

“These practices will not do which have been followed here in Greenland after the coming of Christianity: burying people in unconsecrated ground with little if any service said over them. I want to have my corpse taken to a church, along with those of the other people who have died here. But Gardi should be burned on a pyre straight away, as he has caused all the hauntings which have occurred here this winter.” (664)

Then,

He also spoke of his situation and declared that her future held great things in store, but he warned her against marrying a Greenlander. He also asked her to donate their money to a church or to poor people, and then he sank down for the second time.

It had been common practice in Greenland, since Christianity had been adopted, to bury people in unconsecrated ground on the farms where they died. A pole was set up on the breast of each corpse until a priest came, then the pole was pulled

¹⁰ All saga quotations in this section come from Keneva Kunz’s translation of *Eirik the Red’s Saga*.

out and consecrated water poured into the hole and a burial service performed, even though this was only done much later.

The bodies were taken to the church in *Eiriksfjord*, and priests held burial services for them. (664)

After this, there are no more hauntings at *Lysuffjord*.

The group that Sigrid sees before her death seems far less corporeal than other revenants because Sigrid sees still-living people among them, and neither Sigrid nor Thorstein Eiriksson's physical bodies could exist in two places at once unless the spectral beings become corporeal reproductions of the pre-mortem individuals. In addition to this, these beings do not physically contact anyone. This increases the possibility that these particular beings are spectral, and perhaps a premonition of the deaths to come more than the haunting of traditional revenants. This premonition therefore transforms Sigrid's death from her illness into a far more unsettling one. Though these ghostly figures do not infect her with revenantism, their alarming nature may have influenced Sigrid's post-mortem rising.

While Sigrid may not intend to do offensive physical harm to Thorstein Eiriksson, she does infect him with revenantism, and thus, fulfills the role of a vampire. She tries to climb into his bed, whether for rest, to satisfy her bodily needs with a man who is not her husband, or out of some death-skewed habit remain near a Thorstein and therefore does possess the ability to ambulate. (Thorstein Eiriksson's aversion to Sigrid climbing into his bed should not surprise anyone, as, "Given the bodily coldness of a corpse . . . sexual intercourse with the dead would presumably be cold and painful, let alone repugnant" [Keyworth, *Troublesome Corpses* 82]). However, there is no indication that Sigrid's actions are actually malicious—though she does offensive physical harm, she does not attack anyone directly. Sigrid does not touch Thorstein Eiriksson before her husband

Thorstein disanimates her, but the closeness of their bodies in the bedroom illuminates the ease with which revenants can infect pre-mortem beings with revenantism simply through close proximity. Sigrid also does not speak after she rises post-mortem. When Thorstein disanimates Sigrid for good, he does not decapitate her. Instead, he drives an axe into her chest. Because of her silent walkings, Sigrid is a version of an *aptrgangr* even though she does not seem particularly malicious like many other *aptrgangar*.

Thorstein Eiriksson is a unique revenant because, though he returns from death, he does no harm to anyone at all (unless someone receives a Christian burial when they did not desire one due to the speech Thorstein Eiriksson delivers with his articulatory prowess). Despite Sigrid seeing still living people among the crowd of the dead, Thorstein Eiriksson among them “with a whip in his hand, ready to strike the dead,” Thorstein never actually strikes anyone pre- or post-mortem (Kunz 663). Thorstein does not pass on revenantism nor walk around and, like Gunnar, Thorstein’s corporeality is unspecified. Instead, Thorstein influences the world by using articulation to change the way burials are performed in Christian Greenland in order to help the post-mortem successfully obtain a Christian afterlife.

As DuBois explains,

The revenant Þorsteinn states that while the good Christian dead are to be reinterred [sic] in a church, the body of Garðar is to receive cremation, the pagan burial form. Since he is responsible for the hauntings, he must be disposed of in a manner in keeping with his demonic, pagan tendencies. In this way, burial becomes a key device for determining the postmortem rest of the dead, and reanimation takes on different meanings according to the religion adherence of the revenant. Cremation, the once-standard pagan method of disposing of the body, symbolizes hell fire, juxtaposed to the peaceful repose of Christian inhumation, slaked by the cool blessings of holy water and sanctified ground. (87)

Thorstein returns “from the dead for a brief time—with God’s permission and endorsement—to criticize the settlement’s handling of the deceased” in order to save the afterlives of Christians (DuBois 87). Therefore, Thorstein is one of the few revenants who does not harm the pre-mortem but actually assists those who still walk the earth in a pre-mortem state like Gunnar assists Skarphedin and Hogni, and quite unlike Glam. He is also one of the few who returns to his initial post-mortem state without interaction from a pre-mortem being. Thorstein Eiriksson is a type of *haugbúi* because he speaks and does not wander, but he is not as deeply anchored within that category because he rises before the people of *Lysufjord* have a chance to bury him.

5.5 *The Saga of Hávarður of Ísafjörður*

In *The Saga of Hávarður of Ísafjörður*, Thormodur is an old, little-known man from *Bakki* and the husband of Thorgerd. People believed that “he was not single-shaped” and that “every one of them was the worst to deal with” (Durrenburger and Durrenburger 44).¹¹ After Thormodur’s death, Thorgerd meets with Howard. She says,

“It is not, though, well with us, because he visits his bed every night. Therefore I would accept some help from you, landowner, because my people found Þormóður hard to deal with, but now it is so, that all are thinking of leaving.” (48)

Howard says “I am now out of my most active age and not capable of such” and asks why she does not go to a local aristocrat for help (48). Thorgerd explains that she does not think it will go well, and Howard encourages her to ask his son Olaf for help instead, as “it would be for young men to test their manliness so. In the old days we would have

¹¹ All saga quotations in this section come from E. Paul Durrenburger and Dorothy Durrenburger’s translation of *The Saga of Hávarður of Ísafjörður*.

thought it a game” (48). Olaf agrees to the task and goes to spend the night in Thorgerd’s home. Prepared for a fight, “Oláfur lay in a gable bed out by the door. A light burned in the hall. It was light above, but dark below. Oláfur lay down in a shirt and britches, because he never wore more. He threw a cloak on himself” (48-49). When Thormodur walks into the hall, he notices that Olaf is there, and because “He was not very hospitable,” Thormodur and Olaf begin to do battle (49). Olaf tries to grab his axe, but Thormodur is faster and “The hardest fight began. Þormóður grabbed so hard that all the flesh squeezed out from under where he grabbed. Also most things in their way were torn loose, and just then the light went out” (49). Eventually, their battle takes them outside much like the battle between Glam and Grettir. Thormodur trips over a log and “Oláfur then lets his knee follow the belly, there plays there with Þormóður, until he can arrange what is fitting for him” (49). Olaf walks away heavily bruised from the encounter, and news of his deed spreads.

Later, in *Ísafjörður*, Olaf goes to check on his sheep in the winter. He meets with Brandur the Strong who tells him that when he checked on his own animals, ““there stood a man there in front and waved in front of the sheep so that they leapt back to my arms and it has gone so all day until now. Now I want eagerly that we both go together”” (50). Olaf and Brandur decide to go to the shore together, and “they see that Þormóður is there in front, Oláfur’s wrestling companion, and he waves at the sheep so that the sheep leap back to them” (51). Olaf asks Brandur if he’d prefer to ““herd the sheep or attack against Þormóður”” and Brandur replies that he will take the easier route—the sheep (51).

Olaf and Thormodur begin to do battle again, and Olaf realizes that Thormodur remains incredibly strong despite their previous battle. Soon, the two fall down a

snowdrift and into the water, and Olaf pushes Thormodur under. He then “broke his back in two, prepared him as he liked and swam out in the sea with him long from land and sank him down in the depths. Since then it always seems haunted if people sail near there” (51).

Thormodur—like Glam and Killer-Hrapp—maintains a poor attitude in his pre-mortem life which carries over into his post-mortem hauntings. He does harm with his body through his offensive physical attacks but never speaks which makes him an inarticulatory revenant. Despite all the trouble he causes, Thormodur does not fulfill the vampiric role because he never infects any pre-mortem beings with his own revenantism. His silence in combination with his wanderings and destruction make Thormodur a clear *aptrgangr*. When Olaf finally disanimates Thormodur for the last time, he must combine physical harm to Thormodur’s post-mortem body with the elements when Olaf sinks his body beneath the sea. At this point, Thormodur can no longer do harm with his physical body, but the terror he caused makes the area where that body finally rests feel haunted. This sensation indicates that, like Glam and Gunnar, Thormodur produced some lasting effects on the pre-mortem.

5.6 *Eyrbyggja Saga*

Eyrbyggja Saga contains the highest number of revenants in the sagas analyzed in this study, the first of whom is Thorolf Twist-Foot. Thorolf is a difficult man and “The older he got, the more violent he grew” (Pálsson 83).¹² Thorolf dies a mysterious and

¹² All saga quotations in this section come from Hermann Pálsson’s translation of

Eyrbyggja Saga.

“gruesome” death in his high-seat (93). Thorolf’s son Arnkel hears the news and rides to his father’s home. When he approaches his father’s corpse, he does so from behind, “warning people to take care not to pass in front of the corpse until the eyes had been closed” (93). Arnkel covers Thorolf’s head with cloth and the inhabitants of the hall break the wall behind the high-seat to remove Thorolf’s body from the building.

Despite Arnkel covering Thorolf’s head, removing him from the hall through a hole in the wall, and burying him in an attempt to prevent his body from rising, Thorolf begins to walk at night and terrorize and murder the people and animals who live at *Hvamm*. Thorolf widens the expanse of his walkings and “His ghost was so malignant that it killed people and others had to run for their lives. All those who died were later seen in his company” (94). When a group of men open Thorolf’s burial place, they “saw his body was uncorrupted and very ugly to look at” (95). They begin to transport his body to *Vadilshofdi* but the oxen escape. Thorolf’s body is so heavy that the group buries him near where he lies and names the area *Twist-Foot’s Knoll*. Thorolf does not attack again as long as Arnkel lives.

After Arnkel’s death, Thorolf rises again and decimates *Bolstad* before he walks to *Ulfarsfell* and terrorizes the people there. A local farmer goes to Thorodd Thorbrandsson to seek aid, and Thorodd takes some of his men to Thorolf’s burial place. There, they find him “uncorrupted with an ugly look about him. He was as black as death and swollen to the size of an ox” before they burn his body by the seaside and throw his ashes into the sea (156). Soon, a cow begins licking at the rocks where Thorolf’s ashes had blown and local people see her with an unknown grey bull. Though Thorodd intends to put her down, the cow is pregnant and gives birth to a heifer in the spring, and later a

large grey bull. Thorodd's foster-mother says that the calf is not a "natural creature" but an "ill-omened beast" and that they will "all suffer horribly if you let it live" (157). Despite his promises to kill the calf, Thorodd lets it live and names him Glaesir. Glaesir soon destroys parts of the farm. When Thorodd attempts to stop the beast, Glaesir kills him and flees.

Thorolf is undoubtedly a corporeal revenant. After his initial death, Thorolf's body remains upright and the residents of the hall must remove his corpse. Arnkel worries about the well-being of those who pass in front of Thorolf's still-open eyes after his death, and thus those concerns are rooted in a specific part of Thorolf's physical form. He also uses that body to inflict offensive physical harm upon those who live in the locations he haunts. He is also another revenant who rises not only once in his post-mortem state, but twice. Thorolf's initial burial takes place within a traditional cairn. However, the precautions that Arnkel and his company take, such as covering Thorolf's head with cloth, carrying him out of the hall through a hole in the wall, and burying him are insufficient, and Thorolf rises as a revenant. After his second burial, also at the hands of his son, Thorolf seems content to rest until after his son's death. This period of time suggests that Thorolf was aware of his son's life in some capacity and avoided him whether out of cunning or an instinctual or habitual fear that Arnkel would once again prevent him from causing destruction. Thorolf rises again and does not stop haunting in his post-mortem body until after Thorodd Thorbrandsson burns his corpse. However, it is likely that Thorolf either became the unknown bull that impregnated Glaesir's dam or transformed into Glaesir himself after his dam licked his post-mortem body's ashes from the rocks.

In all the time that Thorolf is a revenant, he does not speak. Articulation is either not within Thorolf's capabilities or within his desires. Instead, he uses the brute force of his walking corpse and ability to incite terror to attack his victims, all in combination with the widening expanse of his wanderings, and therefore is another example of an *aptrgangr*. Thorolf also fulfills the role of a vampire because those he kills contract revenantism and haunt the pre-mortem with him, and may have caused the lasting terror Thorodd Thorbrandsson and his family faced through Glaesir.

The episode at *Frodriver* takes place between Thorolf's first and second post-mortem risings and contains one of the most interesting revenant-focused moments in all of the Icelandic Sagas because these revenants respond appropriately to the articulatory commands that the pre-mortem dictate in a court setting. In 1000 CE, an older, sturdy, temperamental, church-going woman named Thorgunna arrives to *Snæfell Ness* to sell her goods and Thurid invites her to *Frodriver*. Soon after, Thorir Wood-Leg and his wife Thorgrima Witch-Face follow her. That next autumn, a cloud comes over the sky and begins to rain blood upon *Frodriver*. With the blood rain comes a sickness. Thorgunna falls ill and says to Thorodd the Tribute-Trader,

“Should I die of this illness I want my body taken to *Skalholt*, because something tells me it will soon be the most venerated place in the land. I know there are priests there to sing Mass for me as well, and that's why I want you to take me there. In return you can have sufficient of my belongings to repay you handsomely for all your trouble, but before you start dividing up my property, Thurid is to have the scarlet cloak. I'm doing this to make her less unhappy about the disposal of the rest of my things. Next, out of all the things I'm leaving with you, take whatever you and your wife want most, to cover your expenses. There's a gold ring of mine which must be given to the church: but my bed and all its furnishings I want burnt to ashes, for they'll never do anyone much good. I'm not saying this because I grudge these things to anyone who could use them, but I must be firm about it. I wouldn't like to be responsible for all the

trouble people will bring on themselves if they don't respect my wishes.”
(132-133)

A few days later, Thorgunna dies. Those living in *Frodriver* take her body to the local church and Thorodd makes a coffin. Though he intends to go through with burning the bed clothes as Thorgunna wished so that all will be well, Thurid convinces him not to after much insistence. Soon, Thorgunna's pallbearers start the journey to her final resting place. One night, after the group is denied entry into *Nether Ness*, they awaken to a clatter, and

there was a tall woman, stark naked, not a stitch of clothing on her, getting a meal ready. The woman is Thorgunna, and everyone thought it best to leave her in peace. When she had finished doing what she wanted the larder, she carried the food into the living-room, laid the table, and served the meal. (134)

Thorgunna's post-mortem rising and following actions convince the owner of the estate to allow them into the home and feed them. Then, Thorgunna walks away. They continue their journey to *Skalholt* and Thorgunna is finally buried where she desired.

Back at *Frodriver*, the moon begins to move improperly and Thorir Wood-Leg deems it an ill omen of death. Two weeks later, the shepherd dies in his bed and is buried at the *Frodriver* church. This shepherd returns post-mortem and attacks Thorir Wood-Leg as he takes care of his bodily needs. Thorir falls ill (potentially due to the actual disease spreading through *Frodriver* or an early onset of revenantism) and is also buried at the church when he dies. Thorir becomes a revenant and joins the company of the shepherd. Together, they terrify the people of *Frodriver*. Soon, several more people from *Frodriver* fall ill, die, and turn into revenants.

Not long after these risings, a strange creature attacks the fish stores of the stead until Kjartan beats it back. More men of the area—specifically Thorodd the Tribute-

Trader and his companions—die at sea and their bodies are not recovered. At the Yule feast, the drowned men reappear and walk into the hall, dripping water. They are welcomed by the rest of the guests

because in those days it was believed that drowned people had been well received by the sea-goddess, Ran, if they came to their own funeral feast. At that time a good many heathen beliefs still prevailed, though people were baptized and supposed to be Christians. (138)

The dead men ignore the greetings they receive and sit down by the fire until it dies, and the guests flee the hall. For several nights, the drowned men return to the fire and wring out their clothing.

The guests decide to light fires in a different place so that the dead would not find them. However, Thorodd's company still comes, still dripping wet. Kjartan finally has them set fires in two places—one where the living will take their meal, and one for the dead to sit at. This goes on as the other company of revenants grows from the fever and revenant attacks at *Frodriver*. After more attacks on the fish stores, Thorir Wood-Leg's wife, Thorgrima Witch-Face, also falls ill and dies. The same night she is buried, she is found in the company of the other revenants. The people of *Frodriver* continue to die and the large group of revenants scares many of the pre-mortem individuals away.

Kjartan seeks help from his uncle, Snorri the Priest, and returns with another priest, his son Thord the Cat, and several other people to remove the revenants. At this time, goodwife Thurid also falls ill, but she is not yet dead. After Kjartan burns Thorgunna's bed sheets, he and Thord the Cat summon the revenants "for trespassing on the home and robbing people of life and health" (140). The court "was held and charges made, the proper procedure of ordinary lawcourts being observed throughout" (140). However, "As sentence was being passed on Thorir Wood-Leg, he rose to his feet, 'I sat

here as long as people would let me,' he said, then went out through the other door where the court was not being held" (140). The same sentence is passed on the shepherd who says, "it seems I should have gone sooner" (141). Then, "When Thorgrima Witch-Face heard her sentence, she stood up, too. 'I stayed as long as you let me,' she said" (141). Finally, Thorodd the Tribute-Trader is sentenced, and "When he heard the judgement, he stood up. 'There's no peace here,' he said, 'we'd best all be on our way.' And with that he walked out" (141). After this, there are no more hauntings at *Frodriver*, and Thurid survives her sickness.

All elements of this study's categorization are present within the *Frodriver* episode of *Eyrbyggja Saga*. Thorodd and his company of drowned men are a striking example of corporeality that has nothing to do with battle. Most sagas reveal that the Icelandic revenant is corporeal through their contact with the living, particularly when they fight. Thorodd's company provides a sense of corporeality through their general actions, specifically when they try to warm themselves by the fire as seawater drips off of their bodies. While such action may be born out of habit, also likely that they are acting on physical needs given the nature of the sagas and the revenants within the *Íslendingasögur*.

Still, the notion of a habit carrying on after death is a strange one and worth investigating. How can habits carry on after death? If the creature in question has little of its pre-mortem mind left, are the habits that are being reproduced only those that were habits of the body, and therefore more akin to instincts? Perhaps the seeking of warmth in a post-mortem body that can still get cold is more of what is known as a residual

haunting. According to Merlin Coverley, a residual haunting is “defined as the belief that haunting is in some sense analogous to a recording” and

suggests that the natural world is embedded with the mental impressions of emotional or traumatic events, some dating back millions of years. These can subsequently be replayed, our brains acting as receivers with which to decode such ghostly transmissions. (131)

In other words, residual hauntings are stuck in a sort of time loop, either with the ghostly being or element actually stuck replaying a particular moment or completely unaware of its own state of semi-existence. Though the revenants of the *Íslendingasögur* do not seem caught in a time loop themselves, this notion of carrying on and performing a past, pre-mortem habit complicates the idea of how much of any revenant is actually left behind in their post-mortem existence. This line of thought also eventually begs the question of how much any being maintains free will if they are subject to the habits, needs, and instincts of their body—such as warming themselves by the fire—whether they are alive or dead, both or neither. Still, within the *Íslendingasögur*, the revenants are the same people they were when they died, perhaps only with a worse attitude or furthered murderous tendencies.

Additionally, the existence of such troops of ghosts warming themselves by the fires within the domestic space is an interesting one, as, according to Schmitt’s discussion of ghosts appearing inside or outside the home,

Apparitions of the troop of the dead did not occur in this domestic space: their domain was the exterior wild spaces, which included haunted houses, since these houses had been deserted by their inhabitants for a long time. (181)

However, these homes are neither wild spaces nor haunted houses and therefore separate such groups of revenants from the ghosts of Schmitt’s analysis. Furthermore, Schmitt states that, “In the bedroom, according to other tales, the fireplace recalls the fire of the

punishment after death, but the cold dead person might also seek to warm up in front of the fireplace by turning over the coals, in a gesture of familiarity” (181-182). In the case of Thorodd the Tribute-Trader and his men, their actions take on a corporeal nature through the need to warm their bodies and a habitual one through their familiar motions, thus further supporting the belief that these are in fact the drowned men returned to shore and not just unconscious ghosts.

All of the revenants of this episode provide examples of overlapping detriment, ambulation, and vampirism. Though not all necessarily cross great distances, the post-mortem beings wander about *Frodriver* and infect the pre-mortem with revenantism through direct killings and their nearness as they haunt. The terror at *Frodriver* begins around the same time Thorgunna dies—her desires unsatisfied—but that does not mean she fulfills the role of a vampire because she never infects anyone with revenantism herself. In fact, she does no harm at all, but instead assists her pallbearers in receiving hospitality. Soon after her death, the shepherd falls ill and those at *Frodriver* believe he may have been bewitched. After the shepherd dies, he attacks Thorir Wood-Leg, and Thorir, too, becomes a revenant. The pair haunt the estate, and eventually many revenants run rampant in *Frodriver*. Thus, all those revenants who make contact with or are otherwise physically near the pre-mortem and infect them with revenantism inflict offensive physical harm whether they intend to or not. While some Icelanders may have simply fallen ill from the rain like Thorgunna, it is abundantly clear that *Frodriver* faces an epidemic of revenantism spread through attacks and close proximity. As soon as the court makes the decision to cast out the revenants and they leave, the last ill person returns to good health and survives. This outcome reaffirms that being around one or

more revenants can lead to death unless they are disanimated or otherwise removed because of the terror and sickness that they inflict.

The most unique element of the *Frodriver* revenants, however, is their ability to hear and articulate within the framework of legal proceedings. Those proceedings, if the idea includes general rules of hospitality, are first showcased through Thorgunna's actions after rising to care for those who carry her to *Skalholt*. Thorgunna "reanimates to ensure that her pallbearers receive proper hospitality" after they have been "denied food and dry clothes by the farmhouse at *Nes it nerða*" (DuBois 89). Even in death, Thorgunna adheres to the rituals of social care that provided a backbone to medieval Icelandic culture. Because of her quiet and helpful nature, Thorgunna is not quite an *aptrgangr*, but her movement places her closer to the *aptrgangr* than the *haugbúi*.

The dead continue to adhere to the law when it is revealed that the group at *Frodriver* can not only listen, understand what is being said to them, and speak to the living in return, but also still comprehend the concepts surrounding legal proceedings. Though Byock unfortunately confuses the events of *Eyrbyggja Saga* with *Laxdæla Saga*, he still successfully describes how

Sometimes revenants can be reasonable. For example, *Laxdæla* [sic] *Saga* features a crew of drowned sailors who return from the dead to occupy the house of one of the sailors' wives. In saga style based on social and legal processes, the living occupants of the house prepare a legal case against the dead intruders. When the revenants lose their case, they obey the jurisdiction of the living and leave the mortal world. This is an example of the mix of folkloristic content and Icelandic legal structure. The law sets the rules, whether for the living or the dead. (*Grettir's Saga* xxi)

Similarly, DuBois explains that

The exposure of the ghosts to lawsuit, a colorful and again unparalleled detail of the text, underscores the physicality of the Icelandic ghosts. They must be handled as one would deal with the living, while guarding against their return through the liturgical arsenal of Christianity. (90)

Though the ability to understand and respond to the pre-mortem is partially physical, it is not the same physicality as physical violence. Instead, this understanding and response of the mind through the body suggests that what made the revenants who they were pre-mortem is still within them post-mortem. The revenants of the *Frodriver* episode can still hear and understand what is being said to them, and they still have a respect for the law as they did in their pre-mortem lives. This also illuminates just how much autonomy medieval Icelandic society placed upon their dead. Not only were burial practices important (as represented in the cases of Thorstein Eiriksson and Thorgunna), but the dead were still worthy of respect, even to the point of receiving a fair judgement and trial. The revenants whom the pre-mortem send away through their judgements are not just *aptrgangar* or *haugbúa*, but a fusion of both. They therefore fulfill roles similar to Glam, though perhaps without quite as much malintent.

6. Conclusion

For as long as mankind has lived, mankind has died. In all of that time, different cultures and belief systems have painted different pictures concerning what, if anything, comes after death. Whether those stories are about twenty-first century Atlanta or medieval Iceland, humanity has continued to explore the possibility of an afterlife and what it may be like. The existence of these revenants suggests that, in one such afterlife, it is possible for a version of someone's pre-mortem self to return to this world post-mortem, whether with good or ill intentions. The *Íslendingasögur* were born out of a culture steeped in death, magic, religion, blood feuds, a prestigious legal system, and the necessity of the home in a harsh landscape. All of these characteristics remain evident within the sagas, no matter their origins.

Near the completion of this study, *The Northman* debuted in American theaters. Written by American film director Robert Eggers and Icelandic poet and novelist Sjón, the film draws upon the arts of the Nordic peoples and follows the story of Amleth, a young prince who flees his kingdom after his uncle Fjölfnir murders his father and takes the crown for himself. Amleth dedicates his life to avenging his father, saving his mother, and murdering his uncle. To aid his thirst for vengeance, Amleth must acquire a mystical sword named *Draugr* that is hidden away with a revenant. Upon grasping the sword in the revenant's lap, the creature awakens and brutally fights back. Amleth finally brings the creature to its knees with an axe to the back and decapitates it. Then, he places the head by the revenant's buttocks and walks away victorious. When Amleth returns to the farm where his uncle has unknowingly enslaved him, he states, "I will haunt this farm like a corpse returned from the grave." Amleth proceeds to fulfill a role much like the revenants in the sagas as he murders Fjölfnir's men and mutilates their corpses, going as far as to leave the scraps of their bodies in the shape of a "Sleipnir scorn-horse" reminiscent of Egil's scorn-pole or *niðstöng* against King Eirik and Queen Gunnhild in *Egil's Saga* (Sexton and Pfrengler 58:58, Scudder 106).

The *Íslendingasögur* and analyses thereof provide an avenue through which contemporary scholars can investigate the artistic truths of Iceland as they have been passed down over the centuries. The categories discussed here help illuminate the functions the Icelandic revenants serve within their respective sagas, and together they provide a framework for other scholars to perform similar analyses on the *Íslendingasögur*, other medieval liminal beings, and analogous entities in contemporary

American media. And, as Eggers and Sjón prove, the Icelandic revenant still haunts the living.

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