

SEASONAL SETTING AND THE HUMAN DOMAIN IN EARLY ENGLISH AND EARLY  
SCANDINAVIAN LITERATURE

by

Paul Sander Langeslag

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# Abstract

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Paul Sander Langeslag

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Centre for Medieval Studies

University of Toronto

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The contrast between the familiar social space and the world beyond has been widely recognised as an organising principle in medieval literature, in which the natural and the supernatural alike are set off against human society as alien and hostile. However, the study of this antithesis has typically been restricted to the spatial aspect whereas the literature often exhibits seasonal patterns as well. This dissertation modifies the existing paradigm to accommodate the temporal dimension, demonstrating that winter stands out as a season in which the autonomy of the human domain is drawn into question in both Anglo-Saxon and early Scandinavian literature. In Old English poetry, winter is invoked as a landscape category connoting personal affliction and hostility, but it is rarely used to evoke a cyclical chronology. Old Icelandic literature likewise employs winter as a spatial category, here closely associated with the dangerous supernatural. However, Old Icelandic prose furthermore give winter a place in the annual progression of the seasons, which structures all but the most legendary of the sagas. Accordingly, the winter halfyear stands out as the near-exclusive domain of revenant hauntings and prophecy. These findings stand in stark contrast to the state of affairs in Middle English poetry, which associates diverse kinds of adventure and supernatural interaction with florid landscapes of spring and summer, and Maytime forests in particular. Even so, the seasonal imagery in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* makes clear that Middle English poets could use the contrastive functions of winter to no less effect than authors in neighbouring corpora. In partial explanation of authorial choices in this regard, it is proposed that winter settings are employed especially where a strong empathic response is desired of the audience.

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Paul Langeslag

*Sumarmál* mmmxij

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## Abbreviations and Citation Practice

For all corpus texts of the *Dictionary of Old English* (Cameron, Amos, and Healey 1986–), the *Middle English Dictionary* (Kurath et al. 1956–2007), the *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* (Degnboll et al. 1989–), and Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages (Clunies Ross et al. 2007–), the short titles customary in those projects have been used in parenthetical and footnote references. Texts of the Poetic Edda are cited using the abbreviations employed in Neckel 1962, while Bible references are shortened following Weber 1994. Legends to these conventions are not reproduced in the list of additional abbreviations found on the next page.

In reprinting from text editions, I have silently altered punctuation and capitalisation, and occasionally word spacing, according to my own insights, while I have removed such editorial cues as italics and insertion marks. Translations are my own.

<i>ASE</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon England</i>
<i>ASPR</i>	Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records
<i>BT</i>	<i>An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary</i> , ed. by Bosworth and Toller 1898
<i>CCSL</i>	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
<i>DOE</i>	<i>Dictionary of Old English</i> , ed. by Cameron, Amos, and Healey 1986–
<i>EETS</i>	Early English Text Society
<i>FN</i>	<i>Fundinn Noregr</i> , ed. by Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1965: 3–7
<i>HNb</i>	<i>Hversu Noregr byggðisk</i> , ed. by Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: II, 137–48
<i>JEGP</i>	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
<i>KLNM</i>	<i>Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder fra vikingetid til reformationstid</i>
<i>LP</i>	<i>Lexicon Poeticum</i> , 2nd edn, ed. by Sveinbjörn Egilsson and Finnur Jónsson 1931.
<i>MED</i>	Middle English Dictionary, ed. by Kurath et al. 1956–2007
<i>MGH</i>	Monumenta Germaniae historica
<i>PL</i>	Patrologia Latina, ed. by Migne 1844–64
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i>
<i>OED</i>	<i>OED Online</i> , ed. by Butler et al. 1884–
<i>ONP</i>	<i>A Dictionary of Old Norse Prose</i> , ed. by Degnboll et al. 1989–

# Chapter 1

## Season and Society

### 1.1 Introduction

The seasons as they are today understood in much of the English-speaking world, with temperature readings playing a central role especially in our definitions of summer and winter, owe a great deal to the development of controlled fire. It was this technology, along with advances in body insulation, that permitted early hominids to push into new territories where temperatures varied greatly between the seasons, and where the cold of winter would have precluded human survival had it not been for artificial heating and heat preservation.<sup>1</sup> By moving north, our ancestors effectively created a new enemy for themselves in the shape of the winter season. At this time of year more than any other, their survival depended on technology, a shared and therefore social acquisition that has come to define *homo erectus*, and now *homo sapiens*, as a species. With it, mankind learned to shut out the world outside and create a space exclusive to itself.<sup>2</sup>

Technology has undergone great advances since the advent of controlled fire. As a consequence, developed societies today enjoy the most seasonally sterile lifestyle in the history of the human race. The exploitation of new sources of heat and ever improving insulation technologies represent only one aspect of this feat. In some of our cities with their year-round climate control, heated parking

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<sup>1</sup> Sauer 1961: 404–5; Pausas and Keeley 2009: 597; Sørensen 2012: 20–77

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Roth 2007: 161–2.

garages, and seamless underground public transportation and pedestrian infrastructure — winter cities, as Gopnik calls them<sup>3</sup> — it is now possible to avoid direct contact with the outside air altogether if one so chooses. Meanwhile, the airlifting of produce has done away with seasonal limitations to the availability of virtually any food while vastly expanding the range of foods available to us. On an existential level, therefore, the cycle of the seasons has lost much of its immediacy for those with access to advanced infrastructure.

This study concerns northwestern Europe, a region with marked seasonal identities. Its focus period is the early to high Middle Ages, a time when insulation against weather and season had yet to undergo the many advances brought by the widespread use of fossil fuels and other recent technologies.<sup>4</sup> These circumstances alone are reason to study attitudes towards the seasons in medieval northwestern Europe, since they form a valuable point of comparison to present-day seasonal culture. However, there are additional factors that make this cultural sphere a unique laboratory for the study of the historical psychology of seasonality. Firstly, the period here studied produced some of the earliest substantial writings from northern European cultures, allowing an early insight into human responses to climate and environment at higher latitudes. Secondly, northern Europe is of special interest to the study of the seasons because its cultures divided the year into two parts rather than the four that were customary in the south, reflecting on the local seasonal experience while challenging the real-life relevance of the astronomically defined seasons used in most cultures today. Most importantly, however, the literary corpora from this time and region make extensive use of seasonal images, and they do so in distinct but overlapping ways. By analysing the connotations of the seasons in these narrative traditions, this study aims to contribute in the first instance to our understanding of genre and motifs of seasonal time and space in medieval literature and their development over time. It does so, however, with attention to the implications these patterns have for the attitudes towards season and extrasocietal space held in the cultures that gave rise to them. As such, the work provides an impetus for further research in the social sciences as well as in comparative

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<sup>3</sup> Gopnik 2011: 185.

<sup>4</sup> Dresbeck 1976: 182–6; 1979: 103–11.

literature beyond the spatiotemporal niche here considered.

With a view to its rootedness in the physical aspects of seasonal progression, the study opens with a consideration of the ways in which historical societies were affected by the cycle of the seasons. To this end, the present chapter begins by establishing a connection between the economic year and cultural expression, after which it studies the roles played by the seasons in broadly religious and ritual traditions in medieval England and Scandinavia. The second chapter sets up a psychological framework within which to read literary encounters with the outside world in both its spatial and its seasonal manifestations. The remainder of the work then applies this paradigm to seasonal settings in medieval literature. In chapters 2 and 3 the focus is on winter, whose prominent role in Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse narratives is explained as a vehicle by which to explore the extrasocietal domain through such themes as exile, monstrosity, and heroic expeditions. The fourth and final chapter traces similar motifs in Middle English poetry, where expeditions of various kinds are conventionally set in spring and summer landscapes instead. In its concluding observations, the work identifies an underlying layer of seasonal connotations shared by all three corpora and beyond and considers its implications for a range of academic disciplines.

## 1.2 Climate and Economy

### 1.2.1 Climate History

The course of the seasonal cycle is today chiefly defined in astronomical or meteorological terms. Depending on locality (polar, tropical, or temperate), summer and winter represent extremes with regard to either humidity or sun hours and temperature. To cultures inhabiting temperate and polar regions, therefore, summer typically connotes sun and heat, while winter is associated with cold, snow, and ice. In temperate zones, spring and autumn are commonly recognised as transitional periods and given definitions of floral growth and decay.

Since the description of seasonal progression is a human activity, however, it should come as no surprise that more anthropocentric definitions exist, tracing the impact of temperature and the

growth cycle on society. Historically, the most important of these is the economic year, since this cycle holds the key to societal sustainability, not least in sedentary societies.<sup>5</sup> In Marx's terms, a society's superstructure, including the processes of law, politics, religion, and literature, is conditional upon and largely conditioned by the societal base of economic production.<sup>6</sup> The viability of these processes thus depends to various degrees on economic prosperity, but since the economic year has its roots in the natural cycle, they are themselves likewise conditioned by the physical cycle of the seasons. Accordingly, it is worth briefly considering climate history and the medieval economic year before proceeding to the superstructure of literary imagination that forms the central focus of this work.

Since the mid-twentieth century, research into climatic variation past and present has witnessed an exponential increase. Beginning in the 1960s, Lamb's work on climate in historical times established an understanding of late Holocene climate whose outline still shines through in today's rapidly evolving field of palaeoclimatology. He synthesised an array of proxy records alongside documentary evidence to show that the medieval-to-modern temperature record is characterised by a peak-and-trough progression in surface temperature that has since become known as the twin events of Medieval Warm Period and Little Ice Age. In view of the complexity of world climate, no single global chronology can be given for the former of these events in particular. In Lamb's definition, temperatures peaked around 950–1200 in Russia and Greenland but between 1150 and 1300 in the North Sea area. Generally speaking, the cooling set in between 1200 and 1400 and reached its lowest point about 1700.<sup>7</sup>

Despite its impressive scope and considerable detail, Lamb's work has been criticised for such weaknesses as its regional bias and uncritical reliance on documentary evidence alongside proxy data.<sup>8</sup> Since the 1990s, moreover, climate scientists increasingly refuse to accept the results of early

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<sup>5</sup> Grottanelli 2005: 186–8.

<sup>6</sup> See Marx's preface to his *Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (Marx and Engels 1956–90: XIII, 8–9), and cf. Dyer 2002: 1.

<sup>7</sup> Lamb 1966; 1972–77: II, 435–73.

<sup>8</sup> The dangers of an uncritical approach to documentary evidence of climatic trends have long been signalled; see, e.g., Ingram, Underhill, and Wigley 1978; Bell and Ogilvie 1978; cf. Ogilvie and Farmer 1997: 112–13. Ogilvie has been the most prolific scholar to attempt to distinguish between reliable and unreliable documentary evidence from

studies because the work done in Lamb's generation predates current standards of calibration and quantitative analysis. Indeed, the use of written records from the medieval period does not qualify for use in quantitative methods at all given the small sample size and the imprecise, subjective nature of the observations.<sup>9</sup> Certainly the terms popularly used to describe the medieval-to-modern climatic sequence fail to do justice to the complex nature and regional variability of the anomalies.<sup>10</sup> Conversely, however, those who express scepticism regarding the existence of a medieval optimum tend to be interested chiefly in disproving its global character, rather neglecting its validity for the North Atlantic region that forms the subject of this work.

If documentary sources are disregarded, a medieval warm and/or arid period is still evidenced in the geological record, which indicates that the period between 900 and 1250 was one of net glacial retreat worldwide.<sup>11</sup> That this period was comparatively warm on either side of the North Atlantic is confirmed by numerous studies of marine sediments and other proxy records, though the evidence from tree-rings suggests shorter trends with greater regional variability. Temperatures for this period are comparable to early twentieth-century levels but did not reach those of the late twentieth century except at a small number of sites in the western North Atlantic.<sup>12</sup>

The subsequent cooling is not in doubt, though this period too is best defined regionally, while it should not be thought of as a straightforward, continuously downward trend. Following a gradual onset, Europe and the North Atlantic experienced a first trough, and extreme seasonal variability, in the fourteenth century. After a warming spell in the fifteenth, the climate resumed its downward trend to a low about the eighteenth century. For many regions the period can be said to have extended into the mid-1800s, when it was replaced by the current warming trend.<sup>13</sup>

With this progression confirmed using the most rigorous methodology now available, historians

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Icelandic sources (e.g. 1981; 1991). Pfister c.s. have done similar work for Continental Europe (Pfister, Schwarz-Zanetti, and Wegmann 1996; Pfister et al. 1998).

<sup>9</sup> Bradley, Hughes, and Diaz 2003; Jansen et al. 2007: 468–9.

<sup>10</sup> Jones and Mann 2004: 19–20.

<sup>11</sup> Grove 1994.

<sup>12</sup> Hughes and Diaz 1994: 114–25; Cronin et al. 2003; 2010; Kremenetski et al. 2004; Linderholm and Gunnarson 2005; North et al. 2006; Jansen 2007: 468–9; Mann et al. 2008; Knudsen et al. 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Ogilvie and Trausti Jónsson 2001; Cronin et al. 2003: 26; Linderholm and Gunnarson 2005; Grove 2008; Axford et al. 2009.

may turn to documentary evidence to trace the effects of climatic shifts and extremes on medieval societies. Following Lamb, whose primary focus was on the British Isles, Pfister has been the foremost representative of this tradition for Continental Europe, while Ogilvy has led the way in the study of Iceland's climate history. All have found patterns in written observations reflecting the recent warm–cold sequence in this part of the world.<sup>14</sup>

What this means for the societies under study is that later Anglo-Saxon culture, starting perhaps around the Alfredian Renaissance, unfolded in a time of relatively mild climate, comparable to that of the earlier twentieth century. The same may be said of the later waves of Norse expansion and the time in which the sagas of Icelanders are set. However, the textual history of these narratives and most other Old Icelandic literature begins around the start of the cooling and during the severe fluctuations of the fourteenth century. The bulk of Middle English poetry was likewise composed in this time of rapid and erratic climatic downturn. These circumstances are relevant to literary composition inasmuch as they affected the climate perception of writers, poets, and storytellers. In addition, they had some impact on the seasonality of manuscript production, as neither scribes nor ink performed well in cold conditions.<sup>15</sup>

### 1.2.2 The Economic Year

Given the low per-capita production value of pre-fossil fuel (or 'organic') economies,<sup>16</sup> the bulk of medieval labour was carried out in the primary sector, and more specifically in sustenance. For England, this meant farming, and the agricultural calendar dictated the economic year accordingly. Since agricultural production was especially closely tied to the solar year while the economic year

<sup>14</sup> Lamb 1972–77: II, 423–549; 1995: 171–264; Ogilvie 1981; 1990; Ogilvie and Farmer 1997; Pfister, Schwarz-Zanetti, and Wegmann 1996; Pfister et al. 1998.

<sup>15</sup> Abbot Guthberht of Wearmouth–Jarrow remarked on the winter's effect on the hand of the scribe and consequently on book production in a letter of 764 (Tangl 1916: 251), the year of a severe winter across Europe (see, e.g. the *Annals of Ulster* s.a. 764.1 (ed. by Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill 1983); *ChronADEF* s.a. 761 (ed. by Bately 1986; Cubbin 1996; Irvine 2004; Baker 2000); *ChronBC* s.a. 762 (ed. by Taylor 1983; O'Brien O'Keeffe 2001); and further evidence collected in McCormick, Dutton, and Mayewski 2007: 878–81). The low temperatures of this particular winter have been plausibly linked with volcanic activity (McCormick, Dutton, and Mayewski 2007: 881). See further Dresbeck 1976: 180, 191, n. 34; 1979: 87–8.

<sup>16</sup> Landers 2003.

in turn played a central role in shaping the social calendar, the agricultural cycle may be seen as an interface subjecting the cultural year to the material demands of the seasons.

Although the agricultural sector has undergone great technological advances since the Middle Ages, the environmental variables of outdoor cultivation have remained comparatively stable. Broadly speaking, therefore, the medieval agricultural year answered to the familiar cycle of ploughing, sowing, haymaking, and harvesting.<sup>17</sup> Innovations through the centuries included technological developments and changes in crop rotation strategies, but there were also some that responded to the changing climate. Notable among these is the rise of viticulture, first sparingly evidenced in southern England in the tenth century but reaching true economic viability only with the arrival of Norman aristocrats<sup>18</sup> and, shortly thereafter, optimal climatic conditions (c. 1100–1300).<sup>19</sup>

The Icelandic economy differed from that of medieval England in its greater reliance on animal husbandry.<sup>20</sup> The island's climate supports fewer species of crop than England and is more susceptible to poor yields due to sustained winters.<sup>21</sup> For these reasons, pre-industrial Icelanders primarily cultivated hay as winter fodder for their livestock,<sup>22</sup> supplementing their diet of dairy and meat with fish and wild species.<sup>23</sup> The seasonality of fishery and the hunt depended to a degree on the migratory patterns of cod and birds, but relied also on lulls in the agricultural cycle. Up until the nineteenth century, fishing seems to have been one of many labours practised at a balanced farming estate,<sup>24</sup> although professional fishing, a domestic fish trade, and some limited export of stockfish existed by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and became a major part of the economy in the fifteenth

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<sup>17</sup> More detail may be found in the eleventh-century Old English text *Be gesceadwisan gerefan*, which lists a selection of the various tasks to be carried out under the supervision of the reeve, dividing them by the quarter year (Lieberman 1903–16: I, 454; for the dating, see III, 244–7; Bethurum 1963; Harvey 1993: 4–7).

<sup>18</sup> Unwin 1990: 64–70.

<sup>19</sup> Lamb 1972–77: II, 276–9; 1995: 179–80.

<sup>20</sup> Jón Jóhannesson 1974: 288–96; Vasey 1991; Short 2010: 74–88. For a detailed study of the traditional Icelandic diet, see Hallgerður Gísladóttir 1999.

<sup>21</sup> Anderson 1931: 284–90; Vasey 1991.

<sup>22</sup> Gunnar Karlsson 2000: 45–6. Hay remains the country's primary crop today (Rannveig Sigurðardóttir et al. 2007: 27; see also Anderson 1931: 285–6).

<sup>23</sup> Anderson 1931; Vasey 1991: 324; Hallgerður Gísladóttir 1999; McGovern et al. 2007: 29; Adderley, Simpson, and Orri Vésteinsson 2008; Short 2010: 74–88.

<sup>24</sup> Anderson 1931: 290; Lúðvík Kristjánsson 1944; Gunnar Karlsson 2000: 106–10; cf. *Eg* ch. 29 (Bjarni Einarsson 2003: 40).

century.<sup>25</sup>

There has been some disagreement among historians over the distinction between subsistence and commercial economies in the Middle Ages. On the one hand, archaeology and documentary evidence demonstrate that trade, and thus profitable production, was a fact of life in all medieval cultures.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, soil analyses and economic reconstructions suggest that many farming estates produced at bare subsistence levels.<sup>27</sup> Le Goff sought to resolve the divide by defining subsistence relative to socioeconomic class, reasoning that any transactions required to maintain the socioeconomic status quo should be considered elements of the subsistence economy.<sup>28</sup> This position is problematic because it reduces all economies to subsistence economies provided transactions are matched among a peer group. Instead, it should be recognised that both models coexist in any economy: a large enough base of sustenance production will result in enough of a surplus to permit a small upper class to engage in commercial trade.

In this respect, the relative absence of a labour division in Iceland signals that food production here had more characteristics of a microeconomic subsistence economy than that of England, whether before or after the Conquest.<sup>29</sup> Agriculture in both countries pivoted on the farming estate, within which both class and labour divisions existed. Beyond the confines of the farm, however, England knew a social hierarchy with landowners and extensive ruling, trading, and ecclesiastical classes, not to mention urban centres whose existence depended on year-round trade and entailed far-reaching specialisation. For this non-agricultural population to be fed, farmers had to harvest a surplus.

Icelandic freemen, minimally burdened by a system of public officials,<sup>30</sup> owed little tax prior to annexation by the Norwegian crown in 1262,<sup>31</sup> although religious tithing was practised after the

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<sup>25</sup> Jón Jóhannesson 1974: 303–5; Henisch 1976: 33–5; Gelsing 1981: 181–94; Gunnar Karlsson 2000: 106–7; but cf. the reservations concerning the scale of stockfish exports expressed in Jón Jóhannesson 1974: 313–15.

<sup>26</sup> e.g. Dyer 2002: 14.

<sup>27</sup> Simpson 2002; Landers 2003: 47–71; Adderley et al. 2008.

<sup>28</sup> Le Goff 1964: 278–318.

<sup>29</sup> Smith 1995; Simpson et al. 2002; cf. Vasey 1991: 326.

<sup>30</sup> See Jón Jóhannesson 1974: 35–93, esp. 53–63; Gunnar Karlsson 2000: 20–7.

<sup>31</sup> Björn Þorsteinsson 1953, esp. p. 100; Jón Jóhannesson 1974: 61–2; Byock 1988: 78–9; Gunnar Karlsson 2000: 83–6.

adoption of Christianity and was in literary times at least believed to have been practised in pagan times as well.<sup>32</sup> The social topography of the country was characterised by isolated farms and settled valleys. With urbanisation wholly absent and international trade a seasonal industry, there was little impetus to set up a domestic market for vital resources other than the distribution of fish to inland areas,<sup>33</sup> although on a local level the informal exchange of food and related products must have been omnipresent. Iceland's main export in the Commonwealth era was not a food product but wool, which was traded primarily for grain and wood.<sup>34</sup> This should not be taken to mean that the population at large depended on these imported grains for subsistence, however: even at the time of annexation, the legal minimum of trading ships between Iceland and Norway was as low as six per annum, translating into an estimated twelve kilograms of imported goods per capita.<sup>35</sup> At best, if it is assumed that only the social elite profited from international trade, the wealthier landowners chose to enrich their diet by these foreign sources.<sup>36</sup> This is almost certainly what happened, as a lack of competition among traders and the short sailing-season must have translated into high prices.<sup>37</sup> This disconnect between trade and subsistence had a parallel among the Norse Greenlanders, who seem to have been extensively engaged in the export of furs, hides, ivory, and valuable birds,<sup>38</sup> yet they traded these valuables for non-vital commodities rather than the grain their own soil could not support.<sup>39</sup>

North Atlantic agriculture thus placed a strong emphasis on local subsistence, while individual farmers aimed for self-sufficiency in the first instance.<sup>40</sup> This impression is reinforced by the fact that northern societies generally depend more heavily on food storage to last them through the winter.

<sup>32</sup> *Eg* ch. 86 (Bjarni Einarsson 2003: 178); *Vápnf* ch. 5 (Jón Jóhannesson 1950: 33); *Gr* chs 255–60 (Finsen 1852: II, 205–15); Björn Þorsteinsson 1974; Jón Jóhannesson 1974: 62.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Gelsing 1981: 181–94, which argues that fish took the place of wool as Iceland's primary export product from the fourteenth century onwards.

<sup>34</sup> Gelsing 1981; Helgi Þorláksson 1991: 3–28.

<sup>35</sup> Gunnar Karlsson 2000: 50.

<sup>36</sup> Contrast Gelsing 1981, e.g. pp. 14–15, 150–1.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Vasey 1991: 326.

<sup>38</sup> Buckland et al. 1996: 90; Seaver 1996: 47–8, 80–9.

<sup>39</sup> McGovern 1994: 138; cf. Seaver 1996: 47.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Vasey 1991: 326. One may compare with this situation Tacitus's Roman perspective on Germanic agricultural practice, based on self-sufficiency rather than profit (*Germania* ch. 26 (Lund 1988: 90); cf. Lund's cultural interpretation on p. 67 of his edition).

Even if the thirteenth-century interference of Norwegian royalty and the subsequent annexation represented a first clear impetus towards a profit-driven economy,<sup>41</sup> Iceland's paucity of natural resources and its peripheral location relative to trading partners meant that food production remained very much the consuming farmer's own responsibility.<sup>42</sup> Perceived within the framework of the economic cycle, the accumulation of winter provisions, and therefore the feat of making it through the winter without unnecessary discomfort or losses in livestock, constituted a year-long personal challenge for the farmers described in the sagas.

In both England and Scandinavia, any failure to meet the challenge of winter provisions would have hit hardest in spring, when stocks of food and fodder ran low and the population could find themselves at the season's mercy. Accordingly, morbidity and mortality rates were greatest not in the three months of the Julian winter when the temperatures were lowest, but in spring when provisions ran low and the succession of cold months became a test of endurance.<sup>43</sup> Tellingly, the Old English collection of metrical aphorisms known as *Maxims II*<sup>44</sup> observes that 'winter byð cealdost, | lencten hrimigost (he byð lengest ceald)' (5–6).<sup>45</sup> It has been proposed that this notion of a prolonged ground frost in spring has an explanation in Ælfric's *De temporibus anni*,<sup>46</sup> which notes that the earth takes time to warm up after being pervaded by the cold of winter.<sup>47</sup> Even so, the observations of Ælfric and the *Maxims*-poet alike may well have been inspired by the social and economic realities of spring that made the season seem so slow to pass. The Lent fast, though it stimulated

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<sup>41</sup> Perdikaris and McGovern 2006.

<sup>42</sup> An impression of the socioeconomic dynamics of scarcity is presented in *Hænsa-Þóris saga*, which suggests that resources were redistributed through local trade as required (chs 4–5 (eds Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938: 11–16)).

<sup>43</sup> Harvey and Oeppen 2001: 230–1 (seasonal morbidity among monks of fourteenth-century Westminster Abbey compared to seasonal patterns in early modern mortality); cf. Vasey 1991, esp. 327–36, 344–8 (mortality in Iceland as a consequence of the famine following the nine-month eruption of the *Lakagigar* fissure in southern Iceland beginning in June 1783). A different pattern may have existed among the wealthy, who were less affected by food shortages (cf. Farris 2006: 189). A different pattern existed also in years of pestilence, as the bubonic plague caused most deaths in late summer and autumn but was tempered by the northern winter weather (Benedictow 2004, e.g. 24, 30, 103–4).

<sup>44</sup> Ed. by Dobbie 1942: 55–7.

<sup>45</sup> 'Winter is coldest, spring most hoarfrosted (it is cold the longest).'

<sup>46</sup> Ed. by Blake 2009.

<sup>47</sup> Anderson 2003: 248. 'Se langigenda dæg is ceald forðan þe seo eorðe bið mid ðam winterlicum cyle þurhgan, 7 bið langsum ær ðan ðe heo eft gebedod sy' (*ÆTemp* lines 204–5; 'the lengthening day is cold because the earth is pervaded by the winter cold, and it is long before it is heated up again').

fishery in northwestern Europe and eventually, by the fifteenth century, helped spawn a large-scale international fish trade,<sup>48</sup> was not in all respects and localities beneficial to either health or economy. After all, the dairy produce that had to be forgone came from livestock that still had to be fed, and any dietary impoverishment at the time of year when least fresh food is available to begin with poses a threat to health. Although the Advent fast likewise represented dietary impoverishment, the early-winter ritual followed the time of greatest plenty (harvest and slaughtering-season) and may thus be expected to have had less impact on morbidity rates. Economically and medically, therefore, the season of greatest hardship was spring, while the darkest days of the year were eased by large provisions.

The key role played by spring processes in the sustainability of the Icelandic food economy finds confirmation in the narrative literature. The emphasis here is on gathering sufficient winter fodder to last the livestock until the grazing season, the time of whose arrival is variable and therefore highly anticipated. *Landnámabók* tells how Flóki Vilgerðarson, one of Iceland's traditional explorers, neglects to gather sufficient hay on account of the country's abundance in fish, resulting in the death of all his livestock during his first winter in Iceland.<sup>49</sup> The anecdote bears witness to the need for adaptation to the new habitat by underlining the need to stock up for a long winter. In his failure to do so, Flóki is confronted with the long infertile season characteristic of his new habitat. By contrast, the compiler of *Egils saga* explains Skalla-Grímr's success as an early settler of Iceland by the multifaceted nature of his farming and his clever use of space, but notable among his successes is certainly the discovery that his sheep are able to survive in their valley pastures by themselves all winter (ch. 29).<sup>50</sup> Icelandic farmers indeed relied on winter grazing when possible, but snow and lack of growth commonly interfered, so that spring severity remained a threat throughout pre-industrial history.<sup>51</sup> Accordingly, winters that were hard on livestock (*fellivetr*, *hrosfellisvetr*, *nautadauðavetr*, *nautfellisvetr*) are commonly recorded in both narrative and annalistic sources.<sup>52</sup> In *Eyrbyggja saga*, Úlfar

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<sup>48</sup> Henisch 1976: 33–5.

<sup>49</sup> Jakob Benediktsson 1986: 36–8.

<sup>50</sup> Bjarni Einarsson 2003: 40.

<sup>51</sup> Páll Bergthórsson 2000; Ogilvie 2000; Ogilvie and Gísli Pálsson 2003: 258–9.

<sup>52</sup> The most detailed account of a hay shortage is given in *Hæns*, esp. chs 4–5 (Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938: 11–16);

*kappi* is considered exceptionally lucky with his livestock (*fésæll*) because it never dies of starvation or blizzards (ch. 30).<sup>53</sup> These references taken together underline the critical economic significance of livestock survival during the medieval Icelandic winter.

The importance of spring grazing is further brought out by the concept's presence in weather miracles that are in other respects representative of the more international saintly mediation between season and economy. The concern is addressed in both the early thirteenth-century<sup>54</sup> *Jóns saga ins helga*, on Jón Ögmundarson (1052–1121), and the early fourteenth-century<sup>55</sup> saga of Guðmundr Arason (1161–1237). Chapter 13 of the first work tells how, on account of the cold weather, the land in northern Iceland has not yet commenced its springtime growth by the time of the spring assembly in May. Jón travels to the assembly grounds and vows to erect a church there, even marking the spot where the church is to be built. Consequently, the ice breaks up and the grass grows out so quickly that there is sufficient grazing before the week is over.<sup>56</sup> Just two chapters on follows another anecdote, perhaps deriving from a variant of the same narrative, which tells how one spring the weather is so dry that the land has supported little growth by the time of the Moving Days (i.e. late May on the Julian calendar), and even by the time of the *alþingi* in late June. Jón rides to the assembly and promises an improvement in weather. On the same day the weather turns from cloudless to a downpouring, and for the remainder of the summer the land is irrigated by nocturnal dews while the days are sunny, resulting in an average harvest yield (ch. 15).<sup>57</sup> *Guðmundar saga Arasonar* conveys the same motif one year when the Virgin Mary predicts that the snow will disappear so

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see also *Fbr* ch. 6 (Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 147); *Prestsaga Guðmundar Arasonar* ch. 11 (Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason, and Kristján Eldjárn 1946: 1, 136); Annals I, IV, V, VIII s.a. 1187 (Storm 1888: 22, 119, 180, 324); IV s.a. 1313 (Storm 1888: 150); X s.a. 1313–14 (Storm 1888: 488); VII s.a. 1314 (Storm 1888: 265); VIII s.a. 1362 (Storm 1888: 359). Cf. legal documents suggesting hay disputes (e.g. *Grg* ch. 198 (Finsen 1852: II, 106–8)). See further Schach 1949: 18; Ogilvie 1981: 256–60; Ogilvie and Gísli Pálsson 2003: 259–61; Short 2010: 77–9.

<sup>53</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935: 81.

<sup>54</sup> Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson, and Peter Foote 2003: I, ccxiv–ccxv.

<sup>55</sup> The various redactions make extensive use of early thirteenth-century sources (see Stefán Karlsson 1986; Cormack 2005: 37–8), but these do not contain the miracle here described.

<sup>56</sup> Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson, and Peter Foote 2003: II, 227–8. Cf. the miraculous absence of snow from the southwestern face of Þorgrím's grave mound in *Gísla saga*, presented as a token of Freyr's loyalty to Þorgrím (ch. 18 (Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 57 and n. 2)).

<sup>57</sup> Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson, and Peter Foote 2003: II, 229–30.

rapidly that there will be sufficient grazing by Easter Day (ch. 79).<sup>58</sup> Similar episodes occur elsewhere without reference to grazing, as in the later fourteenth-century<sup>59</sup> saga of Lárentíus Kálfsson (1267–1331), which tells of the snow and ice melting just in time for the Easter Day procession (ch. 33)<sup>60</sup> and when the weather turns mild and the snow melts for the occasion of Jón Ögmundarson's translation (ch. 35).<sup>61</sup>

None of these miracles is exceptional among the international body of saintly interventions in general outline;<sup>62</sup> indeed, Jón's feat in conjuring rain from a cloudless sky closely follows its model in the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great.<sup>63</sup> What is peculiar to their form in the bishops' sagas is the authors' concern for spring grazing, reflecting the key role played by this component of the Icelandic economic cycle.

Another aspect of the economic cycle commonly invoked with regard to ancient and medieval Europe is warfare. Though numerous exceptions have been documented, the legions of the Roman Empire normally ceased combat operations when fodder availability became problematic. This closed season is generally defined as December through February for the Mediterranean region;<sup>64</sup> for northern Europe it has been suggested that the arrival of the rainy season about the beginning of October was more commonly normative.<sup>65</sup> The Mediterranean Sea was largely closed to travel, generally including military expeditions, from 10 November to 10 March on account of severe weather.<sup>66</sup> North Sea conditions necessitated a shorter season still.<sup>67</sup> In addition, raiding and sustained warfare alike often depended on the exploitation of the enemy's food stocks for the sustenance of the invad-

<sup>58</sup> Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandr Vigfússon 1858–78: II, 167.

<sup>59</sup> Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1998: lxvii.

<sup>60</sup> Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1998: 340.

<sup>61</sup> Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson, and Peter Foote 2003: II, 229–30.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Brewer 1884: 129–31.

<sup>63</sup> *GREG.MAG. Dial.* II.33 (De Vogüe and Antin 1979: II, 230–5); Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson, and Peter Foote 2003: II, 230, n. 1.

<sup>64</sup> Roth 1998: 177–82.

<sup>65</sup> Tille 1899: 24.

<sup>66</sup> McCormick 2001: 450–1, 459. The same chapter notes, however, that military campaigns, raids in particular, are among the most common exceptions to this convention (pp. 466–7).

<sup>67</sup> For a Roman perspective on the dangers of the North Sea, see Tacitus, *Annales* 2.23–4 (Furieux 1904: 96–7). An insight into Atlantic practice is offered in *Kgs* chs 22–3 (Brenner 1881: 59–63).

ing army.<sup>68</sup> This suggests that late summer should be the central season for large-scale warfare in agricultural societies, when crops were ripening but still in the fields where they would naturally fall to the invaders and could easily be denied to the besieged population. Winter, by contrast, should be the season of least military activity on account of the severe weather conditions and limited access to food and fodder, although occasional land-based raids on food stocks might be expected.

A survey of military seasonality from Roman Britain to Norman England falls outside the scope of this study. However, it may be observed that while the convention of late summer warfare is borne out for a number of large-scale campaigns in Britain, there is also evidence that the sailing- or travelling-season was a more prominent consideration than the state of the crops.<sup>69</sup> Within Scandinavia, a large number of narratives tell of winter conflicts, many of which must be supposed to have a basis in historical fact.<sup>70</sup> This high incidence of winter combat in Scandinavian literature calls attention to the advantages of local warfare in the northern winter, when frozen lakes and marshes opened up new roads while the dark and the snow hindered flight. Narrative details and a broad historical assessment of winter warfare in Scandinavian sources are provided in section 3.5 below.

### 1.3 Calendar Systems

The canonical succession of labours commonly found in medieval calendar illustrations<sup>71</sup> suggests that the year in agro-pastoral communities divides naturally into four: ploughing, sowing, haymak-

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<sup>68</sup> Baume 1998.

<sup>69</sup> Although Caesar twice invaded Britain in late summer, his more ambitious second attempt, in 54 BCE, relied on an external supply of grain and was originally intended to commence earlier in the year (Frere 1967: 33). Rome's definitive conquest of Britain in 43 CE was likewise planned as a spring expedition but it was delayed by unrest among the troops, probably until July (Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, ch. 60.19 (Foster and Cary 1924: 414–16); Dudley and Webster 1965: 18–19). In the ninth century, Alfred's measures to ensure there was both a military and an agricultural force available at all times are indicative of military activity at times of year demanding of agricultural labour (*ChronA* s.a. 893; Hill 2008: 100). On the other hand, the battles fought against the Vikings by the houses of East Anglia and Wessex in the winter and spring of 870–71 make clear that seasonal considerations, though surely a factor in military planning, should rarely be thought of as necessary conditions for military campaigns, particularly where sea-crossings involved were comparatively short (*ChronA* s.a. 870–71).

<sup>70</sup> See, e.g., *Haralds saga gráfeldar* ch. 16 (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: I, 221–1); *Ynglinga saga* ch. 29 (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: I, 57, and cf. *Beo* 2396 (Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008)); *Hákonar saga herðibreiðs* ch. 14 (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: III, 363–4); *Sv* chs 12, 163 (Þorleifur Hauksson 2007: 20, 252–5); *Gesta Danorum* 7.6.5 (Friis-Jensen and Zeeberg 2005: I, 462).

<sup>71</sup> See, e.g., Fowler 1873; Henisch 1999.

ing, and harvesting/slaughtering each have their season. However, the quadripartite calendar is certainly not inevitable in agricultural societies, and it has not been the norm in northern Europe for very long.

Evidence regarding calendrical systems among early Germanic speakers may be found in two descriptive types of source: the peoples' own early observations and those of foreign observers. The latter type has its earliest representative in Tacitus, who in the first century CE remarked of the Germanic peoples:

Arva per annos mutant, et superest ager. Nec enim cum ubertate et amplitudine soli labore contendunt, ut pomaria conserant, ut prata separent, ut hortos rigent; sola terrae seges imperatur. Unde annum quoque ipsum non in totidem digerunt species: hiems et ver et aestas intellectum ac vocabula habent, autumnus perinde nomen ac bona ignorantur. (*Germania*, ch. 26)<sup>72</sup>

(‘They vary their fields year by year, and land is left over. For with the fertility and abundance of soil they do not strive in labour to plant orchards, divide up their pastures, or irrigate gardens; only a crop of grain is required from the earth. Accordingly, they do not divide the year itself into as many constituent parts: winter, spring, and summer have both concept and name, but they know neither the name nor the products of autumn.’)

The aspect of this description that differs most strikingly from Germanic accounts is not the absence of autumn, but the existence of a spring season. Although early scholars in particular attempted, occasionally with arguments of admirable scope, to give Tacitus's calendar a place in Germanic history,<sup>73</sup> the description cannot be taken at face value. In Tacitus's time, northern Europe had been home to a smaller population for a shorter period of time than the Mediterranean. Accordingly, the soil had been used less intensively but more extensively (using crop rotation and fallow, as Tacitus makes clear), and it had not suffered the salinisation through irrigation that had turned much of the southern Mediterranean into desert, nor quite as much deforestation leading to erosion.<sup>74</sup> As such, the land in the north was indeed more fertile, but its yield was less than it could have been in the hands of intensive Mediterranean farmers. Its exploitation would thus have looked primitive from the agro-economic viewpoint normally assumed by the economic elite of a powerful society sup-

<sup>72</sup> Lund 1988: 90.

<sup>73</sup> See esp. Tille 1899, but also Nilsson 1920: 71–7; Enkvist 1957: 4; and cf. Anderson 1997: 242–4.

<sup>74</sup> Diamond 1994: 369; Hughes 2005 *passim*, esp. 17–44, 194–5, and cf. 71; Sands 2005: 1–31; cf. Safriel 2006 and other studies in the same volume.

ported by advanced agricultural technology.<sup>75</sup> Tacitus's decision to emphasise the quality of the soil rather than the primitive character of its exploitation must have been conscious as well as unconventional. As such, it is characteristic of his political designs, which involved a critical assessment of Roman society by comparison with its tribal neighbours.<sup>76</sup> Read in the context of the wider passage, the observation regarding the absence of autumn fits into this depiction of the noble savage so well provided for by nature that he is unfamiliar with the unnecessary toils of horticulture, much less its conceptual field. Seasonal taxonomy is used simply as supporting evidence for the ease of the Germanic agricultural life. Had Tacitus remarked also on the absence of a spring season, this would have invalidated his implication that the absence of a seasonal term supports the case for leisure at this time of year: after all, even the grain harvest requires sowing in spring. While it is possible that Tacitus had heard only of the absence of autumn and never thought to enquire about spring, the tripartite season conveniently supports his argument that Germanic farmers had no need to engage in the autumn toil of the fruit harvest so familiar to Mediterranean readers.

When Germanic authors themselves begin to make observations on the traditional division of the year, it is unambiguously bipartite. Bede makes this clear for the Anglo-Saxons when he describes their calendar,<sup>77</sup> and Old English poetry sparingly evinces the term for such a six-month period, *missere*,<sup>78</sup> though the term's distribution (namely in the older poetry) suggests it was no longer used for calendrical purposes in literary times. This analysis nevertheless cannot be entirely correct, as Middle English poetry still tends strongly to divide the year into two parts. The more accurate reading must be that the old calendar has left few traces in Old English literature because the vast majority of surviving texts is ecclesiastical or latinate in origins. The bipartite system remains a

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. Lund 1988: 67.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Lund 1988: 56–69, esp. 67.

<sup>77</sup> *BEDA. Temp.rat.* ch. 15 (Jones 1977: 330).

<sup>78</sup> *GenA* 1168, 1743 (ed. by Doane 1978); *Ex* 49 (ed. by Tolkien and Turville-Petre 1981); *Beo* 153, 1498, 1769, 2620. Although scholars are today more cautious than before in assigning dates to these poems, it is generally thought that they belong to the same, comparatively early period. The eighth century is still most commonly mentioned for all three (Irving 1953: 20–28; Lucas 1977: 69–72; Doane 1978: 25–37, esp. 36–7; Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008: clxii–clxxx). The dating of *Beowulf* is a particularly controversial issue, discussed at length in the proceedings of the 1980 Toronto conference on that topic (Chase 1981) and the extensive bibliographical notes 36 to 39 on pp. 5–6 of Orchard 2003a. The second conference on the dating of *Beowulf* (Harvard 2011) witnessed a shift back to an early dating, but no proceedings are as yet in print.

far more visible competitor to the quadripartite Julian calendar in much of Old Icelandic narrative literature, where the *misseri* fulfils a central role in timekeeping and *vetr* ('winter') commonly follows immediately upon *sumar* ('summer'). Scandinavian legal texts and early computistical treatises similarly make use of the unit of the halfyear.<sup>79</sup> It thus seems that a division of the year into two parts was prevalent before Germanic culture branched off into North and West Germanic subgroups, and remained uncontested until the Julian year was adopted.

The same conclusion may be reached through a study of the lexical field of seasonal terms. As Anderson has observed,<sup>80</sup> words for winter (*wintrus*, *winter*, *vetr*) and summer (*sumer*, *sumar*) are cognates throughout the Germanic languages, but spring and autumn have no such stable presence. Although autumn is uniformly attested by *hærfest* and its cognates across the West Germanic languages, the persistent ambiguity of that term between the season and its chief agricultural labour of harvest, to which the word originally referred, nevertheless suggests that the seasonal concept of autumn has less ancient roots in Germanic culture than those of winter and summer.

The prehistory of Germanic calendrical systems bears on the present study because the two-season system had not been entirely abandoned when the literature was written. This is particularly clear in Iceland, where the sagas of Icelanders use the old system about as often as the new and make frequent reference to the *vetrnætr* or winter nights that marked the start of the winter halfyear. Indeed, the transitions between the traditional summer and winter seasons enjoy some limited (and antiquarian) observance in Iceland even today, and the continued use of the bipartite system can be traced through the centuries.<sup>81</sup> The significance of this is that multiple systems can exist side by side. That is not to say that a text was always conceived exclusively within one of two frameworks, as one might be led to believe on the basis of Anderson's categorisation.<sup>82</sup> Instead, authors were at home in both simultaneous systems and could switch between them as they saw fit, or as custom dictated. In the sagas, factors that influence which of the two is employed include not only

<sup>79</sup> *Grg* ch. 19 (Finsen 1852: 1, 37); *Bókarbót* (Beckman and Kålund 1914–16: 78); *Rím I*, e.g. ch. 3 (Beckman and Kålund 1914–16: 9); *Rím II*, e.g. §2 (Beckman and Kålund 1914–16: 83); Hastrup 1985: 30–1.

<sup>80</sup> Anderson 1997; 2003: 219–66.

<sup>81</sup> Árni Björnsson 2000: 31–47, 261–9.

<sup>82</sup> Anderson 1997: 249–63; 2003: 246–66.

whether the episode is set in pre- or post-conversion times, but also how precise a reference is required and in how much detail the events are remembered. However, genre is likewise a key factor. Texts whose aim tends more towards historiography will give precise dates where available; in this respect, the contemporary sagas have access to more precise chronology than many of the kings' sagas on earlier subjects, and they often use the liturgical calendar to date events described. The sagas of Icelanders do not aim to reproduce events in high chronological detail, as their purpose tends more towards entertainment, and in any case a detailed chronology for their material could not have been available by the time they were written down. Instead, they tend to be dated quite rigorously by the season (whether of six or three months). References to the passing of time are most sparse in myth and legend, whose universe is often characterised by a minimum of nonessential detail. In Old English poetry, high chronological detail is mostly limited to ecclesiastical works such as the calendrical poem *Menologium*,<sup>83</sup> which lists the main events of the liturgical calendar. The four seasons of the Julian year make appearances in other poems of religious and latinate content, such as *The Phoenix*.<sup>84</sup> Poems discussing more indigenous themes rarely show an interest in seasonal progression (as opposed to static seasonality) at all, and when they do it can be difficult to establish whether summer and winter are used in their inclusive senses (i.e. within the bipartite system) or as representatives of the four-season year.<sup>85</sup> Certainly *Maxims II* makes distinct reference to four Julian seasons,<sup>86</sup> but the progression in *Beowulf*'s Finnsburh-episode from *winter* to *oper gear* is less specific and therefore subject to interpretation.<sup>87</sup>

The main thematic consequence of the Germanic reliance on a bipartite system is a polarisation of the annual cycle into two extremes, yielding literary treatments of a different nature than the latinate tradition. Whereas the latter keenly seizes on its four seasons for their parallels to sets and processes such as the four elements, humours, or ages of man,<sup>88</sup> the Old English and Old Norse

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<sup>83</sup> Ed. by Dobbie 1942: 49–55.

<sup>84</sup> e.g. 240–57 (ed. by Krapp and Dobbie 1936: 94–113).

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Anderson 1997: 249–63; 2003: 246–66.

<sup>86</sup> *Max II* 5–8.

<sup>87</sup> *Beo* 1132–4, ed. by Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008. See Anderson 1997: 238–9, 255–8, and my interpretation of the passage below, pp. 133–4. For a thorough study of seasonal progression in Old English literature, see ch. 3 below.

<sup>88</sup> e.g. *ISID. Nat.rer.* 11 (Fontaine 1960: 213–17); *BEDA. Temp.rat.* ch. 35 (Jones 1977: 391–5); *ByrM* ch. 1.1 (Baker and

literature that more strongly reflects local tradition instead introduces seasonal imagery where binary contrasts are called for. If the seasons are commonly invoked without a sense of progression, as chapter 2 below will suggest is the case in both Anglo-Saxon and early Scandinavian literature, this is therefore fully in line with the Germanic division of the year.

## 1.4 Mythology of the Seasons

If a culture undergoes formative influence from the tangible cycles of climate and economy, a hierarchy of influence may often be recognised within its world of ideas as well. Here, religion and authoritative myth, once established, tend to affect a wide range of the culture's philosophy and literature. Religious and mythological texts themselves also constitute literature, of course. This duality makes the mythological canon one of a culture's most widely recognised interpretations of the laws by which the world is governed, framing the reality within which other narratives should be understood to take place. To understand a literary representation of the seasons, therefore, one first has to analyse relevant seasonal mythology.

### 1.4.1 Christianity: Seasonality as Punishment

In literary traditions influenced by Western Christian theology, realms of the blessed (either heaven or the earthly paradise) and lesser spiritual environments (either hell or the postlapsarian earth) are often described in terms of physical contrast. This duality follows naturally from the respective biblical accounts of Eden in the Old Testament and the heavenly paradise in the New Testament. With regard to the former, the book of Genesis speaks of a *paradisus voluptatis* 'garden of pleasure' filled with *omne lignum pulchrum viso et ad vescendum suave* (Gn 2.8–9).<sup>89</sup> The beauty of this world is complete and self-contained: the production of crops requires no labour, and even the disturbance of precipitation is omitted (Gn 2.5–6). At mankind's expulsion from Eden, God pronounces a

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Lapidge 1995: 10–14); *ÆTemp* lines 385–400.

<sup>89</sup> 'Every tree that is beautiful of appearance and sweet for eating.' All biblical references are to Weber 1994.

curse over the earth to the effect that its yield will now depend on human labour, while the natural world is no longer confined to pleasant and beneficial flora but comes to include *spinae et tribuli* ('thorns and thistles', Gn 3.18). By implication, the expulsion introduces seasonality. Although some prelapsarian activity is implied in the stipulation that Adam 'operaretur et custodiret [paradisum voluptatis]' (Gn 2.15),<sup>90</sup> toil and sweat are understood to have no part in the process until after the fall (Gn 3.17–19). Since the practice of agriculture is to a high degree dictated by the seasons, the novelty of postlapsarian toil suggests that previously, ripe crops had always been there for the taking.<sup>91</sup> Thus a contrast is implied between the prelapsarian *operari paradisum voluptatis* ('tilling the garden of pleasure') and the postlapsarian *operari terram* ('tilling the earth', Gn 3.23): after all, crops grew even before the creation of man, when 'homo non erat qui operaretur terram' (Gn 2.5).<sup>92</sup> Augustine points out that labour as penance was introduced only after the advent of sin, explaining *operari paradisum voluptatis* as a joyful participation in God's work at a time when there were no agricultural adversities and tilling the earth was therefore infinitely more pleasant than in today's world (*AUG. Gen.litt.* 8.8, 8.10).<sup>93</sup> Although the creation account introduces the heavenly luminaries two days prior to the creation of man (Gn 1.14–31), and the role of the sun in seasonal variation was well understood by various Church fathers,<sup>94</sup> macroseasonal variation in general and cold and winter in particular were considered absent from paradise.<sup>95</sup> The absence of agricultural seasons was understood to return only in the heavenly Jerusalem, where the seventh age of man was to consist in a perpetual Sabbath (*AUG. Civit.Dei* 22.30)<sup>96</sup> and the tree of life would be continuously fruit-bearing

<sup>90</sup> 'should till and govern [the garden of pleasure].'

<sup>91</sup> As Augustine describes it, 'uiuēbat itaque homo in paradiso [...] sine ulla egestate [...]. Cibus aderat ne esuriret, potus ne sitiret' ('and so man lived in paradise [...] without any hardship [...]. Food was available so he would not suffer hunger, drink was available so he would not suffer thirst', *AUG. Civit.Dei* 14.26 (Dombart and Kalb 1955: 499). Cf. Cigman 1998: 132. The early fourteenth-century Old Norse compilation of biblical commentaries known as *Sjórn* specifies prelapsarian labour, but without difficulty and for man's delightful nourishment ('ser til lystiligrar næringar', Unger 1862: 32–3, at 32).

<sup>92</sup> 'There was no man to till the earth.'

<sup>93</sup> Zycha 1894: 242–3, 245–6.

<sup>94</sup> *ISID.Nat.rer.* 17.1–3 (Fontaine 1960: 233–5); *BEDA. Temp.rat.* chs 32, 35 (Jones 1977: 380–1, 391).

<sup>95</sup> 'In paradiso nullus aestus aut frigus' ('there was no heat or cold in paradise', *AUG. Civit.Dei* 14.26 (Dombart and Kalb 1955: 449)); cf. Remigius of Lyon, PL 121, col. 1089c; John Scotus, PL 122, col. 806b; and, in the later Middle Ages, Martin of Leon, PL 208, col. 556c.

<sup>96</sup> Dombart and Kalb 1955: 866.

(Apc 22.2). However, heaven was thought to be devoid of seasonality in the astronomical as well as the agricultural sense, as there would be no more need for the heavenly bodies, and no more night (Apc 21.35–5, 22.5). Mankind was thus subjected to seasonality on multiple levels. Individuals experienced the cyclical climate of the postlapsarian world as manifested in the cycles of night and day, winter and summer. However, salvation history itself could likewise be thought of as a seasonal cycle, proceeding from a *locus amoenus* via a flawed and harmful landscape back to a pleasant place; from bright to dark and back into the light; and from a condition without true seasons (though participating in the sequence of day and night) to a seasonal world and back into aseasonality. Thus understood, all life in the present age may be regarded as a penitential winter characterised by a dual perspective, backward and forward to seasons without sorrow.<sup>97</sup>

A contrast between pleasant and unpleasant environments was commonly posited not only in a diachronic configuration, but also in the synchronic opposition between heaven and hell. The Gospel of Matthew, for instance, contrasts the kingdom of heaven with *tenebrae exteriores* ('outer darkness'), where spiritual outcasts engage in *fletus et stridor dentium* ('weeping and gnashing of teeth').<sup>98</sup> The opposition implies not only a spatial centrality on the part of heaven as the opposite of *exterior*, but also an afterworld that is divided between the perpetual day of heaven and the perpetual night of hell.<sup>99</sup> Light and dark, day and night, are seasonal images not only because together they constitute the microseason of the twenty-four hour cycle, but also because light is associated with summer while dark connotes winter. These seasonal alliances are thus implicit in contrasts between heaven and hell. The postlapsarian world occupies a middle ground between these extremes, contrasting with both environments while partaking of each in a limited way.

These contrasts were eagerly exploited in medieval theology as well as narrative literature. One of its most influential applications in theology may be found in Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, which employs a spiritual chiaroscuro like that found in the Gospel of Matthew, tracing the parallel history

<sup>97</sup> For the image of life on earth as perpetual winter, see *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, discussed in section 2.3.2 below.

<sup>98</sup> Mt 8.11–12, 22.13, 25.30; cf. 13.40–50, 24.51; Lk 13.28.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Apc 22.5.

of two spiritual communities, one associated with light and the other with darkness. Augustine at times made the connection quite literal, declaring that God's angels constitute the light spoken into being on the first day of creation,<sup>100</sup> and accordingly that those who turned away from the good became darkness,<sup>101</sup> separated from the light as one of God's first deeds of creation (Gn 1.4).<sup>102</sup> Though this is an extreme example of the spiritual contrast between light and dark, it demonstrates the image's suitability for theological discussion. Hot and cold were similarly distributed: Gregory the Great and Augustine both seized on these seasonal attributes to distinguish between religious charity (hot) and sinfulness (cold),<sup>103</sup> concepts typically discussed within the framework of the present world but whose seasonal associations carried over into descriptions of the afterlife.

Narrative descriptions of heaven and hell are most commonly found in visionary literature. Compared with the theological treatises discussed above, narrative literature allows for greater elaboration on details of landscape and mood. Accordingly, vision literature makes extensive use of the spiritual dimension of the narrative environment. Already the *Visio Pauli* in its early medieval Latin form<sup>104</sup> exploits the opposition between pleasant and hostile surroundings, following but also elaborating on biblical models. Starting from the four rivers that irrigate Eden, for instance (Gn 2.10–14), it posits two otherworldly counterparts. One of these is infernal, recruiting three or four of the rivers of the Greek underworld;<sup>105</sup> the other belongs to the kingdom of heaven, sporting the same four rivers as the earthly paradise, now flowing with honey, milk, oil, and wine.<sup>106</sup> The *Visio Pauli* also

<sup>100</sup> 'Nimirum ergo si ad istorum dierum opera Dei pertinent angeli, ipsi sunt illa lux, quae diei nomen accepit' ('without a doubt, therefore, if the angels belong to the works of God of those days, they are the light which received the name of day', *AUG. Civit. Dei* 11.9 (Dombart and Kalb 1955: 329); similarly 11.19–20 (pp. 338–9)).

<sup>101</sup> 'Sunt omnes, qui uocantur inmundi spiritus, nec iam lux in Domino, sed in se ipsis tenebrae, priuati participatione lucis aeterna' ('neither are all those who are called unclean spirits any longer light in the Lord, but they are darkness in themselves, deprived of the participation of the eternal light', *AUG. Civit. Dei* 11.9 (Dombart and Kalb 1955: 330)).

<sup>102</sup> Cf. *AUG. Gen. litt.* 1.17 (Zycha 1894: 23–6).

<sup>103</sup> See Hill 1968 and the literature there cited.

<sup>104</sup> The Greek original of this vision was composed in the third century CE. A full Latin translation seems to have existed by the sixth century, though the earliest manuscripts to survive are from the ninth. Abbreviated versions, describing the scenes in hell only, were in existence by the fifth century (Jiroušková 2006: 7–17). In view of the complexity of the tradition, motifs from various textual witnesses will here be cited, thus representing the wider textual tradition and its genre rather than a single text.

<sup>105</sup> Silverstein 1935: 153 (Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, MS 362); 205 (Paris, MS Bibliothèque Nationale, lat. 2851).

<sup>106</sup> James 1893: 25–6 (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Nouv. acq. lat. 1631).

incorporates the contrast between light and dark. At one extreme, hell lacks all light;<sup>107</sup> at the other end, even the second heaven, a bright *terra omni auro pulcior* ('land more beautiful than all gold'),<sup>108</sup> serves only as a strawman, paling before the brightness and beauty of the third heaven.<sup>109</sup> Similar contrasts are found in later visions, which share many particulars with the *Visio Pauli*. Thus in Bede's eighth-century account of the vision of Drythelm, the visionary describes how, being led from hell to heaven by his angelic guide, 'nec mora, exemtum tenebris in auras me serenae lucis eduxit' (*BEDA. Hist.eccl.* 5.12).<sup>110</sup> The twelfth-century Hiberno-Latin *Visio Tnugdali* involves a plurality of senses in the contrast, characterising hell by darkness, smoke, stench, and wailing, in addition to the repulsive sights of physical punishment.<sup>111</sup> In heaven, on the other hand, the visionary's soul is met by pleasant music, beauty of dress, faces bright as the sun, and a sweet smell unmatched by earthly odours.<sup>112</sup> Heaven and hell are thus consistently depicted as environments surpassing the comforts and discomforts of the present life, a contrast that may be conveniently described through seasonal imagery.

The concept of seasonality concretely enters narrative depictions of hell in the nature of its punishments, while occurring in discussions of heaven in the negative only. Once again, the cue for this understanding was taken from the biblical tradition: the implication that both the earthly and the heavenly paradise lack seasonal variation suggests that the seasons of postlapsarian life are a punishment, and thereby a preview of hell, from which no punishment is absent. In this respect, a difference between earth and hell is that in the latter, the visual aspect of seasonality is divorced from the tactile: the extremes of heat and cold are both punishments, but hell is always dark (and thus associated with both night and winter), even when filled with fire;<sup>113</sup> in this context, the Old

<sup>107</sup> Silverstein 1935: 153 (Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, MS 362 (redaction I, on fol. 7rv)).

<sup>108</sup> Silverstein 1935: 149 (Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, MS 362 (fragment, on fols 7v–8v)).

<sup>109</sup> Silverstein 1935: 149–51 (Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, MS 362 (fragment, on fols 7v–8v)).

<sup>110</sup> Colgrave and Mynors 1969: 492; 'having brought me out of the darkness, without delay he led me into an atmosphere of serene light.'

<sup>111</sup> Wagner 1882: 12–40.

<sup>112</sup> Wagner 1882: 45–54.

<sup>113</sup> e.g. 2 Enoch ch. 10 (Morfill and Charles 1896: 9–10).

English poem *Christ and Satan*<sup>114</sup> speaks of *se wonna læg* ('the dark flame', 713).<sup>115</sup> The Old Saxon poetic *Genesis*, surviving in its fullest form in the Old English *Genesis B*,<sup>116</sup> describes man's postlapsarian exposure to the elements in great detail:

805 Hu sculon wit nu libban oððe on þis lande wesan,  
 gif her wind cymð, westan oððe eastan,  
 suðan oððe norðan? Gesweorc up færeð,  
 808 cymeð hægles scur hefone getenge,  
 færeð forst on gemang,<sup>117</sup> se byð fyrnum ceald.  
 Hwilum of heofnum hate scineð,  
 811 blicð þeos beorhte sunne, and wit her baru standað,  
 unwered wædo. Nys unc wuht beforan  
 to scursceade, ne sceattes wiht  
 814 to mete gemearcod, ac unc is mihtig God,  
 waldend, wraðmod.

(‘How will the two of us now live or be in this land if wind comes here, from west or east, from south or north? A cloud will rise up, a hailstorm approach close by the heaven, frost will accompany it; it will be terribly cold. Heat will shine down from the heavens at times, this bright sun will shine, and we will stand here naked, unprotected by clothes. We have nothing before us as a shield against the rain, nor any money set aside for food, but mighty God the ruler is angry with us.’)

The lament makes clear that all seasonal extremes are equally harmful: the heat of summer is portrayed alongside the frost and hail of winter as an evil against which mankind stands unprotected. Specifically, Adam and Eve are *unwered wædo* ('unprotected by clothes'), implying that the introduction of dress is a response to the advent of seasonal extremes as much as it serves to counter the shame of nudity.<sup>118</sup> The same categorical condemnation of seasonal extremes occurs in the Old English *Phoenix*.<sup>119</sup> This text, casting the mythological bird as an allegory of Christ (583–98), describes its paradisaal habitat as devoid of all seasonal evils:

<sup>114</sup> Ed. by Krapp 1931: 133–58.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. *Beo* 3115.

<sup>116</sup> Ed. by Doane 1991: 207–31.

<sup>117</sup> The Old Saxon *Genesis* reads 'ferið ford an gimang' ('[a hailstorm] goes forth along with [the wind]', 18), but Doane believes the *GenB* reading may represent the original reading (1991: 300).

<sup>118</sup> Cf. lines 838–46, where no reason is given for the adoption of the covering of leaves. *Genesis A* follows the biblical account in having Adam confess he dare not show himself because he is naked, though the Old English text shows rather greater interest in the concept of clothing, of which it makes repeated mention (*GenA* 867–81; *Gn* 3.10–11). It may here also be noted that the Old English prose *Genesis* describes the dress of the first parents as *wædbrec* ('trousers'), a northern invention that compares to the *perizoma* ('girdle') of the Vulgate account as a more insulating garment (*Gen* 3.7 (Crawford 1922: 89)).

<sup>119</sup> Ed. by Krapp and Dobbie 1936: 94–113.

14                                Ne mæg þær ren ne snaw,  
                                      ne forstes fnæst, ne fyres blæst,  
                                      ne hægles hryre, ne hrimes dryre,  
 17                                ne sunnan hætu, ne sincaldu,  
                                      ne wearm weder, ne winterscur  
                                      wihte gewyrdan, ac se wong seomað  
 20                                eadig ond onsund.

(‘Neither rain nor snow can exist there, nor the onset of frost, nor fire’s blast, nor downpour of hail, nor fall of hoarfrost, nor heat of the sun, nor continuous cold, nor warm weather, nor any winter precipitation, but the field lies blessed and perfect.’)

Although the description of a *locus amoenus* through the absence of evils is a classical topos inspired by the poem’s Latin model,<sup>120</sup> Lactantius’s *Carmen de ave phoenice*,<sup>121</sup> the absence of hot weather (and by implication of the summer season) is a deviation from Lactantius, who mentions only the absence of tempest, clouds, and winter weather:

19                                Luctus acerbus abest et egestas obsita pannis  
                                      et curae insomnes et violenta fames.  
                                      non ibi tempestas nec vis furit horrida venti  
 22                                nec gelido terram rore pruina tegit,  
                                      nulla super campos tendit sua vellera nubes,  
                                      nec cadit ex alto turbidus umor aquae.

(‘Bitter affliction is absent, as is rag-covered poverty and sleepless worries and severe hunger. There are no storms, nor does the terrible force of the wind rage there, nor does hoarfrost cover the earth with its icy dew. No cloud stretches its fleece across the fields, nor does the stormy liquid of water fall from above.’)

The understanding of seasonal variation, including heat, as punishment was certainly not unique to Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>122</sup> Nevertheless, it seems to have been a popular motif in Anglo-Saxon tradition, to the extent that the imported narrative of *The Phoenix* was adapted to conform to this belief.

Further evidence of a penitentiary understanding of the seasonal cycle may be found in descriptions of hell. These commonly feature a radical equivalent to the seasons as a specifically punitive device, often applied to a single class of sinners. Thus in the *Visio Pauli*, those who have killed widows

<sup>120</sup> Steen 2008: 43–7.

<sup>121</sup> Ed. by FitzPatrick 1933.

<sup>122</sup> e.g. *AUG. Civit. Dei* 14.26 (Dombart and Kalb 1955: 449); Avitus, *De mundo initio* 222 (ed. by Peiper 1883: 203–12).

and orphans and sought their own gain without mercy are burned by a fire on one side, while their other side is subjected to freezing.<sup>123</sup> A similar punishment occurs in Bede's account of the vision of Drythelm:

Deuenimus ad uallem multae latitudinis ac profunditatis, infinitae autem longitudinis, quae ad leuam nobis sita unum latus flammis feruentibus nimium terribile, alterum furenti grandine ac frigore niuium omnia perflante atque uerrente non minus intolerabile praeferebat. Vtrumque autem erat animabus hominum plenum, quae uicissim huc inde uidebantur quasi tempestatis impetu iactari. Cum enim uim feruoris immensi tolerare non possent, prosiliebant miserae in medium rigoris infesti: et cum neque ibi quippiam requiei inuenire ualerent, resiliebant rursus urendae in medium flammarum inextinguibilium. (*BEDA. Hist. eccl.* 5.12)<sup>124</sup>

(‘We came to a valley of great width and depth, and infinite length. The valley being to our left, one side of it was exceedingly terrible with burning flames, while the other showed itself to be no less intolerable for its raging hail and the cold of snow blowing and driving across everything. Both sides were full of human souls, which appeared to be hurled back and forth from one side to the other as though by the force of the storm. For when they were unable to tolerate the force of the immense heat, the wretched souls rushed into the midst of the violent cold; and when they were unable to find any rest there either, they jumped back into the midst of the inextinguishable flames to be burned.’)

The motif of a infernal punishment consisting in an alternation between hot and cold in fact occurs in texts across the medieval Christian world,<sup>125</sup> even if it enjoyed a marked popularity in the North Atlantic region.<sup>126</sup> A scene similar to that in Drythelm's vision is found in the Hiberno-Latin *Visio Thugdali*. In this text, the group of souls subjected to seasonality is that of the highwaymen and traitors, who are made to walk a path with a dark, sulphurous fire along one side, while the other side is plagued by snow and hail. Unlike in the vision of Drythelm, where it seems to be the souls' own desperate volition that drives them to alternate between the two, the *Visio Thugdali* speaks of demons using pitchforks to seize the souls by the throat and cast them back and forth between hot and cold.<sup>127</sup> Although the *Visio Thugdali* is too late to have influenced Anglo-Saxon literature,

<sup>123</sup> Silverstein 1935: 199 (Oxford, Bodley, MS Rawlinson C 108 (fols 79–81v)).

<sup>124</sup> Colgrave and Mynors 1969: 490.

<sup>125</sup> Apart from the *Visio Pauli*, it is found in the apocryphal 2 Enoch, extant in medieval Slavonic and fragmentarily in Coptic (ch. 10, trans. Morfill and Charles 1896: 9–11), and in numerous Western texts, including Haymo of Halberstadt's ninth-century *Expositio in Apocalypsin* (PL 117, col. 1155a) and the early twelfth-century *Chronicon* of Hugo of Flavigny (ch. 10 (Pertz 1848: 343)).

<sup>126</sup> Some Insular examples are referenced in Wright 1993: 131, n. 102. Wright's inference that the northern popularity of this motif is a response to northern climates seems unwarranted.

<sup>127</sup> Wagner 1882: 14.

it survives in a thirteenth-century<sup>128</sup> Old Norse translation, the relevant passage of which runs as follows:

Sidan geingu þau leid sina til eins undarliga mikils fialz audnar og ognar. Fiall þetta gaf þraung-an ueg ollum um forundum. Enn þeim megin fiallsins sem uegrin uar þa uall enn fulazsti daun og brenusteins logi myrkur sem kolreykur. Enn odrum megin j mot uar is frosin snær og hiner huosuzstu uindar med hinum meinsomuzstum hoglum. Þetta fiall uar buit huarum tuegia megin med salna fiollda<sup>129</sup> fullt af leidiligum dioflum er yfer uoro þeim pislum sua at eingi uar þar uegur oruggur yfer at fara. Enn allir dioflar er uoro j þeim pislum hofdu þrikuislada liostra og skutu j gegnum þær salr er þar uilldu um fara og geingu suo til pislar. (pp. 27–8)<sup>130</sup>

(‘They then went on their way until they came to a wondrously high mountain of desolation and terror. The mountain offered a narrow path to all those crossing it. But on the side of the mountain where the path was, there rose up the foulest stench and a fire of brimstone, dark as coal fumes. But opposite, on the other side, was ice, frozen snow, and the sharpest winds with the most hurtful hailstorms. This mountain was arranged on either side with a multitude of souls, full of hideous devils who were in charge of those torments so that there was no path there which it was safe to cross. And all the devils that were in those torments had three-pronged fishing-spears and shot them through the souls that wanted to cross there, and in this way they proceeded to torment.’)

The thirteenth-century Icelandic poetic vision known as *Sólarjód*<sup>131</sup> shows a reliance on the same tradition in its description of the punishment of two specific wicked souls:

18 Munað þau drýgðu á marga vegu  
ok höfðu gull fyrir gaman;  
nú er þeim goldit, er þau ganga skulu  
meðal frosts ok funa.<sup>132</sup>

(‘They practised lust in many ways and had gold for their enjoyment. Now it is repaid them, since they have to walk between frost and fire.’)

This use of hot and cold likewise occurs in biblical retellings, as when the Satan of the Old English *Christ and Satan* observes that ‘her hat and ceald hwilum mencgað’ (‘at times hot and cold mingle here’, 131) and *Genesis A* describes hell as ‘geondfofen fyre and færçyle’ (‘filled with fire and terrible

<sup>128</sup> Cahill dates *Duggals leiðsla* to the reign of Hákon Hákonarson of Norway (1217–63; Cahill 1983: xlix–lviii; see further Wolf 1993).

<sup>129</sup> Wagner 1882 has ‘ad puniendum animas’ (‘for the souls to be punished’, p. 14).

<sup>130</sup> Cahill 1983; cf. the Latin text in Wagner 1882: 14.

<sup>131</sup> Ed. by Larrington and Robinson 2007. For a discussion of its date, see pp 287–8 of that edition.

<sup>132</sup> For full context, see also stanzas 16–17.

cold', 43).<sup>133</sup> *Genesis B*, however, uses the extremes of hot and cold in a cycle more reminiscent of earthly climate, assigning heat to the evenings and cold to the early mornings:

313 Þær hæbbað heo on æfyn ungemet lange,  
 ealra feonda gehwilt, fyr edneowe,  
 þonne cymð on uhtan easterne wind,  
 316 forst fyrnum cald. Symble fyr oððe gar,  
 sum heard gewrinc habban sceoldon.

(‘There they, all the fiends, suffer renewed fire for an immeasurably long time in the evening; then, in the last part of the night, there comes an east wind, a terribly cold frost. They must always suffer some severe torment, fire or cold.’)<sup>134</sup>

The Hiberno-Latin *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* similarly tells of cold and heat by regular alternation when it describes Judas as normally punished by fire, but exposed to the cold of the elements on Sun- and feast-days (ch. 25).<sup>135</sup> This text is exceptional in depicting the cold as a relief from the infernal fires, while also selecting a milder form of cold, namely exposure to the surf with no mention of snow or ice. By contrast, the twelfth-century Dutch verse rendering of this text has Judas undergo simultaneous burning and freezing on different sides of his body as a Sunday relief from weekday punishments (*De reis van Sente Brandane* 1321–1448).<sup>136</sup> This indeed is the more typical configuration, resembling the visions of Drythelm and Tnugdalus. Unlike *Genesis B* and the Latin *Navigatio Brendani*, most literary depictions of hell employ a seasonal contrast in a radical, compressed form, an image that seems to underline once again the belief that seasonal extremity, and by implication all seasonal variation, was a punishment. It will be seen in the next chapter that this understanding has a partial counterpart in Old English poetry, which commonly associates barren landscapes and winter weather with personal misery.

<sup>133</sup> An analogous description has often, and with some plausibility, been proposed for *HomS4*, but considerable emendation is there required to read ‘frea’ and ‘forclas’ (‘lord’ and ‘?little forks’) as ‘fyre’ and ‘forcilas’ (‘fire’ and ‘extreme chillings’; Scragg 1992: 170; *DOE* s.v. ? \*for-cyle, ? \*forcel).

<sup>134</sup> The literal translation of ‘fyr oððe gar’ is ‘fire or spear’. In view of the contrast between hot and cold just described, however, many critics have understood *gar* as the metaphorical sting of cold (Klaeber 1913: 539; Krapp 1931: 165; cf. *DOE* s.v. *gār* sense 1.a.ii).

<sup>135</sup> Selmer 1959: 65–70.

<sup>136</sup> Brill 1871.

### 1.4.2 Scandinavian Mythology

Since manuscript production and preservation in Anglo-Saxon England were overwhelmingly in the hands of a clergy that condemned superstitions, it is now virtually impossible to establish how the Anglo-Saxons involved the seasons in myths of origin or eschatology prior to the Christian transformation of their culture. Where heroic poetry provides glimpses of a pre-existing mythology that may be calibrated against analogous Germanic traditions, seasonal elements seldom play a role. By the time Middle English emerged in writing, the production of narrative literature had spread to courtiers and other nobles, but what mythology was written down does not recover ideas about the inception of a pre-Conversion Anglo-Saxon world. Although twelfth-century historiographers sought to recover an Anglo-Saxon past for political reasons,<sup>137</sup> they either did not know of an alternative creation narrative or they chose not to resurrect it.

In Iceland, by contrast, Snorri wrote his Edda for a literate class of aspiring poets less than two and a half centuries after the Conversion. In addition, no cultural disruptions to compare with the Norman and Viking conquests of England had taken place in Iceland, and the Church was on the whole more tolerant towards heterodox traditions and practices and hence to their description in writing. Accordingly, it is here that a non-Christian mythology of the seasons has been documented, albeit out of an antiquarian interest rather than pagan devotion. Equally importantly, however, Icelandic authors of prose mythology give the impression that they were actively shaping their material, suggesting that seasonal myth was not transmitted in fossilised form but continued to play a role in the cultural imagination.

The most explicit origin myth of the seasons has its earliest form in *Vafþrúðnismál*,<sup>138</sup> a wisdom debate among the eddic body of poetry commonly dated to the tenth century.<sup>139</sup> The account is succinct, consisting of only nine verses:

Óðinn qvað:

26      Segðu þat íþ fíórða, allz þic fróðan qveða

<sup>137</sup> Campbell 1986.

<sup>138</sup> Ed. by Neckel 1962: 45–55.

<sup>139</sup> See Machan 2008: 6–8 and the literature there cited.

oc þú, Vafðrúðnir, vitir,  
 hvaðan vetr um kom eða varmt sumar  
 fyrst með fróð regin.

Vafðrúðnir qvað:

27 Vindsvalr heitir, hann er Vetrar faðir,  
 enn Svásuðr Sumars.

(Óðinn said, “Tell me this fourthly — everyone says you are wise and you know this, Vafþrúðnir: from where did Winter and warm Summer first come among the wise powers?”)

Vafþrúðnir said, “One is called Vindsvalr [‘Wind-cool’], he is Winter’s father, and Svásuðr [‘Pleasant’] is Summer’s father.”)

It is apparent in Vafþrúðnir’s response that Vetr and Sumar are here personifications of the two seasons of Germanic tradition. Although the rooting of the seasons in a genealogy does not provide a purpose for their existence, it does suggest that *Vafþrúðnismál* explains seasonal phenomena by positing corresponding deities.

In his prose reworking of the passage, Snorri Sturluson appears to express a degree of dissatisfaction with the genealogical justification of the seasons, as he modifies the question so as to ask specifically for an explanation of seasonal extremes: ‘Hví skilr svá mikit at sumar skal vera heitt en vetr kaldr?’ (*Gylfaginning* ch. 19).<sup>140</sup> His version of the response differs subtly but tellingly from that in *Vafþrúðnismál*. Apart from slight modifications to the genealogy, Snorri explains that Sumar’s father led such a pleasant life that the term *svásliigr* (‘pleasant’) derives from his name, but Vetr comes from a family of grim and cold-hearted men. Not only does Snorri thus bring out more explicitly the preference for summer found implicit in the name *Svásuðr*, he also explains the existence of the seasons by the inherited personalities of individual deities. Both texts carry the implication that the gods Vetr and Sumar govern seasonally, and that this temporal distribution is responsible for the extremes within the climate system.

The second noteworthy seasonal reference in eddic mythology concerns the *fimbulvetr*. Translating as ‘great winter’ or ‘terrible winter’, this concept is presented as a life-devastating event to take place at the end of an era. *Vafþrúðnismál* introduces the concept as follows:

Óðinn qvað:

<sup>140</sup> Faulkes 1988–99: 1, 21 (‘why is there such a great difference that summer must be hot but winter cold?’).

- 44 Fiold ec fór, fiold ec freistaðac,  
fiold ec reynda regin;  
hvat lifir manna, þá er in mæra líðr  
fimbulvetr með firom?

Vafþrúðnir qvað:

- 45 Líf oc Lífðrasir, enn þau leynaz muno  
í holti Hoddmimis;  
morgindoggvar þau sér at mat hafa,  
þaðan af aldir alaz.

(Óðinn said, “I have travelled a great deal, I have tried a great deal, I have put many powers to the test. Who will live when the famous great winter comes over the people?”)

Vafþrúðnir said, “Líf [‘Life’] and Lífðrasir [‘Life-persister’], and they will hide in Hoddmimir’s forest; they will have the morning dew for food. From them the people will be raised.”)

The passage implies a winter obliterating an entire race with the exception of a single couple. The remainder of the poem makes clear that this survival is part of a global rebirth when it speaks of a new sun and a new dynasty of *Æsir* following a world conflagration (*Vm* 46–7, 50–1; cf. *Vsp* (c. 1000)<sup>141</sup> 59–65). The co-occurrence of winter and fire is reminiscent of Christian traditions of hell discussed in section 1.4.1 above, raising the question whether the two traditions share a genetic connection. While eddic eschatology certainly seems to echo Christian tradition, winter is no traditional element in Christian accounts of latter-day events. In any case, both traditions make use of various extreme experiences to create once-in-an-era levels of discomfort. The eschatological element of winter weather reported in *Vafþrúðnismál* has a parallel in *Hyndluljóð* (composed before 1225):<sup>142</sup>

- 42 Haf gengr hríðom við himin sjálfan,  
líðr lqnd yfir, enn lopt bilar;  
þaðan koma snióvar oc snarir vindar;  
þá er í ráði, at regn um þrióti.

(“The sea will go against heaven itself with gusts, it will flood the lands, and the sky will give way. Snows and strong winds will follow. Then the rain is meant to cease.”)

Once again, the most elaborate depiction of this development is given by Snorri, who combines material from at least two of the above-mentioned poems in his account of Ragnarök. Asked about this event, his character Hár begins his response as follows:

<sup>141</sup> Ed. by Neckel 1962: 1–16. For the dating, see Dronke 1969–2011: II, 63.

<sup>142</sup> Ed. by Neckel 1962: 288–96. For the dating, see Von See et al. 1993–: III, 689.

Mikil tíðindi eru þaðan at segja ok mǫrg. Þau in fyrstu at vetr sá kemr er kallaðr er fimbulvetr. Þá drífr snær ór ǫllum áttum. Frost eru þá mikil ok vindar hvassir. Ekki nýtr sólar. Þeir vetr fara þrír saman ok ekki sumar milli. En áðr ganga svá aðrir þrír vetr at þá er um alla verǫld orrostur miklar. (*Gylfaginning* 51)<sup>143</sup>

(‘Many great things can be said about that. Firstly, the winter will come which is called “the terrible winter”. Snow will drive from all directions. There will be great frosts and sharp winds. The sun will be of no use. Three such winters will come in succession with no summer in between. But first three other years will precede it in the same way, in such a way that there will then be great battles across the entire world.’)

The succession of warfare and winter is attained by combining the accounts of *Vǫluspá* and *Vafþrúðnismál*; the numerals are almost certainly Snorri’s own contribution. The parallelism of three *vetrar* of winter weather and three *vetrar* of war requires some explanation. The former are contrasted with *sumur* and are thus winters that continue throughout the year, but the usual season for warfare is the summer, so that *vetrar* in the second instance should be translated ‘years’, with the understanding that these are three continuous years (summers) of warfare not separated by winter quarters.<sup>144</sup>

Further relevant seasonality may with varying degrees of plausibility be extrapolated from the eddic poetry. The best example of such interpretation is what despite recent but as yet not fully developed criticism<sup>145</sup> remains the default reading of *Skírnismál*, a late<sup>146</sup> eddic poem exploring the theme of love between members of different social groups (*Vanir* and giants). Since the lover in question is Freyr, however, identified as an agricultural fertility god in texts of the thirteenth and perhaps the fourteenth century,<sup>147</sup> and the beloved is a giantess called Gerðr (possibly ‘enclosed [field]’),

<sup>143</sup> Faulkes 1988–99: I, 49.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. with the *fimbulvetr* an episode in *Jvs*. In ch. 3 of this work, a prophetic dream is elicited by sleeping alone in a particular house during the three winter nights. The resulting dream is interpreted as signalling, among other things, the coming of three snowy winters causing all the crops in Denmark to fail, followed by three severe winters but with little snow, and finally three famine-plagued winters so severe that no-one will remember their like (Blake 1962: 3–4).

<sup>145</sup> Von See et al. 1993–: II, 51; McKinnell 2005: 65.

<sup>146</sup> *Skm* may have been composed in the twelfth or thirteenth century (Bibire 1986: 19–21; Von See et al. 1993–: II, 64–5). At any rate it was composed prior to the Prose Edda (c. 1220), which quotes from it (*Gylfaginning* ch. 37 (Faulkes 1988–99: I, 31)).

<sup>147</sup> Esp. in Snorri: *Gylfaginning* ch. 24 (Faulkes 1988–99: I, 24); *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 7 (Faulkes 1988–99: II, 18); cf. *Ynglinga saga* ch. 10 (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: I, 23–5). The thirteenth- or fourteenth-century *Qgmundar þátr dytts* connects Freyr with a wagon-procession intended to attain improvement of the year’s yields (*árbót*; for a discussion of the dates of composition of the tale’s two parts, see Wyatt and Cook 1993: xxix–xxxiv). This episode, set in Sweden, survives in the early fourteenth-century *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* (Ólafur Halldórsson 1958–2000: II, 13–18; for the dating, see Ólafur Halldórsson 1987: xi) and in a compressed form in the late fourteenth-century Vatnshyrna-redaction of *Glúm* (Jónas Kristjánsson 1956: 99–115; discussion and dating at liii–lxiv).

though the form is not far off from meaning simply ‘girded’)<sup>148</sup> who is approached via Skírnir (‘shining one’), the text has been thought to symbolise the sun turning its radiance to the soil in spring, believed by some to reflect an annual spring ritual, whether or not understood as a *hieros gamos*.<sup>149</sup> The theory is backed by considerable circumstantial evidence, including Freyr’s filial relationship to Njǫrðr,<sup>150</sup> whose name is cognate with Nerthus, the *terra mater* or mother earth mentioned in Tacitus’s *Germania* (ch. 40) which shares with Freyr the attribute of a procession by wagon.<sup>151</sup> The implications of this particular connection are difficult to assess in view of the long interim between its classical and Norse nodes, however, and can be done no justice here.<sup>152</sup> The Icelandic evidence is more straightforward, establishing that there existed a literary understanding of an agricultural fertility cult of Freyr by the thirteenth century with explicit reference to Swedish practice. Since these ideas circulated not long after *Skírnismál* was composed, it may indeed be the case that its author intended the poem to evoke agricultural processes associated with spring.<sup>153</sup>

There are other texts and passages where seasonal patterns are less plausibly extrapolated from the eddic material by modern scholars. Thus Finnur Magnússon concluded in the early 1820s that the late<sup>154</sup> poem *Þrymskviða*, among others, was a song for a spring feast, *Vǫluspá* for a summer feast, *Hymiskviða* (composed before the mid-twelfth century)<sup>155</sup> for an autumn feast, and *Hárbárðsljóð* (composed before 1225)<sup>156</sup> a song about the coming of winter reminiscent of European debates between the seasons. He maintains all the while, however, that these poems were composed before the coming of Christianity, when, as was made clear above, such a fourfold division of the year was certainly not customary.<sup>157</sup> Indeed, his evidence for *Vǫluspá*’s association with summer consists in saga narratives which, as Finnur himself observes, connect prophecy with winter (on which see be-

<sup>148</sup> Bibire 1986: 22–3.

<sup>149</sup> Olsen 1909; Halvorsen 1959; Dronke 1962; 1969–2011: II, 396–400; North 1997: 19–25; Gunnell 2007: 362–3.

<sup>150</sup> *Skm*, prose introduction (ed. by Neckel 1962: 69–77); *Gylfaginning* ch. 24 (Faulkes 1988–99: I, 24); *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 7 (Faulkes 1988–99: II, 18); *Ynglinga saga* ch. 10 (Bjarni Aðalbarnarson 1941–51: I, 23–5).

<sup>151</sup> Lund 1988: 100; Olsen 1909: 21; North 1997: 19–25; cf. De Vries 1962, s.v. *Njǫrðr*.

<sup>152</sup> Roman and Gallic parallels are noted in North 1997: 19–25.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. Bibire 1986: 31.

<sup>154</sup> *Þrk* may have been composed in the thirteenth century (Von See et al. 1993–: II, 526).

<sup>155</sup> Von See et al. 1993–: II, 277.

<sup>156</sup> Von See et al. 1993–: II, 169.

<sup>157</sup> Finnur Magnússon 1821–23: I, 13; II, 41, 93–4, 131–5.

low, section 3.6).<sup>158</sup> While all interpretations deserve individual consideration, the evidence in this instance is thin. The case for *Lokasenna* as an autumn feast is reasonable enough in the light of the festive prominence of the *vetrnætr* in Iceland, but there is no text-internal support for this supposition. In the case of *Hárbarðsljóð*, the contrast may perhaps be more fruitfully studied in the context of gender studies inasmuch as it juxtaposes alternate claims to masculinity, a theme invoked elsewhere with reference to Þórr.<sup>159</sup>

A further branch of seasonal mythology is found in a small group of texts describing an eastern Scandinavian dynasty headed by an individual named Fornjótr. The earliest of these seems to be the opening episode to *Orkneyinga saga* (c. 1200),<sup>160</sup> known separately as *Fundinn Noregr* (hereafter *FN*),<sup>161</sup> which probably served as a model for the very similar thirteenth-century<sup>162</sup> *Hversu Noregr byggðisk* (*HNb*).<sup>163</sup> The seasonal value of both texts lies in the high concentration of unusual names with winter references among Fornjótr's descendants. His own three sons are Hlér or Ægir ('sea'), Logi ('flame'), and Kári ('wind'). In *Hversu Noregr byggðisk*, these men are said to have ruled the forces of nature referred to in their names, but this idea is not made explicit in the earlier *Fundinn Noregr*. Kári is father to Frosti ('frost', *FN*) or Jökull ('icicle', *HNb*), who had as his son King Snær ('snow'). Snær again has one son, Þorri (the name of a late winter month in the Icelandic calendar), or, in the later *Hversu Noregr byggðisk*, four sons, namely Þorri, Fönn ('(drift of) snow'),<sup>164</sup> Drífa ('driving snow, snowstorm, hailstorm'),<sup>165</sup> and Mjöll ('fresh powdery snow').<sup>166</sup> The last three, however, play no further role in the narrative, since the line continues with Þorri's descendants; the extra characters seem to have been added in merely to continue the trend of winter names. Þorri's chil-

<sup>158</sup> Finnur Magnússon 1821–23: I, 6–14.

<sup>159</sup> Esp. in *Prymskviða* (ed. by Neckel 1962: 111–15).

<sup>160</sup> On the text's date of composition, see Nordal 1913–16: i–v; Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1965: vii–ix; Meulengracht Sørensen 2001: 227.

<sup>161</sup> Ed. by Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1965: 3–7.

<sup>162</sup> The text has not been persuasively dated with any great precision. See Vigfusson 1887: x; Finnur Jónsson 1923: 646–53 for 653–9; Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1965: ix–xi; Clunies Ross 1983: 55; Rowe 2003: 199–200 and notes 5 and 6.

<sup>163</sup> Ed. by Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: II, 137–48. On the relationship between these texts, see Nordal 1913–16: i–v; Rowe 2003.

<sup>164</sup> Fritzner 1883–96, s.v.; Cleasby and Vigfusson 1957, s.v.; see further *LP*, s.v.

<sup>165</sup> Fritzner 1883–96, s.v.; *ONP*, s.v.; see further *LP*, s.v.

<sup>166</sup> Fritzner 1883–96, s.v.; Cleasby and Vigfusson 1957, s.v.; see further *LP*, s.v.

dren are three, sons Nórr and Górr (names without evident meanings) and daughter Góí (the winter month immediately following Þorri). In both accounts, genealogy now gives way to narrative.

It is in the narrative that the mythological value of the dynasty is played out, as it takes the form of an origin myth. Fornjótr's kingdom is situated east of the Gulf of Bothnia, i.e. in present-day Finnish Lapland.<sup>167</sup> King Þorri's daughter Góí disappears during her father's annual sacrificial feast, which comes to be named *Þorrablót* after him (a word not elsewhere recorded until early modern times).<sup>168</sup> In order to retrieve her, Þorri performs his sacrificial rites again the next month, and this event provides the aetiology for *Góíblót* (a Swedish rite confirmed by Snorri).<sup>169</sup> His sons then set out to find her, conquering Norway and its archipelagos in the process. In the course of time, these regions are distributed among their descendants, who constitute the dynasties of Norway and Orkney.<sup>170</sup>

In view of this foundational function of the dynasty, Meulengracht Sørensen has proposed that the author of the narrative set out to write an indigenous origin myth to rival the Trojan migration that formed the paradigm for foundation myths in this period and was used by Snorri, among others.<sup>171</sup> Although it cannot be verified whether the author's aim was quite so deliberate, conceived with a rival narrative in mind, the episode's position at the start of *Orkneyinga saga* makes clear that it was intended as an origin myth for the ruling class featuring in the remainder of the work. That the author chose to root the Norwegian and Orcadian ruling houses in the very essence of winter (*frosti, snær, þorri*) suggests two things: that he held winter to be at the heart of Scandinavian culture, and that he believed there could be something noble or desirable to this affiliation.

The author of *Orkneyinga saga* and his imitator in *Hversu Noregr byggðisk* were not, in fact, alone

<sup>167</sup> 'Hann réð fyrir því landi [var *Jótlandi*], er kallat [er] Finnland ok Kvenland; þat liggir fyrir austan hafsbotn þann, er gengr til móts við Gandvík; þat kǫllu vér Helsingjabotn' ('he governed the land that is called *Finnland* and *Kvenland*, which lies east of the gulf that stretches towards the White Sea; we call it [i.e. the gulf] *Helsingjabotn*', Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1965: 3).

<sup>168</sup> Árni Björnsson 2000: 434–5; 2008: 9–11.

<sup>169</sup> *ÓH* ch. 77 (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: II, 109).

<sup>170</sup> *FN* chs 1–3 (Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1965: 3–7); *HNb* ch. 1 (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: II, 137–44). See also Meulengracht Sørensen 2001; Clunies Ross 2003; Rowe 2003.

<sup>171</sup> Meulengracht Sørensen 2001: 229. Snorri employs the paradigm in the *Prologue* to his *Edda* (Faulkes 1988–99: I, 4–5) as well as in *Ynglinga saga* chs 2–5 (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: I, 11–16).

in these opinions. Regardless of the Trojan ancestry that Snorri assigns the *Æsir* in the frame narrative of his *Prologue*,<sup>172</sup> the core content of *Snorra Edda* responds to and amplifies a very different origin myth, similarly rooted in winter. Pre-existing eddic poetry associates the giant races with winter, among other things through their description as *hrímpursar* ('rime giants'; see further section 2.6.1 below). Snorri strengthened this association in his version of the myth, in which the world's first giant is formed out of melting rime. In addition, however, he gave giants and *Æsir* a shared origin, as in his account the first god is freed from a block of rime by a cow similarly grown from drops of melting rime, and the tribe of *Æsir* results from his son's marriage with the daughter of a *jötunn*.<sup>173</sup> This association between men and giants is in fact not dissimilar from the Fornjótr-material. Since the northern regions governed by Fornjótr and his descendants are typically associated with the dangerous supernatural (see section 2.6.2 below), *Fundinn Noregr* and its cognates similarly imply that the North Germanic peoples derive from supernatural winter stock. Even if the Fornjótr-legend seems at first sight quite distinct from the eddic material, then, the two have a great deal in common, and the former may be far more canonical in outline than Meulengracht Sørensen suggests.

Snorri also relays the Fornjótr-dynasty and adds a couple of names not found in other texts of the tradition. His *Ynglinga saga* is based on *Ynglingatal*,<sup>174</sup> which has been dated as far back as the ninth century<sup>175</sup> and is an enumeration of the royal Swedish descendants of Freyr. Although the poem uses numerous transparent names, it is only in the prose reworking that winter names are introduced, largely derived from the Fornjótr-material which Snorri echoes elsewhere as well.<sup>176</sup> In accordance with the now-Swedish perspective, however, they are here all names of neighbouring rulers and antagonists. *Snjár inn gamli*, for instance, is identified as a king of Finnland. King Vanlandi of Sweden meets him on his eastern exploits and marries Snjár's daughter Drífa.<sup>177</sup> Frosti, too,

<sup>172</sup> Faulkes 1988–99: I, 3–6.

<sup>173</sup> *Gylfaginning* chs 5–6 (Faulkes 1988–99: I, 9–11).

<sup>174</sup> Ed. by Finnur Jónsson 1912–15: A1, 7–15.

<sup>175</sup> Finnur Jónsson 1912–15: B1, 7–9; Magerøy 1976.

<sup>176</sup> *Skáldskaparmál* 29–30 (Faulkes 1988–99: II, 39–40).

<sup>177</sup> *Ynglinga saga* ch. 13 (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: I, 28–9); cf. *Ynglingatal* 3; *FN* ch. 1 (Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1965: 3); *HNb* ch. 1 (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: II, 137).

is mentioned, and called the chieftain of the *Finnar*; King Agni of the Swedes defeats him in battle.<sup>178</sup> In addition to these now-canonical names, however, Snorri adds two new ones that are equally connected with winter. These are the sons of King Vísburr of Sweden and the daughter of Auði *inn auðgi*, whose region of origin is not specified. Their sons are Gísl ('hostage', but here probably to be understood as *geisl* 'ski stick')<sup>179</sup> and Qndurr ('snowshoe'). Vísburr leaves his wife for another woman, evidently taking back his lavish wedding gifts. When Gísl and Qndurr are adolescents, they raise an army and burn their father in his house after he refuses to hand over their mother's wedding gifts.<sup>180</sup> Nowhere in *Ynglinga saga* does Snorri acknowledge the *Finnar* as the ancestors of the North Germanic peoples, however, so that he cannot be considered a proponent of this origin myth. On the other hand, he does strengthen a widespread tradition associating the *Finnar* with winter (see below, section 2.6.2).

A crucial difference between the Christian and the independently Scandinavian mythology of the seasons consists in their respective attitudes towards seasonal extremes. In Christian tradition, all seasonal variation is a curse, both directly through exposure to heat and cold and indirectly through the consequent introduction of agricultural toil. In the golden age of Eden as in the heavenly Jerusalem to come, neither of these exists. Eddic tradition likewise looks forward to a world without seasons (whether or not under Christian influence), but it also acknowledges a debt of *Æsir* and giants alike to an origin in the elements of winter. The Fornjótr-material does the same for the human population of Scandinavia, suggesting that associations between winter, Scandinavia, and its inhabitants were a common mythological theme. Rather than implying that the Icelanders looked especially kindly on the winter season, this theme may be indicative of Scandinavians' attempts to reconcile themselves with the realities of the harsh climate of their habitat by taking pride in their hardiness and recognising the challenges of daily life as part of their identity.<sup>181</sup>

<sup>178</sup> *Ynglinga saga* ch. 19 (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: 1, 37–9); cf. *Ynglingatal* 9; *FN* ch. 1 (Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1965: 3).

<sup>179</sup> McKinnell 2005: 71.

<sup>180</sup> *Ynglinga saga* ch. 14 (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: 1, 30–1); cf. *Ynglingatal* 4.

<sup>181</sup> Cf. present-day Finnish pride in the purportedly national characteristic of *sisu* (approximately 'grit').

## 1.5 The Social and Ritual Year in Literature

In agricultural societies, the timing of the larger festive, religious, and in some cases political gatherings tends to be strongly determined by the economic calendar. On the one hand, many such events require a critical mass of leisure and provisions; on the other, thanksgiving and prayers for divine intervention often concern a specific agricultural process bound to a particular season.<sup>182</sup> In consequence, an annual social cycle develops that follows the economic year in general outline, and is thus by extension bound to the solar year as well. In societies with strongly divergent economic seasons, this could conceivably result in marked seasonal identities. It will be seen that such patterns play a distinct role in Scandinavian texts, while traces of seasonal identities in Anglo-Saxon literature are largely restricted to liturgical evidence.

The Christian tradition that dominated the literate classes of society in medieval England and Iceland was itself informed by seasonal patterns, although the seasons in question had mostly been transplanted from southern economies. The fifty days between Passover and Pentecost correspond to the grain harvest in Israel; when first instituted, Pentecost itself coincided with the post-harvest celebration. Since the grain harvest ushers in the region's long harvest season, which ends with the olive harvest in November,<sup>183</sup> it is no surprise that one strain of rabbinic thought held the month of Nisan, following immediately upon the spring equinox, to have been the season of creation: it is a time of new beginnings.<sup>184</sup> While the Church fathers embraced a similar doctrine on astronomical and allegorical grounds (namely that light and darkness are separated at the equinox as at creation, and that the liturgical chronology of the passion forms a parallel with the sequence of creation),<sup>185</sup> spring is a time of renewal in Europe as well, though this renewal is more broadly visible in the natural world and therefore not generally perceived as primarily agricultural. On a ritual level, the annual defeat of winter hardship may help explain why Easter grew into such an important festival

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<sup>182</sup> Grottanelli 2005: 186–92.

<sup>183</sup> Borowski 1987: 31–44.

<sup>184</sup> Babylonian Talmud: Rosh hashana, ch. 1 (Rodkinson 1896–1903: IV, 16–17). The same passage tells of a rival theory holding the month beginning with the autumnal equinox to represent the first month of creation. See also Chupungco 1981: 31.

<sup>185</sup> See, e.g., *AMBR. Hex.* 1.4.13 (Schenkl 1897: 11); *BEDA. Temp.rat.* ch. 6 (Jones 1977: 290–3); Wallis 1999: 273–4.

in Europe. The other great feast of the Church, Christmas, was by the fourth century purported to have been instituted in late December because a pagan festival of sun worship celebrated about the time of the winter solstice was drawing Christian interest. An influence from that celebration on the date of Christmas cannot be proved, though the balance of evidence is significant.<sup>186</sup> Either way, the coincidence of the two feasts shows that winter was a popular time for celebrations. In imperial Rome, late December was marked by the Saturnalia and the New Year, both festive occasions, while rumours of sun festivals about the time of the Nativity recurred on a few occasions.<sup>187</sup> The first lengthening of the days may indeed have inspired cultures to celebrate, but the leisure and provisions afforded by the agricultural quiet of winter should be acknowledged as a loosely necessary condition for the proliferation of festivities at this time of year.<sup>188</sup>

Despite the eventual adoption throughout medieval England and Scandinavia of Catholic Christianity as the official religion, the social year retained some of what had existed prior to the arrival of Christianity. Relatively little of this now survives from Anglo-Saxon England, where writing remained primarily a privilege of a clergy at pains to suppress heathen ritual. Nevertheless, emphases in the English liturgy may be used alongside the Anglo-Saxon month-names to form a rough impression of an ongoing English ritual cycle. Scandinavian tradition proved more resilient to the cultural assimilation that came with Christianity; moreover, Christian Icelanders did not hesitate to describe what they believed pagan practice had looked like. Thus both Anglo-Saxon and Icelandic culture reveal something of a festive cycle distinct from the newly adopted culture.

Classical authors offer the earliest evidence of Germanic ritual, but this is limited in both extent and reliability. Although Tacitus's discussion of the earth-goddess Nerthus is suggestive of fertility (*Germania* ch. 40),<sup>189</sup> he does not describe the seasonality of Germanic religion other than by stating that worship took place 'certis diebus' ('on specific days', ch. 9)<sup>190</sup> or 'stato tempore' ('at a fixed

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<sup>186</sup> Roll 1995: 107–64.

<sup>187</sup> Roll 1995: 152–7; Hutton 1996: 1–3; see further below, p. 42.

<sup>188</sup> That an acute surplus of provisions is not strictly required is demonstrated by the two largest Christian festivals, each of which was preceded by a fast that would have served, among other things, to store up food for the feast.

<sup>189</sup> Lund 1988: 100.

<sup>190</sup> Lund 1988: 76.

time', ch. 39).<sup>191</sup> His *Annales*, however, tell how the Roman general Germanicus, in an attempt to channel his troops' disquiet in the wake of an attempted mutiny towards the end of the military season, attacks a Germanic tribe at feasting some time after the Roman troops have moved into winter quarters (I, 49–51).<sup>192</sup> While the occasion for the event is not identified, its timing suggests that it marks the end of the harvest, or perhaps the slaughtering-season. For more detailed accounts, it is necessary to turn to the observations of Germanic authors.

Little evidence is to be had of pre- or sub-Christian ritual in Anglo-Saxon England, but the basic facts of one or more harvest ceremonies, an autumnal slaughtering event, and wintertime gatherings may be gleaned from the Old English month-names supplemented with comparative evidence. Although Bede's interpretations of the month-names read like guesswork and deserve little credence,<sup>193</sup> the names themselves are well established, and several have transparent meanings. *Haligmonað* ('holy month'), for instance, is identified with September by Bede and a number of independent witnesses.<sup>194</sup> What evidence can be gleaned from the month's name therefore suggests that an Anglo-Saxon unit of time overlapping with the Julian month of September was associated with worship. Economically, this time of year was overwhelmingly associated with the harvest (hence the alternative month-name *hærfestmonað*),<sup>195</sup> suggesting that the religious referent of *haligmonað* had some association with that process. That the harvest had a religious dimension in Anglo-Saxon England is apparent from Lammas, celebrated on the first of August and thus prior to *haligmonað*. This festival was concerned with the consecration of bread from the first grain harvest,<sup>196</sup> a ritual hinted at in the word's Old English form, *hlafmæsse* ('bread-mass'). The *Menologium* indicates that

<sup>191</sup> Lund 1988: 100.

<sup>192</sup> Furneaux 1904: 69–71. For the timing of the mutiny, see I, 16–30 on the simultaneous mutiny of the Pannonian troops (Furneaux 1904: 53–60). Particularly instructive is the information in I, 30 that the troops in Pannonia were experiencing 'an early winter bringing continuous rains so heavy that they could not leave their tents or gather, and barely protect their standards, which were torn by the storm and the downpouring' ('praematura hiems imbribus continuis adeoque saevis, ut non egredi tentoria, congregari inter se, vix tutari signa possent, quae turbine atque unda raptabantur', Furneaux 1904: 60).

<sup>193</sup> Cf. Weinhold 1869: 4–5; Tille 1889: 138–57; Page 1995; Hutton 1996: 6, 140, 180, 362; Nordberg 2006: 60–1.

<sup>194</sup> *BEDA. Temp.rat.* ch. 15 (Jones 1977: 330); *Men* 164; *Mart* 5 (Kotzor 1981: 11, 196); *ByrM* ch. 1.2 (Baker and Lapidge 1995: 24); *Notes* 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 (Wormald 1934: 136, 164, 262); *Notes* 4.4 (Baker and Lapidge 1995: 409); *Notes* 4.6 (Oxford, St. John's College, MS 17, fol. 76v); *OccGl* 88 (Meritt 1945: 56).

<sup>195</sup> *ÆGram* ch. 18 (Zupitza 1880: 43).

<sup>196</sup> *Charm* 12.5 (Ker 1957: 300); *OED* s.v. *Lammas*.

*hærfest*, whether the harvest itself or its season, arrived one week after Lammas (136–43).

*Blodmonað* ('blood-month', sometimes *blotmonað* 'sacrificial month'), overlapping with November according to the Julian sources,<sup>197</sup> was almost certainly named after the annual slaughter of livestock. The name has analogues in Old Norse *gormánuðr*, Welsh *Mis Tachwedd*, and the archaic forms *slachtmaand* (Dutch), *slaktmånad* (Swedish), and *slagtemaaned* (Danish). The first of these unambiguously means 'blood-month,' the others 'slaughter-month'.<sup>198</sup> Whether the slaughter was accompanied by a celebration, and whether such a celebration would have been secular or religious, is not known, although a twelfth-century<sup>199</sup> reader of Bede gave the month-name the explanation 'quia in eo pecora quae occisuri erant diis suis uouerent' (*Notes 4.6*, fol. 76vb).<sup>200</sup> Whether this should be read as speculation or report, certain is that the necessary conditions for a gathering, secular or religious, were in place at this time of year.

The well-attested *geola* months, overlapping with December and January, may be suspected of festive or ritual associations both by Bede's testimony to a *modraniht* coinciding with Christmas Eve and by analogy with the Scandinavian cognate *jól* ('Yule'). None of the remaining Anglo-Saxon month-names shows any evidence of ritual content, despite Bede's conjectures to that effect for *redmonað* (March) and *eastermonað* (April).<sup>201</sup> Clerical injunctions against pagan practice have little to add to this index: specific practices are condemned, but they are not associated with particular times of year.<sup>202</sup> Between Lammas, *modraniht*, the etymology of *haligmonað*, the North Germanic analogue to *geola*, and the ceremonial potential of *blodmonað*, therefore, the hypothesis may be posited that there were religious harvest events in August and September, and further social events with festive or religious potential from November to January.

<sup>197</sup> *BEDA. Temp.rat.* ch. 15 (Jones 1977: 330); *Men* 193–8; *ByrM* ch. 1.2 (Baker and Lapidge 1995: 24).

<sup>198</sup> *Bókarbót* (Beckman and Kålund 1914–16: 78); Weinhold 1869: 18–23; Fritzner 1883–96, s.v. *gormánáðr*; Jones 1930: 146; Dahlerup and Jacobsen 1918–56, s.v. *Slagte-maaned*; Thomas, Bevan, and Thomas 2002, s.v. *tachwedd*; Boon and Geeraerts 2005, s.v. *slachtmaand*; Mattison 1898–, s.v. *slakt-månad*.

<sup>199</sup> Ker 1957: 435 (item 360).

<sup>200</sup> 'Because during it they offered the cattle to be killed to their gods' (Oxford, St John's College, MS 17).

<sup>201</sup> *BEDA. Temp.rat.* ch. 15 (Jones 1977: 330–1); cf. Page 1995. A recent defence of Bede's claim relies primarily on the existence of personal and place-names containing either the element \**eāstor* or a possible etymology for the initial element in the name *Hreda* (Shaw 2011).

<sup>202</sup> e.g. *Conf3.1.1*, §4.12–16 (Raith 1933: 53–5); *LawIICn* §§5–5.1 (Liebermann 1903–16: 1, 312); *LawNorthu* §§48–53 (Liebermann 1903–16: 1, 383).

If evidence of Scandinavian seasonal ritual can also be elusive, at least there is a large amount of material to go by.<sup>203</sup> Firstly there is Procopius's sixth-century account of a nordic festive welcoming of the sun following the winter darkness. According to this work, the residents of the northern island of Thule send scouts up to a mountain-top in January to watch for the return of the sun following its forty-day absence in winter. When the scouts return with the good news, a celebration is held.<sup>204</sup> This early account, however, is difficult to place in a continuous tradition, not only because the identity of the island Thule is unclear but also because the next evidence of a similar custom is so recent it involves the consumption of coffee to celebrate the first day of the year when direct sunlight reaches into the Icelandic valleys.<sup>205</sup> Next, the Scandinavian sacrificial festival taking place once every nine years, described in the eleventh-century accounts of Thietmar of Merseburg and Adam of Bremen, is pinpointed to a time about the spring equinox by a scholium attached to Adam's description.<sup>206</sup> Since this event is purportedly not annual, however, its seasonal character would have been less striking than that of an annual celebration of the type described by Procopius.

Greater detail is to be had from Scandinavian sources, beginning with the Norwegian *Ágrip* (ca. 1190).<sup>207</sup> This is the first of a number of texts describing pre-Conversion ritual in the context of its subsequent Christian reinterpretation:

Á þeim fimm vetrum, er hann [Óláfr Tryggvason] bar konungs nafn í Nóregi, kristnaði hann fimm lönd: Nóreg ok Ísland ok Hjaltland, Orkneyingar ok it fimmta Færeyjar, ok reisti fyrst kirkjur á sjálfs síns höfuðbólum ok felldi blót og blótdrykkjur og lét í stað koma í vild við lýðinn hátíðadrykkjur jól og páskar, Jóansmessu mungát og haustöl að Mikjálsmessu. (*Ágr* ch. 19)<sup>208</sup>  
 ('During the five years in which he [i.e. Óláfr Tryggvason] bore the title of king in Norway, he converted five countries to Christianity: Norway, Iceland, Shetland, Orkney, and fifthly the Faroe Islands. He first erected churches by his own residences, and he did away with sacrifice and sacrificial toasts, substituting the festive toasts of Christmas and Easter, St John's Mass brew and the autumn ale at Michaelmas as a favour to the people.')

It should be noted that the text does not strictly state that these four Christian feasts were instituted to replace the same number of festivals taking place about the same time of year; indeed, they could

<sup>203</sup> The traditions mentioned in this paragraph are treated at greater length in Gunnell 2000; Nordberg 2006.

<sup>204</sup> *History of the Wars* 6.15 (Dewing 1914–19: III, 414–18).

<sup>205</sup> Árni Björnsson 2000: 431–2.

<sup>206</sup> *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* ch. 27 and scholium 141 (Schmeidler 1917: 260).

<sup>207</sup> Bjarni Einarsson 1984: x–xi.

<sup>208</sup> Bjarni Einarsson 1984: 22.

conceivably constitute a representative sample of Christian feast-days. If that were the case, however, it would be remarkable for the author to have chosen St John's Day and Michaelmas alongside the religion's main festivals of Christmas and Easter, favouring an even seasonal distribution over a listing of Western Christendom's most important celebrations, which would certainly have included Pentecost. Instead, the text seems to suggest that each of these Christian feasts was indeed designed to replace a specific pagan festival not too distant in time from the named feasts, thereby to ease the transition to the new religion.<sup>209</sup>

The next historiographical evidence of an ancient ritual cycle is Snorri's and largely confirms the evidence from *Ágrip*, filling in the nature and timing of the pre-Conversion festivals there implied. Snorri repeats his information across a number of works, leaving little doubt as to his understanding of the ritual tradition. In *Ynglinga saga*, he states that a euhemerised Óðinn instituted three annual sacrifices, namely for a successful year at the start of winter, for the growth of crops at midwinter, and for military victory at the start of summer (ch. 8).<sup>210</sup> Sacrifices at all these points in time are twice recorded in Snorri's *Óláfs saga ins helga* (chs 109, 117),<sup>211</sup> while individual confirmations occur at various turns in Snorri's writings.<sup>212</sup> What is more, Snorri states specifically that a pre-Conversion *jól* was assimilated into Christmas (*Hákonar saga góða* ch. 13)<sup>213</sup> and that a Swedish feast in late winter, originally sacrificial, was absorbed by Candlemas (*ÓH* ch. 77),<sup>214</sup> thus further strengthening the idea implied in *Ágrip* that seasonal Christian feasts were deliberately selected to replace pre-Conversion ritual events taking place about the same time of year.

A few of these festivities are described in greater detail in the sagas. To begin with, the narrative sources amply attest to the pre-Conversion existence of a festive *vetrnætr*-celebration at the start of winter,<sup>215</sup> which can therefore hardly be doubted. Similarly beyond doubt on account of widespread

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<sup>209</sup> Gunnell 2000.

<sup>210</sup> Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: I, 20–1.

<sup>211</sup> Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: II, 180, 194.

<sup>212</sup> e.g. *Hákonar saga góða* chs 13, 17 (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: I, 166–7, 171); *ÓH* chs 77, 108 (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: II, 109, 178).

<sup>213</sup> Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: I, 166–7.

<sup>214</sup> Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: II, 109.

<sup>215</sup> e.g. *Gísl* chs 10, 15 (Björn K. Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 36, 50–1); *Glúm* ch. 6 (Jónas Kristjánsson 1956: 17); *Eyrb* ch. 37 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935: 98); *Laxd* ch. 46 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934: 139); *Vápnf*

report is a tendency to celebrate weddings during the winter nights.<sup>216</sup> More caution is in order when religious aspects to the celebration are described, as such ritual had been banned from the public view for over two centuries when the first surviving sagas were written.<sup>217</sup> Accordingly, there is some variation between accounts of this type. *Gísla saga*, of doubtful reliability in these affairs since it describes a number of purported heathen practices not recorded elsewhere,<sup>218</sup> states that the *vetrnætr* involved sacrificing to Freyr;<sup>219</sup> *Víga-Glúms saga* speaks of a *dísablót* ('sacrifice to the *dísir* or goddesses') taking place at this time (ch. 6),<sup>220</sup> a ritual similarly situated in autumn in *Egils saga* (chs 42–4).<sup>221</sup> Other texts speak simply of sacrifice without specifying an object of worship.<sup>222</sup> In view of the large body of references and the fact that the *vetrnætr* were close in time to the annual slaughter, it may be accepted that religious sacrifice of livestock took place at this time, but references to this feast provide no firm evidence for the seasonal worship of any particular deity or group of deities.<sup>223</sup>

The sagas describe the winter feast of *jól* in considerable detail and with great frequency, although it is often difficult to distinguish between its pagan and Christian guises. As with the *vetrnætr*, Saga Age authors thought of *jól* as a feast<sup>224</sup> including a banquet.<sup>225</sup> The occurrence in a variety of sagas of the words *jóladrykkja* ('Yule drink') and *jólaql* ('Yule ale') confirms the evidence from the

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ch. 4 (Jón Jóhannesson 1950: 29); *Vatn* ch. 46 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1939: 124–5); cf. *Eg* chs 2, 86 (Bjarni Einarsson 2003: 2, 176).

<sup>216</sup> *GunnK* ch. 10 (Jóhannes Halldórsson 1959: 377); *GunnL* ch. 9 (Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938: 82); *Vall* ch. 1 (Jónas Kristjánsson 1956: 235); *Laxd* ch. 43 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934: 130); *Vatn* chs 32, 44 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1939: 85–6, 116); *Vígl* ch. 6 (Jóhannes Halldórsson 1959: 72). Several further episodes do not mention the festival itself but situate weddings more loosely in the autumn; thus *Eb* ch. 28 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935: 75); *Glúm* ch. 11 (Jónas Kristjánsson 1956: 38); *Heið* ch. 42 (Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938: 326); *Laxd* ch. 7 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934: 11).

<sup>217</sup> *Íslb* ch. 7 (Jakob Benediktsson 1986: 17).

<sup>218</sup> Notably the *helskór* in ch. 14 (Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 45–6).

<sup>219</sup> *Gísl* ch. 15 (Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 50).

<sup>220</sup> Jónas Kristjánsson 1956: 17.

<sup>221</sup> Bjarni Einarsson 2003: 56–8; see further Gunnell 2000.

<sup>222</sup> e.g. *Eg* ch. 2 (Bjarni Einarsson 2003: 2); *Vatn* ch. 46 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1939: 124–5); *Vápnf* ch. 4 (Jón Jóhannesson 1950: 29).

<sup>223</sup> Contrast Gunnell 2000. Although two autumnal references to a *dísablót* are found in the sagas of Icelanders, the general absence of the *dísir* from Icelandic sources suggests that their default scholarly interpretation as a specific class of deities may be unwarranted. There is no evidence to suggest that *dís* had a reference more specific than 'goddess' to Icelandic saga authors (contrast Ström 1958 and again Gunnell 2000).

<sup>224</sup> e.g. *Glúm* ch. 1 (Jónas Kristjánsson 1956: 4–5); *HarHárf* ch. 25 (Bjarni Aðalbarnarson 1941–51: 1, 125).

<sup>225</sup> e.g. *HálfdsV* ch. 8 (Bjarni Aðalbarnarson 1941–51: 1, 91–2).

Norwegian *Gulapingslög* that the Christian celebration involved a toast.<sup>226</sup> Since the toast is a consistent element in *Ágrip*'s descriptions of pre-Christian festivals quoted above, the Norwegian legal requirement to brew ale for the Christian festival may well date back to the older feast.<sup>227</sup> According to Snorri, the festivities of pre-Christian *jól* lasted for three days, like the *vetrnætr*, and coincided with the Epiphany.<sup>228</sup> Little more can be said with any certainty about the early feast, and indeed all that has been listed so far was recorded by a culture deeply entrenched in Christian tradition, rendering even this tentative.

As far as non-Christian annual festivities in medieval Iceland are concerned, the two above-mentioned traditions of *vetrnætr* and *jól* are the only ones to make frequent appearances in narrative literature. Granted, Snorri claims that Óðinn instituted a sacrifice for military victory at the start of the summer halfyear, while *Ágrip* suggests that Easter replaced a pagan libation about the same time of year. The *Ágrip*-passage, however, composed in Norway, does not distinguish between King Óláfr's various North Atlantic holdings, and Snorri's reference is to Sweden. It is indeed in Sweden that evidence of a spring festival is best attested, primarily in the form of the *dísablót* that is thought to have taken place at that time of year.<sup>229</sup> *Egils saga* suggests there was an annual spring sacrifice in Gaular, Norway as well (ch. 49).<sup>230</sup> Since the Swedish *dísablót* is explicitly linked with religious sacrifices, this seems the most unambiguous case of a religious festival aimed at influencing the quality of the season to come. However, there is little evidence of its popularity in Iceland. Instead, the sagas of Icelanders devote their attention at this time of year to political action at the regional assemblies. It is only in the contemporary sagas and other texts dealing with post-conversion Iceland that the ritual significance of spring plays a role in the guise of the moveable feasts of Christian tradition.

The situation is much the same for midsummer festivals. Here too, *Ágrip* suggests the season

<sup>226</sup> *Gul* ch. 7 (Keyser and Munch 1846–95: I, 6); *BjH* ch. 27 (Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938: 180); *Eb* ch. 54 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935: 148); *Fbr* ch. 22 (Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 226–7); *Hákonar saga herðibreiðs* ch. 15 (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: III, 365); *Laxd* ch. 74 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934: 217).

<sup>227</sup> So also Seierstad 1963: 7–8.

<sup>228</sup> *Hákonar saga goða* ch. 13 (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: I, 166).

<sup>229</sup> *ÓH* ch. 77 (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: II, 109); *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* ch. 27 and *scholium* 141 (Schmeidler 1917: 260); Granlund 1958; Ström 1958; Gunnell 2000; Nordberg 2006: 107–12.

<sup>230</sup> Bjarni Einarsson 2003: 69.

accommodated a major celebration prior to the Conversion, as indeed does the fact that *miðsumar* is attested as a point on the calendar, in mid-July.<sup>231</sup> On the other hand, a midsummer celebration is conspicuously absent from Snorri's canon of three pre-Christian festivals. Moreover, the sagas of Icelanders, set mainly in pre-Conversion times, do not mention it, although the term *miðsumarshelgr* ('midsummer feast') makes an appearance in *Þorgils saga skarða* (ch. 40), a section in the contemporary saga collection *Sturlunga saga* set and composed in the thirteenth century, which uses the date as a setting for an ad hoc political gathering.<sup>232</sup> Fritzner understood this term to refer to the Nativity of John the Baptist on 24 June, but it probably refers to the pre-Christian *miðsumar* in mid-July given the chronology of developments surrounding its mention.<sup>233</sup> The occurrence is surprising in a text as firmly embedded in the Church calendar as *Sturlunga saga*, and hints at a continued familiarity with this feastday. If this work is able to cite the date of a pre-Christian festival without explanation, it is the more remarkable that the family sagas and Snorri's historiographical works make no mention of it.

The Nativity of John the Baptist is today the largest popular festival across mainland Scandinavia,<sup>234</sup> and it is attested as a major festival in medieval Norway as well as in the Icelandic contemporary sagas.<sup>235</sup> The silence on annual summer festivals in the sagas of Icelanders suggests that the festival in July lost much of what ritual importance it had as the feast of John the Baptist took its place, but survived as a more muted calendrical presence. Accordingly, the pre-Christian celebration is likely to have assumed a modest place in the ritual year to begin with, since the sagas make no effort to suppress the importance of the analogous festivals of *jól* and the *vetrnætr*. Although the sagas of Icelanders should not be read as straightforward accounts of pre-Christian ritual given the Christian culture in which they were written down, their lack of interest in a midsummer festival surely reflects the relative insignificance of such a festival at least in the thirteenth and fourteenth

<sup>231</sup> *Rím I* ch. 26 (Beckman and Kålund 1914–16: 22); *Rím II* chs 3, 113, 171 (Beckman and Kålund 1914–16: 83–4, 138, 172–3); *Grg* ch. 78 (Finsen 1852: I, 129); Granlund 1966; Hastrup 1985: 28–9.

<sup>232</sup> Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason, and Kristján Eldjárn 1946: II, 166.

<sup>233</sup> Fritzner 1883–96, s.v.; Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason, and Kristján Eldjárn 1946: II, 306, n. 40.1.

<sup>234</sup> Granlund 1966; Hutton 1996: 312.

<sup>235</sup> See the passages referenced for the majority of words beginning in *jóns-* in Fritzner 1883–96.

centuries, and probably before.

A greater discrepancy between the historical calendar and that found in the sagas of Icelanders may be recognised in the narrative emphases for autumn and spring. Although a cursory reading of these texts may suggest otherwise, regional assemblies in Iceland gathered not just in spring but in autumn as well. In the sagas, however, the autumn *þing* receives only a fraction of the attention of the *vetrnætr* taking place in the same season. In the concordance to the *Íslendingasögur* by Bragi Halldórsson et al. (1998, working from a collection of popular editions with modernised spelling), the term *haustþing* ('autumn assembly') has only six occurrences, half of which are found in *Droplaugarsona saga*, while *vorþing* ('spring assembly') occurs thirty times across nineteen sagas or major saga redactions; *veturnætur* and its compounds occur forty times across twenty texts. Thus if this genre were to be used as a guide to the social and political year, one might almost be led to believe that autumn was defined by its festive character and had no political significance. Conversely, spring and summer in these texts are usually the setting of political events. There is some limited evidence of entertainment at the *alþingi*,<sup>236</sup> but that aspect of the meeting is usually left unmentioned in the family sagas. These texts thus present autumn and winter as times for feasting, while spring and summer are depicted as the seasons for political activity.

Some aspects of this literary calendar do follow historical patterns and may be explained by conditions resulting from the economic cycle. Firstly, there is the suitability for feasting during both the post-harvest agricultural lull and the time of the annual slaughter. Secondly, the timing of the *alþingi* to a time of midnight sun and a minimum of snow was only practical, as attendees camped out in booths and many had to travel across the mountainous interior to reach the assembly grounds. Of the summer months, moreover, June was agriculturally the least intensive,<sup>237</sup> so that the farmwork of this period could be carried out by a smaller work force. Thirdly, the agricultural quiet of winter combines with the ready availability of food stocks and the necessity of spending time indoors to explain the relative prominence of midwinter feasting. Accordingly, Christmas has been considered a

<sup>236</sup> *Þorsteins þátr sǫgufróða*, for instance, suggests there was storytelling (Jón Jóhannesson 1950: 336).

<sup>237</sup> Cf. Granlund 1966: 613.

feast of greater significance in northern Europe than in the Mediterranean,<sup>238</sup> where milder winters with more sun hours did not result in the same level of confinement. Moreover, northern countries emphasised further liturgical dates at this time of year and gave them a symbolism of light amidst the dark of winter. Within the Christian framework this is most striking in the Scandinavian observance of Lucia (13 December, corresponding to the Julian solstice in the later Middle Ages),<sup>239</sup> but the English interpretation of Candlemas (2 February) carried a similar emphasis.<sup>240</sup> The most explicit connection between winter ritual and the return of the sun, however, is the nordic welcoming of the sun described by Procopius in the sixth century (see above, p. 42). The existence of all these celebrations suggest that there was a demand for a ritual marking of the passing of winter darkness. On the other hand, it does not suggest less occasion for celebration in summer. Indeed, the conditions that make June an appropriate setting for political gatherings also make it an attractive time for festivals, as the post-Conversion Scandinavian popularity of Midsummer Night testifies. However, the festive identity of the start and midway points of the winter halfyear in the sagas of Icelanders should not be considered without taking into account that this was a time of greater leisure, less travel, and more time spent indoors.

The tendency in these texts to concentrate on the festive potential of autumn and winter against the political functions of spring and summer also translates into convenient narrative functions. Prominent among these is the development of discord at winter feasts, followed by attempts at pacification by means of the spring and summer assemblies. In *Gísla saga*, for instance, the ‘doomed quartet’ at the heart of the story attempt to establish a political league at the spring assembly in order to pre-empt the internal strife that has been prophesied for them. They experience a falling out all the same, and of the four consequential killings, as Hermann Pálsson observes, three take place during the *vetrnætr*, and it is one of these deaths that inspires the killing of the fourth member, Þorkell, at a spring assembly. The first three killings are embedded in the early winter season on a meteorological level as well, as Vésteinn’s takes place during a severe rainstorm, while the valley is covered

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<sup>238</sup> Hutton 1996: 3–4; Gopnik 2011: 98–9.

<sup>239</sup> Celandier and Vilkuna 1965; Árni Björnsson 2000: 297–301.

<sup>240</sup> Hutton 1996: 139–41.

with snow and hoarfrost respectively during the killings of Þorgrímr and Gísli.<sup>241</sup> In *Laxdæla saga*, tensions arise over two valuable items that are stolen at two autumn feasts taking place in the same year shortly before and during the *vetrnætr*. These tensions escalate into feuding over the course of the winter, followed by peace talks finalised at the spring assembly.<sup>242</sup> The feud does not end there, and hostilities follow in various seasons; but the autumn feasts provide a first opportunity for tensions to surface.

The tensions in *Njáls saga* between Bergþóra and Hallgerðr escalate during successive general assemblies in June, but here too the first offence is given at a winter feast. When Gunnarr and Hallgerðr attend Njáll's feast, Hallgerðr gets into an argument with the hostess over the seating arrangement, and an unpleasant exchange follows (ch. 35).<sup>243</sup> This initial wintertime strife sets the stage for mortal feuding between the two households in the summers that follow (chs 36–42).<sup>244</sup>

This last example raises the question whether women played any special part in wintertime strife. After all, the sagas of Icelanders and other Old Norse texts frequently portray women as a source of conflict, both through envy amongst themselves and through their insistence on the male obligation of vengeance.<sup>245</sup> Moreover, it has been proposed that winter was the social domain of women: in summer, many texts concentrate on male action, not seldom out of doors or abroad. In winter, however, Icelanders spent more time indoors, where women enjoyed greater power and influence.<sup>246</sup> It might thus be expected that tensions often escalate as a consequence of female wintertime rivalry and goading, whether at feasts or on other occasions when time is spent indoors.

This potential is not exploited as often as conditions might suggest, however. A rare episode of female troublemaking in winter occurs in *Grœnlendinga saga* when Freydís Eiríksdóttir first deceives her trading partners, then antagonises them by refusing them access to her brother's house in Vínland, forcing them to build their own. In the course of the winter, discord arises between the

<sup>241</sup> *Gísl* chs 5–6, 10–17, 28, 34–6 (Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 17–24, 34–56, 89–91, 109–16); *Eyr* ch. 12 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935: 20); Hermann Pálsson 2000: 113.

<sup>242</sup> *Laxd* chs 46–51 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934: 139–59).

<sup>243</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954: 90–2.

<sup>244</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954: 92–109.

<sup>245</sup> Jesch 1991: 182–202.

<sup>246</sup> Jesch 1991: 187; Gunnell 2005, esp. 292–5.

two houses until contact ceases altogether. Eventually, Freydís contrives to have everyone in her partners' company killed (ch. 7).<sup>247</sup> Female envy is likewise a factor in the episode with the stolen valuables in *Laxdæla saga*, but Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir is at the root of most conflicts in that saga, regardless of season. When tensions do escalate at winter feasts, it is more commonly men and alcohol that are to blame. Thus Egill Skalla-Grímsson famously makes trouble at an autumnal feast on Atley, eventually killing his host Bárðr after the latter tries to poison him (ch. 44).<sup>248</sup> Perhaps the most tense of wintertime confrontations is that between Þorgeirr and Grettir in *Grettis saga* (written about the first quarter of the fourteenth century),<sup>249</sup> or Þorgeirr and Butraldi in *Fóstbræðra saga*, each of which tells how two troublemakers are forced to spend the night (in *Grettis saga* the winter) under the same roof (see further below, pp. 134–5). Not a single woman features in either of these accounts; in *Fóstbræðra saga*, even the food is served by the farmer himself.<sup>250</sup> In the legendary sagas, perhaps in imitation of Continental texts,<sup>251</sup> women repeatedly meddle with the drinks they serve at feasts whose season is not always specified,<sup>252</sup> but here too there are examples of revelry escalated by male action.<sup>253</sup> In both legendary and family sagas, sports are another aspect of male recreational activity, often situated in winter or autumn, that tends to escalate without interference from women; an index of such escalations is given below (n. 186 on p. 149). These examples are largely representative of configurations of gender, winter, and violence in the sagas of Icelanders, which do not reserve a special place for female troublemakers in this respect. Perhaps the most extended episode of female goading in the sagas of Icelanders is the rivalry in *Njáls saga* mentioned above between Bergþóra and Hallgerðr, which takes place during the *alþingi* in summer, when the men are away (chs 36–42).<sup>254</sup> That rivalry between these women first arises at a winter feast (ch.

<sup>247</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935: 264–7.

<sup>248</sup> Bjarni Einarsson 2003: 58–60.

<sup>249</sup> Guðni Jónsson 1936: lxxviii–lxx.

<sup>250</sup> *Gr* ch. 50 (Guðni Jónsson 1936: 159–63); *Fbr* ch. 6 (Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 142–7).

<sup>251</sup> The love potion is central to the Tristan-material, while potions of various kinds are a common element in Old French romance generally. They are typically prepared by women (cf. Huot 2005; Gallagher 2010: 98–9).

<sup>252</sup> *Vǫls* chs 10 (an autumn funerary feast), 28, 32 (Finch 1965: 18, 47, 62).

<sup>253</sup> e.g. *Vǫls* ch. 3 (Finch 1965: 4–5); *Hervarar saga* ch. 5 (Turville-Petre 1976: 24–5).

<sup>254</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954: 92–109.

35)<sup>255</sup> demonstrates not so much a connection between season and gender but rather the general tendency for winter to serve as a breeding-ground for strife in the sagas.

Apart from the social confrontations inherent in festive occasions, the tradition of taking vows during toasts and celebrations (*heitstrenging*,<sup>256</sup> sometimes presented as a drink-induced game<sup>257</sup>) is a second source of conflict, this one exclusively male. Since feasts in the sagas most commonly take place in the winter halfyear, the tradition of vows is likewise associated with winter feasts.<sup>258</sup> It is at a feast in autumn or winter that Hersteinn vows to marry no-one but Helga in *Flóamanna saga*, but Helga's brother Ingólfr promptly vows to marry her to none other than his foster-brother Leifr, thus setting the stage for hostilities between the foster-brothers and Hersteinn, who receives the aid of his own brothers (chs 2–3).<sup>259</sup> *Hænsa-Þóris saga* tells of vows taken at a feast in winter to the effect that certain guilty parties will be outlawed before the year's *alþingi* is over (ch. 12).<sup>260</sup> Drinking vows also lead to larger-scale conflicts, as with the vows of the *Jómsvíkingar* at a funerary toast at the time of the *vetrnætr* to drive away or kill Athelstan of England and Hákon of Norway (*Jvs* ch. 26), the latter of which undertakings proves fatal to the brotherhood (chs 27–37).<sup>261</sup> Similarly, in the AM 291-redaction of the same saga, Emperor Otto of Saxony vows, at Christmas, to convert Denmark within three years or die in the attempt (ch. 6).<sup>262</sup> In *Eiríks saga víðförla*, the protagonist vows on Christmas Eve to find the earthly paradise.<sup>263</sup> All such traditions associated with wintertime feasting strengthen the social differentiation between the literary seasons, characterising feasting as a winter activity but also setting the stage for conflict.

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<sup>255</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954: 90–2.

<sup>256</sup> See Fritzner 1883–96 s.v.

<sup>257</sup> *Jvs* ch. 26 (Blake 1962: 28–9).

<sup>258</sup> Cf. Boberg 1966: 191 (motif M119.3), who claims the motif is primarily associated with *jól*.

<sup>259</sup> Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991: 234–7.

<sup>260</sup> Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938: 33–4.

<sup>261</sup> Blake 1962: 29–44.

<sup>262</sup> Ólafur Halldórsson 1969: 85.

<sup>263</sup> Jensen 1983: 4.

## 1.6 Conclusions

The discussion so far has sought to make three things clear. First, that the effects of the solar year on various facets of pre-industrial cultural expression run primarily through economic channels. Secondly, it has sought to describe the general shape of the economic and cultural seasons in medieval England and Iceland. Thirdly, it has presented the aetiologies posited for the existence and nature of those seasons within the Western Church and by poets and writers interested in Scandinavian mythology.

A degree of determinism must be acknowledged in the chain of cause and effect here set out, but it should not be overstated. On the one hand, the seasonal cycle has profound and inevitable implications for the succession of agricultural labours, and the distribution of such labours in turn determines the general distribution of leisure across the year, at least where a labour-intensive style of agriculture makes up a large enough portion of the economy. Recreational and religious activities thus receive a strong impetus to concentrate in seasonal economic calms, as do periodic political gatherings in societies without a professional ruling class. On the other hand, the only link in this chain that cannot be influenced by human or other sublunary factors is the astronomical cycle of the solar year and the consequent earthly growth cycle. Many medieval societies were at liberty to adjust their diets by altering the balance between crop production and fishery, for instance, two sectors with considerably divergent calendars. Similarly in the religious sphere, if a particular date or season becomes sufficiently important to a culture it may choose to worship despite a consequent loss of agricultural efficiency. On the whole, however, a society with a largely agricultural economy will mow and harvest in summer and autumn, but spend more time around the home in winter, engaged in indoor labour but conceivably also at leisure.

In terms of conceptual frameworks, two differences stand out between learned or imported and popular or indigenous approaches to seasonality in northern Europe. The first of these is a difference in aetiology: if seasonal variation began as a curse on mankind, then the ideal world forms an undisturbed midway point between the extremes. If, as is suggested in several Scandinavian texts, the races were created out of the elements of winter, then there is something admirable and awe-

inspiring in that season. The second difference is taxonomical: the existence of four seasons, namely two extremes and two intermediate periods, invites their use in images of progress and development, while the bipartite nordic calendar is more suitable for the expression of contrasts. In the next two chapters, it will be seen that the aetiological binary may be traced in the difference between certain Anglo-Saxon sources that are heavily influenced by latinate thought and Scandinavian narratives that seem to take their lead from the mysterious qualities of winter. As for the taxonomical difference, it sets up sharp contrasts between light and dark, comfort and distress in both Anglo-Saxon and Icelandic sources, to the extent that summer and winter are commonly used without any sense of chronological progression. In these cases, winter becomes a landscape with connotations of danger and foreignness, serving to contrast associated elements with the comfort and safety of human society. Winter landscape transfers its dark connotations onto any elements associated with its domain, and it colours the perception of protagonist and audience alike. In so doing, winter becomes a literary device to describe the unfamiliar and dangerous, effecting a contradistinction with the human domain through its psychological associations.

## Chapter 2

# The Psychogeography of Winter

### 2.1 Introduction

The study of landscape and the natural world in Old English literature is by no means new. The modern study of Germanic languages and literatures rose to popularity against a background of national historicism and Romantic culture,<sup>1</sup> which combined formed a fertile breeding ground for a political brand of environmental determinism.<sup>2</sup> In view of the Romantic roots of the field and an enduring fascination with the relationship between nation state and geography,<sup>3</sup> it should come as no surprise to find not only that the natural world retained a scholarly interest outlasting the nineteenth century, but also that studies from this era brought an ideological burden to bear on Anglo-Saxon depictions of weather and landscape. It was in this context that Moorman could assert that what separated Homer from the *Beowulf*-poet was ‘the difference between the classic and the romantic’;<sup>4</sup> indeed, he conceived of the latter as working in much the same tradition as Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and Shelley, poets who ‘lived nearest to Nature’.<sup>5</sup> Scholars operating within this framework concluded

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<sup>1</sup> Smith 1976a: 15–19; 1976b; Hunger 1994: 239–40, 255–6; Netzer 2006: 11–13.

<sup>2</sup> Herder was instrumental in the popularisation of climate determinism as well as a nationalist interest in German culture, language, and history (‘Ueber den Fleiß in mehreren gelehrten Sprachen’, ed. by Suphan 1877–1913: 1, 1–7; Kühnemann 1914: 75–8; Hayes 1927: 723–7; Ergang 1931).

<sup>3</sup> Ratzel 1897; Semple 1911; cf. Dale 1907: 51.

<sup>4</sup> Moorman 1905: 15.

<sup>5</sup> Moorman 1905: 4, 216–39 (esp. 216, 238–9).

that Old English poets were fascinated with the rougher manifestations of nature so prominent in northern Europe, but indifferent to its gentler side.<sup>6</sup> In his study of 'the Teuton' through Old English literature, Dale observed in 1907 that '[i]t is always the hardship of the life upon which he dwells, because he has mastered it, fighting his battle alone in the solitude of the sea.'<sup>7</sup> Although present-day scholars may cringe at this type of discourse and its ideas regarding 'primitive poetry',<sup>8</sup> 'the Teutonic mind',<sup>9</sup> and 'feeling for nature',<sup>10</sup> the paucity of summer landscapes in Old English poetry, though not absolute,<sup>11</sup> remains an incontestible fact contrasting with a considerable body of barren landscapes and winter scenes. This phenomenon continues to be observed by scholars today, though often in passing.<sup>12</sup>

While scholarship of the mid-twentieth century continued to display considerable interest in medieval nature imagery, it employed a new paradigm based on the understanding that landscape descriptions in much of Western literature are highly conventional. This approach was given so absolute a form that landscape was now understood as a self-contained tradition with little bearing on the world inhabited by the culture that described it. Instead, the emphasis came to rest on classical models, resulting in a series of studies tracing the development from classical to medieval.<sup>13</sup> This approach proved significantly more fruitful for Middle English than for Old English literature, so that publications of larger scope either treated pre-Conquest material briefly or passed it over altogether.<sup>14</sup>

Towards the close of the twentieth century, following the formal inception of ecocriticism,<sup>15</sup> a paradigm gained popularity in which literary uses of space and the natural world were once again understood to reflect the contemporary experience. This time, causality was understood to be the

<sup>6</sup> Burton 1894: 476–7; Hanscom 1903–5: 440; Moorman 1905: 8–15, 29–35, 39–40; cf. 41–3.

<sup>7</sup> Dale 1907: 13.

<sup>8</sup> Moorman 1905: 22.

<sup>9</sup> Moorman 1905: 40.

<sup>10</sup> Hanscom 1903–5: 457 and title.

<sup>11</sup> On paradisaical landscapes, see Magennis 1996: 147–8; Barrar 2004; see further below, pp. 80–1.

<sup>12</sup> This tendency is noted in Pearsall and Salter 1973: 41–3; Anderson 1997: 236–8; 2003: 219–66; Neville 1998. Of these, only Neville is centrally interested in the motif.

<sup>13</sup> e.g. Tuve 1933; Enkvist 1957; Martin 1969; Pearsall and Salter 1973.

<sup>14</sup> Tuve 1933; Pearsall and Salter 1973: 41–4.

<sup>15</sup> Glotfelty 1996; Branch and Slovic 2003.

reverse of that assumed a century before: literary landscapes were now thought to bear an imprint of existing social and mental constructs rather than acknowledge a societal debt to the natural world. In his 1996 *Images of Community in Old English Poetry*, Magennis expends several chapters on natural environments and their social functions.<sup>16</sup> Neville pushed the same paradigm in her 1999 book on Old English poetic representations of the natural world, identifying definitions-by-delineation of human society and individual heroes engaging with the extrasocietal sphere. More recently, Michelet (2006) devoted a monograph to the spatial organisation of Old English prose and verse narrative, reflecting on the core-and-periphery thinking underlying Old English literary representations of society in its landscape. These studies are indicative of a belief that the systemic relationships between narrative agents and their physical surroundings reflect on a culture's conceptual world at various levels of deliberation and consciousness.

The argument developed in the following chapters proceeds from the recognition that each of these three paradigms, which may be called environmental determinism, literary autonomy, and projection, outlines a valid motivation behind literary scenery. To the Romantics it must be conceded that the arts, like mankind itself, developed in, and by the grace of, a material ecosystem, which accordingly has some claim to having inspired their products. A degree of continuity in literary conventions is likewise beyond dispute. Most of all, however, this study relies on the more recent projection paradigm for its recognition that the extrasocietal other is defined in contrast with the societal self, and vice versa. What these chapters contribute to that school of thought is a seasonal dimension often left out of the contrast between self and other.

Unlike medieval English literature, the Old Norse tradition has rarely been studied for its use of the natural environment. In part this is because Old Norse prose in particular expends few words on the matter, while the poetry largely limits environmental imagery to circumlocutions for various social demographics and biological species.<sup>17</sup> Whereas Old English literature makes extensive use of parallels between the microcosm of the mind and the natural environment as macrocosm,<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Magennis 1996, chs 6–8 (pp. 121–88).

<sup>17</sup> For kennings using landscape features, see the indices in Meissner 1921, e.g. pp. 110–24, 256–7.

<sup>18</sup> Burlin 1974; Greenfield 1981: 208–9; Anderson 1997: 256–8; Neville 1998: 43–8.

landscape in the sagas is generally acknowledged to be important only insofar as it affects the social action of the narrative.<sup>19</sup> Outside of Schach's unpublished 1949 dissertation, the natural world of the sagas has rarely been the central object of modern scholarship. What landscape studies have been written strongly tend to leave seasonality out of the equation. An exception is formed only by the Fornjótr-narrative, which sets up a legendary ancestry for the Norwegian and Orcadian aristocracy. This material has drawn the attention of Clunies Ross (1983) and Meulengracht Sørensen (2001) for the high concentration of transparent winter names applied to the first generations of this line (see above, section 1.4.2). While the Fornjótr-material certainly contains the most striking concentration of winter imagery in the Old Norse corpus, related motifs are widespread but have been overlooked on account of their subtle and organic inclusion in the narrative structure. It is, of course, precisely such common and well-integrated seasonal themes that shed light on perceptions of seasonality fundamental to Saga Age culture.

If winter environments are commonly evoked in Old English and Old Norse literature, not all authors meant thereby to draw attention to the cyclical progression of time. In order to award seasonal landscape and chronology each their due attention, the latter subject is deferred to the next chapter. The present chapter will approach winter as an environment evoked independently of the narrative time of year. Landscapes of this kind will be seen to reflect on narrative mood and the disposition of their inhabitants rather than any practical or typological associations of seasonal progression. Winter environments in Old English and Old Norse literature form a contrast with society, whether by posing a threat to communities or by accentuating the solitary's deprivation of them. Both corpora reveal the antagonistic function of winter landscapes through the inclusion of these landscapes in a dark domain accommodating hostile social categories, thus revealing assumptions of who belongs where in the landscape.

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<sup>19</sup> Schach 1955; Hallberg 1962: 71; Pearsall and Salter 1973: 45; O'Donoghue 2004: 59–60; cf. Hansen 1978. A more comprehensive study is Schach 1949, which acknowledges other uses of landscape but concludes that '[t]he most unique and characteristic use of scenery in the Sagas of Icelanders is the anticipatory or expository setting, consisting in the depiction of such features of the natural surroundings as are necessary for an understanding of the following action' (1).

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework

Since the 1950s, the term *psycho geography* has been used to describe theories and practices of diverse ilk and varying academic value. It was first employed by Guy-Ernest Debord and other members of the artistic movement Letterist International to describe the effects of a subject's physical environment on his or her behaviour and emotions. Its practitioners had mainly urban environments in mind and were interested in drawing out the unconscious influences of urban planning and architecture on the course and subjective experience of the pedestrian.<sup>20</sup> When psychoanalyst Howard Stein uses the term in publications from the 1980s, however, he employs it without reference to its prior usage and defines it with a primary emphasis on the reverse causality:

The term 'psycho geography' refers to people's shared psychological representation or 'map' of the natural and social world, the developmental antecedents of that map, the group dynamics which forge and revise that common map, and the consequences in group and intergroup action of living according to that map.<sup>21</sup>

In other words, Stein's concept concerns in the first instance not the susceptibility of the psyche to its environment, but the projection of a subjective and intersubjective culture onto the human environment: '[e]nvironment is heir to psyche'.<sup>22</sup> If Debord's interest in the subject's interaction with space may be described as psycho geographical reception, Stein focuses primarily on psycho geographical projection.<sup>23</sup>

In the study of literary landscape, aspects of both approaches will prove useful, though neither concept should be adopted without qualification. If Stein's understanding of an externalised mental landscape is fruitful as a psychological model, its application to literature should be more effective still inasmuch as literary creation, though derivative of artistic convention, is less immediately bound to external reality (and thus more culturally charged) than the direct report of sensory perception. Furthermore, the elements of the landscape have already been transcribed into explicit

<sup>20</sup> Debord 1955: 11; cf. Ford 2005: 33–6; Coverley 2006: 81–110.

<sup>21</sup> Stein 1987: 3.

<sup>22</sup> Stein 1987: 15.

<sup>23</sup> Naturally, each implies the other as a correlative: the urban landscape affecting the Letterist pedestrian is man-made, and Stein speaks also of 'living according to [the] map' projected onto reality. The difference is one of emphasis only.

form and need only to be parsed by the critic, who has thus a less subjective method of accessing the projected image than does the psychologist who relies primarily on accounts actively elicited in a clinical setting. The main danger entailed by this understanding of the subjective environment resides in Stein's reference to the 'developmental antecedents' of the intersubjective geographical image. Admittedly, Stein leaves the field of psychoanalysis largely untouched in his discussion of the concept, showing an interest primarily in intersubjective space as studied by human geographers: space as 'physical extent fused through with social intent'.<sup>24</sup> The title of his book, however, *Developmental Time, Cultural Space*, signals the Freudian interest in psychological development that is not infrequently taken to such extremes as to undermine a study's academic utility. In the present context, therefore, the theory is best stripped of its psychoanalytical implications and limited to the cultural-geographical recognition that landscape is perceived through a filter of culture. In literature, such a filter may be identified and isolated in order to illuminate the mental culture from which it originates.

Stein's definition of psychogeography is best supplemented with an understanding of psychogeographical reception resembling that of the Letterist International in those cases where literary landscape serves to identify cultural boundaries within the narrative. In contrast with the concept of psychogeographical projection, which is most useful at the extradiegetic level to identify the geographical framework injected into the text by its author, psychogeographical reception becomes relevant at the intradiegetic level to explain the geographical distribution of social groups within the confines of the narrative. In the present chapter, for instance, monstrous categories will be seen to inhabit areas shunned by human agents on account of the fear these regions impart to ordinary men. At the intradiegetic level, the landscape supplements and complements the horror instilled by the monsters themselves because the landscape is antagonistic to mankind: the monsters inhabit these regions because their nature is in agreement with the environment. On the extradiegetic level, the monsters are part of a hostile landscape projected onto the narrative universe because the author's culture does not engage with this landscape category to a sufficient degree to render it familiar and

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<sup>24</sup> Smith 2008: 214; see further Gregory 1994; Hess-Lüttich 1998: 342–3; Bonnemaïson 2005.

perceive it as safe. Psychogeographical interaction is thus a positive feedback loop: the monsters projected onto reality become part of the intersubjective map of the environment, amplifying the unease experienced when the alien territory is traversed. In some cases, this influence of projection over reception may be largely limited to intradiegetic affairs, leading literary characters to experience heightened psychogeographical reception, extended to the audience only insofar as readers and listeners are capable of imagining the fictional geography as real. In this way, for instance, the hero of *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* is cursed with fear of the dark,<sup>25</sup> an affliction that affects his engagement with his environment for the remainder of his life but may be assumed to have little impact on the audience's perception of real-world nocturnal landscape. On the other hand, the more overlap there is between the author's literary projection and any extraliterary projection onto reality as shared by the author and his or her community, the more strongly is exposure to literary monster-narratives able to affect one's real experience of traversing territories perceived as unsafe. For instance, a substantial number of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian place-names contain elements denoting hostile creatures, whether real or imagined.<sup>26</sup> Although in many cases the particular geography of a site must have given the first occasion for such associations,<sup>27</sup> it may be assumed that they frequently came about in conjunction with oral narratives, which in turn would have made the traveller feel less at ease when passing through such zones of perceived danger.

In the context of the present study, psychogeographical reception, like its projective counterpart, should be understood in isolation from the field in which the term was developed. In terms of its contextual application, Coverley's scathing characterisation of the Letterist construct as 'an

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<sup>25</sup> Ch. 35 (Guðni Jónsson 1936: 121–3).

<sup>26</sup> Anglo-Saxon texts, particularly charter bounds, frequently refer to landscape features and place-names with the identifying element *wulf* (e.g. *wulfpytt*, *wulfcomb*, *wulflode*, *wulflið*, *Wulfamere*, *wulfandun*; the personal name *Wulfwold* is evidence of a similar landscape association), while several contain elements like *þyrs*, *ent*, or *grendel* (Hall 2007: 64–6). Names containing the last of these elements in particular have drawn much attention as potential analogues to the proper noun in *Beo* (Von Sydow 1914; Chambers 1959: 42–5; Cardew 2005: 193). In Scandinavian areas, geographical features with name elements like *jötunn*, *þurs*, or *troll* (and their modern reflexes) are not uncommon (see, e.g., Matras 1933: 3–4; Jakobsen 1936: 138–9). Not all of these are indicative of landscape-inspired unease, of course: many derive rather from analogy with the human anatomy.

<sup>27</sup> As may be seen from the previous note, depressions and water features are typical associations of dangerous creatures in Anglo-Saxon England (see further Hall 2007: 65–6). In Scandinavia, mountains and rocks figure largely in the corpus of monster-inspired place-names.

object failure'<sup>28</sup> is justified: coined by a community in development from surrealist artists to political revolutionaries, psychogeography proved irrelevant to the latter while in the former guise it only served the movement's empty pretense to academic substance.<sup>29</sup> Like Stein, therefore, I use the term for its transparent meaning, not for its associations in popular culture.

A final theoretical construct of relevance to seasonal time and landscape is that which seeks to define the connection between temporal and spatial dimensions: the Bakhtinian chronotope. Bakhtin's discussion of the chronotope is an attempt to document the incorporation of the historical convergence of time and space ('setting' in its broader sense) into narrative literature. This intention to root literary setting in historical actuality is also the central weakness in Bakhtin's discourse, leading him to explain the great divergence between reality and literary convention by the fact that literary chronotopes are both incomplete and fossilised, reflecting only certain aspects of a space-time long gone. The concept's most valuable contribution, by contrast, is the recognition that a literary genre comes equipped with conventions as to the spatiotemporal configuration appropriate to certain plot developments. In Bakhtin's reading, for instance, the spatial element in a Greek or medieval romance specifies that the adventure-time separating opening and conclusion is rife with spatial removes. The temporal dimension has adventure-time rely heavily on contingency, since adventure depends centrally on chance encounters, whether looked for (as in medieval romance) or not (as in Greek romance).<sup>30</sup>

Since Bakhtin's discussion is aimed at abstraction and generalisation across the history of Western literature, his concept of the chronotope is best applied to more specific traditions through a concretisation of setting. This holds true for the spatial element: in medieval romance, for instance, the spatial removes of adventure-space tend to be represented by forests, while texts typically begin and end in a court setting.<sup>31</sup> Concretisation is also applicable to narrative time, but here Bakhtin's interest in the perceived nature of time's passing is best replaced by a mapping of events to the sea-

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<sup>28</sup> Coverley 2006: 24, 100.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Coverley 2006: 23.

<sup>30</sup> Bakhtin 1981, esp. 84–110, 151–5. Gurevich revisited the concept in 1995, proposing that medieval narratives are characterised by chronotopes that cannot be dissociated from the individual characters central to the action.

<sup>31</sup> Putter 1995: 10–50.

sons of the year. The forest expeditions of medieval romance, for instance, are strongly tied to the summer halfyear (see below, section 4.3). This detheorised application of chronotopicity, in which it is reduced to the identification of the landscape and season of the narrative action, is the primary tool of the present study. Because landscapes connotative of particular seasons may be found in isolation from, or even in conflict with, the narrative time of year, however, the remainder of this chapter will consider seasonal landscape in isolation from the annual cycle, deferring the study of narrative time to the next.

## 2.3 Exile and Hardship: The Anglo-Saxon Elegiac Mode

### 2.3.1 The Season of Elegiac Landscape

While the theology of weather and season in northwestern European literature was clearly inspired by foreign models (see section 1.3 above), their concrete literary depictions seem to rely more immediately on indigenous traditions. In Anglo-Saxon England, such depictions are particularly prevalent in vernacular poetry expressive of elegiac themes. Elegy as a narrative mode is not, however, limited to the body of poems traditionally discussed under that heading.<sup>32</sup> One relevant passage normally excluded from this corpus has already been discussed: Adam's lament near the end of *Genesis B* (790–820, quoted in part above, p. 24) seems to draw on Saxon rather than biblical tradition inasmuch as it uses environmental conditions to heighten the grief associated with the fall from grace (see section 1.4.1 above). Adam cites not only the dark and fiery landscape of hell, but also the worldly afflictions of tempest and precipitation, summer heat and winter cold as external attestations of the first couple's newfound misery. This is a particularly clear example of horror instilled in the protagonist's mind by his physical environment with an explicit recognition of the roles of seasonal extremes. In fact, such treatment is no exclusive right of vernacular poetry, as even Bede's historiographical prose employs the motif in his account of the conversion of Edwin (see below, pp.

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<sup>32</sup> For a traditional discussion of the genre, see Klinck 1992; for a recent reclassification and repositioning of Old English elegiac texts in a European literary context, see Orchard 2010.

66–9). Nevertheless, elegiac associations of mind and environment remain most prevalent in the texts traditionally grouped as the Old English elegies. Although Anglo-Saxon elegiac texts and passages make use of seasonal themes to varying degrees, each sets up a pivotal connection between sterile landscape and the elegiac mode, investing the protagonist's immediate environment with a burden of melancholy and solitude. Within this function, it is important to recognise the relevance of real experiential responses to barren landscape, an intersubjective cultural reflex that enables the author to immerse his audience more fully into the protagonist's world than could be accomplished by a reliance on mere intellectual metaphor or pathetic fallacy.<sup>33</sup>

One text employing seasonality for elegiac effect is *The Wife's Lament*.<sup>34</sup> The first of this poem's two settings, however, is essentially aseasonal, relying instead on barren landscape for its descriptive effect. Although the narrator lives below an oak in a wooded area, she describes her immediate residence as an *eorðscræf* ('underground cave') surrounded by dark valleys. The only further vegetation she mentions consists in the briars covering the *burhtunas*, which have been plausibly understood as an ironic reference to 'home enclosures'.<sup>35</sup> The reference to thorny plant life calls to mind mankind's exile from Eden to a land filled with thorns and thistles (Gn 3,18; see also above, p. 19). The protagonist's environment is described as a joyless place:

27 Heht mec mon wunian on wuda bearwe,  
 under actreo in þam eorðscræfe.  
 Eald is þes eorðsele, eal ic eom oflongad,  
 30 sindon dena dimme, duna uphea,  
 bitre burgtunas, brerum beweaxne,  
 wic wynna leas.

(‘I was told to live in a wooded grove, in the underground cave below the oak. This earthen hall is old; I am entirely beset with longing. The valleys are dark, the hills high, the home-enclosures bitter, overgrown with briars; the dwelling-places are joyless.’)

The narrator's situation is given no time of year: although she qualifies her day as *sumerlang* (37), this adjective serves merely to indicate that her solitary days seem as long to her as the days

<sup>33</sup> Contrast Greenfield 1966, which emphasises the metaphorical quality of winter imagery as well as other conventional Old English poetic content (148).

<sup>34</sup> Ed. by Krapp and Dobbie 1936: 210–11.

<sup>35</sup> Orton 1989: 211–12.



past when a hot stream fed into its baths (38–46). Although there is no reason to assume that the hot spring has since ceased, all the verbs in this passage are in the preterite, setting up a contrast between the past, when the warmer aspects of the natural world were channelled to improve living conditions, and the narrative present, in which the natural world in its winter guise has free rein to penetrate a roofless structure. A similar picture is drawn in *The Wanderer* lines 73–110, which express horror at the prospect of a future in which the remains of man-made constructions will have outlived their makers. Already now, the poet points out, such scenes may be witnessed:

75 Swa nu missenlice geond þisne middangeard  
winde biwaune weallas stondaþ,  
hrime bihrorene, hryðge þa ederas.

(‘Just as in various places throughout this world walls now stand assailed by the wind, covered by hoarfrost, the enclosures stand storm-beaten.’)

The role of winter in this scene is further brought out:

101 Pas stanhleoþu stormas cnyssað,  
hrið hreosende hrusan bindeð,  
wintres woma, þonne won cymeð,  
104 nipeð nihtscua, norþan onsendeð  
hreo hæglfare hæleþum on andan.

(‘Storms beat down upon these rocky slopes, the raging storm, blast of winter, binds the earth; when the darkness comes, when the shade of night grows dark, it angrily sends a savage cargo of hail to men from the north.’)

It is unlikely that *The Ruin* and *The Wanderer* have quite the same aim in describing ruins as winter-afflicted.<sup>42</sup> The ultimate end advertised in the latter poem is the personal attainment of lasting fulfilment, in which the transience of earthly glory serves to contrast with the eternal comforts of the Christian faith (114–15). No such contrast is suggested by *The Ruin*, which instead follows up its description of crumbled ruins with a celebration of the glory that was. In the traditional reading, the

<sup>42</sup> Differences in mood between *The Ruin* on the one hand and *The Wanderer* and other Old English elegies on the other are emphasised in Leslie 1961: 30; Greenfield 1966: 143–6; Hume 1976: 349; Talentino 1978: 3; Renoir 1983: 149–55; Liuzza 2003: 9–10. With reference to patterns of alliteration, rhyme, and diction shared between these poems, however, it has been suggested that they share a tradition (Leslie 1961: 30) and that the author of *The Wanderer* may have been familiar with *The Ruin* (Orchard 2008: 59–60).

poem concludes with that description: the last legible clause is ‘þæt is cynelic þing’ (48; conventionally ‘that is a kingly thing’). Since the manuscript leaves no space for further lines,<sup>43</sup> the Exeter Book text could have had no conclusion other than the depiction of past glory.<sup>44</sup> A superior reading was suggested to me by Ian McDougall, who proposes to read *cynelic* as a cognate of Old Norse *kynligr* to mean ‘strange, wondrous’.<sup>45</sup> Given that the incomplete sentence at the end of the text begins ‘þæt is cynelic þing, hu’, this reading brings the poem in connection with the corpus of Old English riddles, which contains several sentences analogous in sense and syntax.<sup>46</sup> In this reading as in the traditional reading, however, the final sentiment is unlikely to turn to such eschatological considerations as are found in *The Wanderer*.

What the two poems certainly have in common is an interest in the role of buildings in the contrast between worldly glory and worldly decay.<sup>47</sup> Winter imagery is particularly well suited to this literary device because, together with storms,<sup>48</sup> winter weather is what buildings in this part of the world were erected to withstand. Thus not only do these poems evoke melancholy by reference to uncomfortable weather conditions, they further reinforce this mood by drawing attention to the fact that the structures described are now governed by the elements they were designed to keep at bay. This convergence of winter weather and social space conveys a mood of desolation and decay: this is a society overcome by its perpetual assailant,<sup>49</sup> whose hostile character is thus asserted.<sup>50</sup>

Bede’s uncharacteristic foray into the elegiac associations of landscape occurs in his celebrated account of the conversion of King Edwin of Deira. Although the sparrow simile offered to the king

<sup>43</sup> Exeter, Exeter Cathedral Library MS 3501 fol. 124b.

<sup>44</sup> So also Greenfield 1966: 143–4; Klinck 1992: 63.

<sup>45</sup> An Old English intensive prefix *\*cyne-* cognate with Old Norse *kyn-* was proposed in Bugge 1897: 122, where Falk is credited with having reached the same conclusion.

<sup>46</sup> ‘Wrætlic me þinceð, hu’ (*Rid* 31 18); ‘þæt is wundes dæl [...] hu’ (*Rid* 60 10). McDougall, personal communication, 30 March 2012.

<sup>47</sup> Contrast Renoir, who contends that *The Ruin* is unique in its emphasis on contrast where other poems focus on either past glory or present decay (1983: 155).

<sup>48</sup> *Ruin* 11; *Wan* 76, 101–2.

<sup>49</sup> Battle imagery of this sort is in fact used in *And* 1257–8 (ed. by Brooks 1961: 1–55), which speaks of ‘hrim ond forst, | hare hildstapan’ (‘rime and frost, grey warriors’; cf. *Men* 202–7 and below, section 3.4).

<sup>50</sup> At the same time, of course, the structures, though imperfect, have withstood time and outlasted their builders and one-time residents. This aspect of their existence is apparent in their designation as *enta geweorc* (2; see further Frankis 1973).

by one of his counsellors is today popularly recounted and referenced in various contexts,<sup>51</sup> few have observed that this ‘heartrendingly simple’<sup>52</sup> figure of speech seems at first sight somewhat imprecise in terms of correspondence between symbol and referent:

‘Talis’ inquiens ‘mihi uidetur, rex, uita hominum praesens in terris, ad comparationem eius quod nobis incertum est temporis, quale cum te residente ad caenam cum ducibus ac ministris tuis tempore brumali, accenso quidem foco in medio et calido effecto cenaculo, furentibus autem foris per omnia turbinibus hiemalium pluuiarum uel niuium, adueniens unus passerum domum citissime peruolauerit; qui cum per unum ostium ingrediens mox per aliud exierit, ipso quidem tempore quo intus est hiemis tempestate non tangitur, sed tamen paruissimo spatio serenitatis ad momentum excurso, mox de hieme in hiemem regrediens tuis oculis elabitur. Ita haec uita hominum ad modicum apparet; quid autem sequatur, quidue praecesserit, prorsus ignoramus. Vnde, si haec noua doctrina certius aliquid attulit, merito esse sequenda uidetur.’ (*BEDA. Hist.eccl. 2.13*)<sup>53</sup>

(“Such seems to me the life of men on earth, my King,” he said, “compared to the time that is uncertain to us, as though while you are seated at a banquet with your nobles and officials in wintertime, with a fire burning in the centre and the dining room heated, but with storms of winter rain or snow raging mercilessly outside, a passing sparrow were to fly through the hall very rapidly. Coming in at one entrance, it soon goes out through the other. In the time when it is inside, it is untouched by the winter storm; but when that very brief moment of peace has run out, it soon escapes your sight going from winter back into winter. So also this life of men appears for a short time; but of what follows after, or of what came before, we are wholly ignorant. Therefore, if this new teaching brings anything of greater certainty, it seems right to follow it.”)

The advisor’s stated point is that life on earth is both preceded and followed by uncertainty; whatever religion provides the most reliable knowledge on these matters is to be adopted. Strictly speaking, then, all that the audience is to gather from the image is the darkness of the outside world and the brightness of the hall, representing ignorance and knowledge respectively. Nevertheless, the natural world is described in such detail as to invite the objection that the parable presents sufficient information regarding the world outside to invalidate the counsellor’s argument. An unpleasant world awaits outside, and if the bird may yet encounter other halls in its path, none will be categorically better than the present hall, whatever the counsellor’s new religion may proclaim. This, of course, is not the response Bede’s unnamed speaker was intended to elicit, either from the king or

<sup>51</sup> e.g. Schuster 1957; Kendall 1979: 178–9; Cameron 1993: 5–6; Neville 1999: 24–5; Ó Carragáin and North 2007: 175. The passage is studied for its own sake in Fry 1979; Toswell 2000; Robinson 2005; Major 2007.

<sup>52</sup> Toswell 2000: 7.

<sup>53</sup> Colgrave and Mynors 1969: 182–4.

from Bede's audience. The conclusion must instead be that the details of interior and exterior environments, strictly redundant to the image, are all to be understood as contributing to the opposition between security and uncertainty, and the passage's winter weather is representative of the latter.

While this understanding of the sparrow simile supports the spatial dynamics of society and its environment described by Magennis (1996), Neville (1999), and Michelet (2006),<sup>54</sup> it also illuminates the need for a psychogeographical approach to the material with a seasonal focus. The author of the image has chosen to make winter its expressed seasonal context because this allows him to draw on a range of social and experiential connotations. Firstly, winter represents a spatial restriction of society, as the human domain is limited to a smaller area (see above, ch. 1); this aspect of the image emphasises the very short duration (*parvissimum spatium*) of life on earth. Next, it is because of society's spatially reduced engagement with the natural world at this time of year, as well as in consequence of the season's darkness, that natural and supernatural outside threats of various levels of articulation seem to encroach upon society (see below, section 3.1); it is this hibernal unease that permits the natural world of the simile to represent uncertainty. By the same token, the confined space of the hall is never so emphatically conceived of as a safe haven as it is in winter, when the conceptual boundary between inside and out holds the greatest significance.<sup>55</sup> This aspect receives expression in the fire, providing heat and light, and the meal, an element not traditionally given a place in vernacular poetry<sup>56</sup> but representative of the ample provisions stored up during the annual harvest and slaughter (see above, ch. 1). The full import of the image with all its detail pivots on the intersubjective experience of winter inside and outside the human domain, thus relying on psychogeographical dynamics for effect.

Although the scene of indoor comfort has more in common with late medieval calendar conventions than with what survives of Anglo-Saxon cultural expression (see above, ch. 1), the detail here provided on the natural world is primarily reminiscent of the Old English elegies.<sup>57</sup> Bede's narra-

<sup>54</sup> The passage is accordingly discussed in Magennis 1996: 129–30; Neville 1999: 24–5.

<sup>55</sup> On the significance of spatial boundaries in Old English literature, see Michelet 2006.

<sup>56</sup> Magennis 1999: 28–34.

<sup>57</sup> The episode's use of Anglo-Saxon hall and winter imagery is noted also in Mora 1999: 237–8.

tive shares the motif of winter storm and winter precipitation with such texts as *The Wife's Lament*, *The Wanderer*, and *The Seafarer*,<sup>58</sup> and it may be presumed that the simile was so embellished in order to elicit the same connotations of winter weather as those texts, depicting the pagan cosmos as a place of melancholy and loneliness graced only by a brief moment of warmth and communion. Conversely, however, the sparrow narrative also illuminates the connotative significance of winter weather in the more obviously elegiac texts. Bede's use of a winter environment as an expression of uncertainty has a counterpart in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, both of which convey the central message that 'eal þis eorþan gesteal idel weorþeð' (*Wan* 110)<sup>59</sup> and 'ic gelyfe no | þæt him eorðwelan ece stondað' (*Sea* 66–7).<sup>60</sup> Just as the sparrow's brief spell in the hall of heat and brightness is followed by a return into winter weather, so also do the worldly glories of the hall give way to hoarfrost and hailstorm in *The Ruin* and *The Wanderer*, while the narrator of *The Seafarer* flees the pleasantries of spring on land for the sober relativism of the wintry sea. Although the coming of winter with all its learned associations (see above, p. 18) is thus an inevitable chronological reality, all these texts employ winter *environments* as representatives of uncertainty and mutability. A notable distinction is that the elegiac poems express uncertainty regarding the present life only, whereas Bede's counsellor as yet holds that the present is man's only *a priori* certainty. In his understanding, Christianity must be embraced to roll back the winter of uncertainty covering the soul's past and future.<sup>61</sup> Once that is achieved, he will be ready for the paradigm shift signalled by *The Wanderer's* defeat of heroic convention at the hands of Christian stoicism.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Ed. by Krapp and Dobbie 1936: 143–7.

<sup>59</sup> 'All this world's constitution will become empty.'

<sup>60</sup> 'I do not believe that worldly goods remain forever for him [who lives this dead life]' (see Krapp and Dobbie 1936: 296, commentary to line 67, for this understanding of 'him').

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Bede's interpretation in his *In Cantica canticorum allegorica expositio* of a reference to rain and winter (Ct 2.11) as a time of apostasy. Bede uses the phrase *hiems longae infidelitatis* ('winter of long faithlessness') and associates this environment also with the dark of night (Hurst 1983: 181).

<sup>62</sup> In an interesting parallel to the storm imagery (though not the seasonality) of all these texts as well as the bird simile of Edwin's council, the Boethius-translator introduces the image of an eagle soaring above the clouds to escape their storms, representing Wisdom soaring with her servants (or qualities) learning, skills, and true riches (*Bo* ch. 7, lines 100–3 (Godden and Irvine 2009: 1, 254)). The parallel confirms the popularity of storms as an image of sublunary mutability while demonstrating the suitability of bird imagery for storm metaphors. For discussions of how the Anglo-Saxon translator may have arrived at his innovation, see Bately 1994: 41–2; Godden and Irvine 2009: 11, 281, commentary to 7.100–3.





bihongen hrimgicelum; hægl scurum fleag.  
 18 Þær ic ne gehyrde butan hlimman sæ,  
 iscealdne wæg.

(‘He whose life on the land passes most pleasantly does not know how, sorrowful at my wretched condition, I lived on the ice-cold sea, the exile’s path, in winter, deprived of friends and kinsmen, weighed down with icicles; hail came flying down in showers. I heard nothing there but the sea roaring, the ice-cold wave.’)

55 Pæt se beorn ne wat,  
 esteadig secg, hwæt þa sume dreogað  
 þe þa wræclastas widost lecgað.

(‘The man, the fellow blessed with bounty, does not know what those few suffer who travel the paths of exile most widely.’)

The natural world of dry land is described in a general way only, in what is a rare depiction of pleasant landscape in the Old English elegies:

48 Bearwas blostmum nimað, byrig fægriað,  
 wongas wlitigiað, woruld onetteð.

(‘The groves go into blossom, the towns grow fair, the fields grow beautiful, the world hurries onwards.’)

Its function, however, is not to attract but to usher out: the spring renewal of the natural world, epitomised by the cuckoo’s call (53–5), is the starting signal for the seafaring season, sending the narrator back into the cold and barren seascape of exile. It is for this reason that the cuckoo is perceived as singing with a sad voice (‘geomran reorde’, 53).<sup>67</sup> This role of the cuckoo as a herald of hardship is traditional: it fulfils the same function in the Latin *Conflictus veris et hiemis*<sup>68</sup> attributed to Alcuin, in which a personified Winter regards the cuckoo as the starting signal for hardship and war on land and sea following the comforts of winter (13–15, 19–21, 25–7). Even in the Old English *Husband’s Message*,<sup>69</sup> where the start of the seafaring season has obvious positive connotations as a time of spousal reunion, the cuckoo that heralds it is portrayed as a sad bird:

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Knowlton 1929: 100–1; Williams 1989–90: 77, 86; Klinck 1992: 137, n. to *The Seafarer* 53–55a; Alamichel 1998: 54–5; Dubois 1998.

<sup>68</sup> Ed. by Godman 1985: 144–9.

<sup>69</sup> Ed. by Krapp and Dobbie 1936: 225–7.

20 Heht nu sylfa þe  
 lustum læran, þæt þu lagu drefde,  
 siþþan þu gehyrde on hliþes oran  
 23 galan geomorne geac on bearwe.

(‘He [your husband] himself has now commanded you to be joyfully instructed that you should sail the water after you hear the sad cuckoo calling in the hillside grove.’)

Despite this association, the prospect of a warmer time of year here unambiguously signals an improvement in fortunes. In its focus on the joy of a spring reunion, this text represents a complete reversal of the argument in *The Wife’s Lament*, which expresses the emotional anguish of its protagonists’ isolation with reference to barren landscapes and winter weather. In its connotative use of spring, however, *The Husband’s Message* is a reversal rather of *The Seafarer*, whose seemingly appreciative depiction of the season in fact serves to underline the discomfort of life at sea — but this discomfort is expressed with reference to a winter seascape.

As in *The Wanderer*, the point that *The Seafarer* was intended to get across is that the only lasting fulfilment is to be had through religious devotion.<sup>70</sup> Despite the contrast drawn between life at sea and on land, the narrator makes clear that earthly joys are nowhere enduring. Following the account of his hardships, he states,

64 Forþon me hatran sind  
 dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif,  
 læne on londe. Ic gelyfe no  
 67 þæt him eorðwelan ece stondað.

(‘Therefore the joys of the Lord are hotter to me than this dead life, this transitory life on land. I do not believe that worldly joys remain eternally.’)

*Hat* ‘hot’ is here used in a sense of intense emotion similar to that expressed by the ‘hot sorrows’ of line 11 (quoted above, p. 71),<sup>71</sup> although the feeling is now triggered by desire rather than the oppression of worldly cares.<sup>72</sup> Here too, a contrast of temperatures may have been intended in view of the winter imagery employed elsewhere in the poem. The description of the eternal joys of heaven

<sup>70</sup> So also Klein 1975: 218.

<sup>71</sup> Hill 1968: 531; cf. *OED*, s.v. *hot*, adj. and n.<sup>1</sup> sense A.II.8.a.

<sup>72</sup> For a fuller discussion of heat as a descriptor of emotions, see Lockett 2011: 54–109.

as 'hotter' or 'exciting more fervent emotion' than the foregoing recalls earlier complaints of the cold seafaring existence, ensuring that these discomforts are fresh in the audience's mind when the heavenly alternative is brought forward. The remainder of the poem makes repeated and explicit reference to God, stressing the importance of loving and fearing him (e.g. 103, 106, 121). Again, then, the winter seascape painted in *The Seafarer* should be understood as an argument against worldly fulfilment, accentuating the fragility of the strawman of earthly joys. In so doing, both this poem and *The Wanderer* characterise the sea as a cold and hostile environment suitable for the expression of elegy when contrasted with human society.

## 2.4 Cold Water

The poetic association between water landscapes and aspects of winter is not limited to the elegies. Though no other Old English text foregrounds this combination of environmental features as prominently as *The Seafarer* or *The Wanderer*, a considerable number of texts refer to bodies of water as cold, thereby strengthening the identification of water landscapes with winter landscapes. In *Beowulf*, for instance, Grendel's mother is banished to *cealde streamas* ('cold currents') following Cain's crime (1258–63). Moreover, Beowulf's swimming-contest<sup>73</sup> with Breca is explicitly set in winter when the poem states that 'geofon yðum weol, | wintrys wylmum' (515–16)<sup>74</sup> and we hear that the match takes place in the coldest of weathers ('wedera cealdost', 546). Although the poem contains three references to warm water, there is always an explanatory context for this. Thus the dragon's flames seem to be the explanation for (or even the metaphorical referent of) the fiery stream that runs from the dragon's mound (2542–9), and the water of the monsters' *mere* ('pool') is

<sup>73</sup> The episode has been widely argued to represent a rowing competition (see Robinson 1974; Wentersdorf 1975; Earl 1979; Frank 1986: 158–63; Nelles 1999). Perhaps the greatest difficulty with such a reading is that no transition is described between the supposed initial rowing and the later underwater combat, although a capsizing or falling out of the boat would surely merit description (so also Fulk 2005: 462; Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008: 152, commentary to lines 512b f.; cf. Biggs 2002: 313–14). Although full-length articles contesting the literal reading of *reon* ('row') are fewer and at times less eloquent than those advocating it, the interpretation of the episode as a swimming-expedition remains the default position (Greenfield 1982; Biggs 2002: 312–15; Fulk 2005; Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008: 152, commentary to lines 512b f.); Anlezark 2011.

<sup>74</sup> 'The ocean was surging with waves, winter's billows.'

on two occasions described as contaminated with blood in a set collocation *hat heolfre* ('hot with gore', 847–9, 1422–3).<sup>75</sup> Descriptions of cold water are not provided with explanatory contexts of this kind.

Scenes at sea in Old English poetry repeatedly favour the descriptor *ceald* in stressed position. Although the word frequently alliterates with *ceol* and once with *clif* as a circumlocution for wave, its inability to alliterate with straightforward words for water suggests that its frequent application to such words should be explained by conceptual association rather than reduced to alliterative expediency. The combination occurs, for instance, in all of the following lines from *Andreas*:

201 ofer cald wæter cuðe sindon

222 ceol gestigan, ond on cald wæter

253 on cald wæter ceolum lacað

310 ofer cald cleofu ceoles neosan

No reference to cold water appears in the Greek and Latin analogues to the wider passages.<sup>76</sup> Despite the alliterative advantages of *ceald*, the threefold repetition of the phrase *ceald wæter* within fifty-three lines, augmented with the wave-metaphor *ceald clifu* ('cold cliffs') shortly after, cannot fail to draw attention to the uncomfortable quality of the water, and hence to its perceived hostility. In the first instance, this connotation fits the context particularly well: ordered by God to travel to Mermedonia, Andrew objects that both the people and the customs of that land across the water are unknown to him (171–201). By specifying the uncomfortable temperature of the water, he groups the setting of the voyage with the environment of his destination as alien and hostile, thereby heightening the heroic challenge of traversing it.<sup>77</sup> The fourth reference to the cold sea, the metaphor of

<sup>75</sup> Cf. *And* 1240–1, 1275–7.

<sup>76</sup> The passage corresponds to chs 3–6 in the *Πράξεις Ανδρέου* and *Acta Andreae* (Casanatensis redaction) as edited in Blatt 1930 (34–45).

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Martin 1969: 377, suggesting of the winter passage in *And* 1255–65 that it emphasises the saint's fortitude. Cf. also *Gawain* 713–32, in which Gawain is described as less bothered by the enmity of his various supernatural enemies than by the winter weather encountered on his journey (ed. by Tolkien and Gordon 1967; see below, section 4.3.5). On the heroism of travel see further Battles 2000: 59; Michelet 2006: 176–87, 201–2; cf. Neville 1999: 89–138; on the hostility of the sea see Brooke 1892: 162–88; Magennis 1996: 126–7; cf. Stanley 1955: 436–7; on the heroism of saints see Woolf 1966: 50–3.

line 310, is similarly effective: here, Christ tests Andrew's resolve by asking him his purpose in seeking out the discomforts of the sea (305–14), recalling the contrast between life on land and at sea expressed in *The Seafarer*. The remaining two lines on cold water form part of God's insistence that Andrew should undertake the journey (203–24) and an account of God and his angels sailing into the harbour to take Andrew on board (244–53). All four descriptions taken together emphasise the seafaring feat that takes Andrew to Mermedonia, suggesting that it represents the first of three tests, a natural threat preceding the disciple's human and demonic challenges.<sup>78</sup> The perceived hostility of the sea is confirmed elsewhere in the poem, which twice refers to it using the compound *wæteregeša* 'water-terror' (375, 435), once extending the concept into a battle image in which the waves are recast as warriors: 'wæteregeša stod | þreata þryðum' (375–6).<sup>79</sup> The only other occurrence of the term *wæteregeša* is in *Beowulf*, where a direct connection is made between cold water and perceived hostility: this is the passage mentioned above in which Grendel's mother is banished to 'wæteregešan [...], cealde streamas' (1260–1).<sup>80</sup>

The references in *Andreas* to the cold of the water to be traversed are paralleled in *Christ B*,<sup>81</sup> which allegorises the present age as a sea voyage:

850 Nu is þon gelicost swa we on laguflode  
ofer cald wæter ceolum liðan  
geond sidne sæ, sundhengestum,  
853 flodwudu fergen. Is þæt frecne stream  
yða ofer mæta þe we her on lacað  
geond þas wacan woruld, windge holmas  
856 ofer deop gelad. Wæs se drohtað strong  
ærþon we to londe geliden hæfdon  
ofer hreone hrycg. Þa us help bicwom,  
859 þæt us to hælo hyþe gelædde,  
godes gæstsunu, ond us giefe sealde  
þæt we oncnawan magun ofer ceoles bord  
862 hwær we sælan sceolon sundhengestas,  
ealde yðmearas, ancrum fæste.

(‘The present time is most like the way we travel across the cold water of the sea by ship, with

<sup>78</sup> More specific winter landscape occurs as one of Andrew's afflictions in lines 1255–65 (cf. Stanley 1955: 440 and see below, section 3.4).

<sup>79</sup> ‘The water-terror rose up with hosts of troops.’

<sup>80</sup> ‘The terror of water [...], the cold currents.’

<sup>81</sup> Ed. by Krapp and Dobbie 1936: 15–27.

swimming-horses across the wide sea, travel by water-wood. The wild stream of the waves on which we roll here throughout this insignificant<sup>82</sup> world is excessive, the waves are windy over the deep way. The conditions were rough before we made it to land across the stormy ridge. Then help came to us, God's spirit-son, who led us into the safe harbour and gave us the gift that we are able to know where we should moor our swimming-horses, the old wave-mares, firmly with the anchor over the ship's board.')

Here too, the water is referred to as *ceald* as part of the overall imagery representing the various afflictions of life. Such detail is not provided in the Latin source, which limits seafaring imagery to a single metaphor portraying hope as the mind's anchor:

Quamuis adhuc rerum perturbationibus animus fluctuet, iam tamen spei uestrae ancoram in aeternam patriam figite, intentionem mentis in uera luce solidate. (*GREG.MAG. Hom.euang.* 29, p. 254)<sup>83</sup>

('Even though your mind now surges with unrest, nevertheless fix the anchor of your hope in the eternal homeland, fasten your resolve in the true light.')

The Anglo-Saxon poet saw here the potential for an extended simile, but in its creation it seems he made use of an existing Anglo-Saxon tradition of voyaging descriptions, which he employed to outline all the dangers of life at sea.<sup>84</sup> As a simile, the resulting passage draws attention to the inhospitable qualities of life on earth. The image used, however, emphasises the cold of the sea.

The collocation *ceald wæter* shows up also in *The Battle of Maldon*<sup>85</sup> during the parley across the river Pante between Byrhtnoð and the foreign raiders: 'ongan ceallian þa ofer cald wæter | Byrhtelmes bearn' (91–2).<sup>86</sup> It has been suggested that the description could have no literal implications here: after all, the battle was fought in August.<sup>87</sup> Of course, for English tidal waters to be cold at any time of year should hardly come as a surprise. In the same way, the *Death of Edward*<sup>88</sup>-poet cannot be accused of lack of realism when he observes of the subject of his elegy,

<sup>82</sup> *Wac* 'of little value' may here have been intended further to strengthen the passage's seafaring imagery through a further sense 'soft, pliant', used of *wæter* in *Met* 20, line 93 (ed. by Godden and Irvine 2009; cf. BT s.v. *wác*).

<sup>83</sup> Ed. by Étaix 1999: 244–55. Cf. also the figure used in *Solil* 1 22.11–25 (Endter 1922: 22, alongside a redaction of its Latin source, *AUG. Solil.*) and the figurative uses of *hyð* ('harbour') cited in *DOE* s.v. *hýþ* (forthcoming) sense 3.

<sup>84</sup> The passage's reliance on traditional Old English poetic diction is demonstrated in Orchard 2009: 302–3, 317–18. See also Stanley 1955: 436–7; Magennis 1996: 126–7; Hill 1994.

<sup>85</sup> Ed. by Scragg 1981.

<sup>86</sup> 'Byrhtelm's son then began to call out across the cold water.'

<sup>87</sup> Salmon 1959: 314. Cf. Gordon 1937: 49, n. 91, which assigns the description both a literal and a figurative value.

<sup>88</sup> Ed. by Dobbie 1942: 25–6.

9    Weold wel gepungen    Walum and Scottum  
       and Bryttum eac,    byre Æðelredes,  
       Englum and Sexum,    oretmægcum,  
 12    swa ymbclyppað    cealde brymmas.

(‘The excellent son of Æðelred governed well the Welsh and Scots, and the British too, the warriors as the cold waves surround them.’)

Even if British waters are cold, of course, that does not mean that the *Edward*-poet did not intend to heighten the heroic style of his eulogy by describing them as such in implication of their hostility, amplifying Edward’s achievement by the suggestion that he faced external threats alongside the eleventh-century challenges of internal unity, whether from the sea itself or from the enemies it brought to English shores. Similarly, the *Maldon*-poet must have intended to evoke a mood by his reference to cold water, as so much of poetic content serves the shaping of a mood.<sup>89</sup> Although nothing precludes the poet’s contemporaneity with the actual battle,<sup>90</sup> whether he had been present to test the water temperature is anyone’s guess. More likely, his diction was informed by a combination of traditional poetic environmental depiction, alliterative requirement, and the knowledge that his collocation would do no unacceptable injustice to the historical record of East Saxon water temperatures.

An aspect of the poetic tradition that seems to have played a role in *Maldon*’s reference to cold water is the hostility of the natural world, which heightens the heroism as well as the drama of the action to which it forms the backdrop in much the same way as is done in *Andreas*. A starker example of this is found in *Exodus*, whose author had considerably less oceanographical justification to refer to the Red Sea as *sinceald* (‘perpetually cold’, 472,<sup>91</sup> with a possible pun on the Egyptian *synn* (‘sin’) that occasions the massacre), though he may not have known that the sea he was describing is among the warmest bodies of salt water on earth. Although his choice of words is again favoured by alliteration (the full line is ‘sincalda sæ, sealtum yðum’), its natural contextual explanation is that the sea represented a hostile landscape category, first obstructing the Judaic refugees and then, in

<sup>89</sup> This understanding differs from Greenfield’s statement that ‘much [...] Old English poetic diction [is] best taken metaphorically’ (1966: 148), a perception that undervalues a text’s rootedness in the world of sensory experience.

<sup>90</sup> Scragg 1991: 32.

<sup>91</sup> This line is numbered 473 in Krapp’s edition (1931: 89–107).





innovation than poetic paraphrase, let alone original verse composition. It furthermore underscores the creative input required by poetic form. However, it may also be taken to reflect on the nature of the poetic narrative mode. Evidently, Old English poetic narratives are set in a poetic reality that answers to certain environmental expectations. Thus regardless of actual Anglo-Saxon perceptions of the sea, the poetry describes it as a cold place.

Despite these observations, it should be pointed out that the cold water topos is by no means mandatory in poetic passages describing the sea. *Genesis A*, for instance, makes no use of it even in its account of the flood, whose waters it calls *hreo*h ('rough', 1325), *sweart* ('black', 1326), *deop* ('deep', 1331; cf. 1451), and *famig* ('foamy', 1452), never *ceald*.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, the original collocation of *ceald* with words for water and sea across some ten poetic texts, combined with further winter associations of water in *Beowulf*, *The Wife's Lament*, *The Wanderer*, and *The Seafarer*, is sufficient to conclude that water described in the poetic mode was widely expected to be cold, and that water landscapes in the poetry tended to connote winter and winter weather regardless of the season on land.<sup>101</sup>

The association here described is not limited to narrative literature. The combination of cold and water is frequently encountered in the Old English names of streams and springs,<sup>102</sup> which may be taken as a reminder that a literary topos based on a concept as tactile as 'cold water' is unlikely to develop in isolation from everyday experience. Also based on experience is the learned latinate doctrine of the four elements and qualities. Relayed in Anglo-Saxon England by Bede, Byrhtferth, and Ælfric, mostly in imitation of Isidore of Seville,<sup>103</sup> this system groups winter and water as sharing

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17, lines 194–8 (Pope 1967–68: II, 555). The majority of these derive from the New Testament promise of a reward for those who provide Christ's 'little ones' with cold water (Mt 10.42; cf. Mk 9.40). In the original geographical context of this anecdote, of course, cold was intended as a favourable property for a beverage. Interesting in this respect is the *HomS* 13 homilist's attempt to explain the specification as a way of pre-empting the excuse of not having a vessel in which to heat the water one is expected to give. The homilist here betrays his difficulty in understanding why cold water would be a desirable drink. Less cultural disagreement may have existed regarding the undesirability of tepid drinks, as both the Latin and the Old English versions of the *Pastoral Care* echo this biblical sentiment (cf. *Apc* 3.15–16). On the other hand, the definite context provided with this image in the Apocalypse rendered it difficult to misinterpret.

<sup>100</sup> Moorman, comparing the episode to the nature descriptions of *Beo*, *Ex*, and the riddles, remarked that '[w]hat we miss is the passion, the breathlessness, the fine frenzy of the more primitive poetry' (1905: 22).

<sup>101</sup> A poetic connection between the sea, cold, winter, and misery has previously been discussed by Stanley (1955: 436–7; cf. Bately 1984: 4–8).

<sup>102</sup> Smith 1970, s.v. *cald*.

<sup>103</sup> *ISID. Nat. rer.* 11 (Fontaine 1960: 213–17); *BEDA. Temp. rat.* ch. 35 (Jones 1977: 391–5); *ByrM* ch. 1.1 (Baker and Lapidge

the same qualities. In Byrhtferth's words,

Hiemps ys winter; he byð ceald and wæt. Wæter ys ceald and wæt; swa byð se ealda man ceald  
 7 snoflig. (*ByrM* ch. 1.1)<sup>104</sup>

(‘*Hiemps* is winter; it is cold and wet. Water is cold and wet; the old man likewise is cold and  
 sniffly.’)

It is unlikely that this particular detail of the learned tradition of the four elements, not taken over into Old English narrative prose except in *The Consolation of Philosophy* (ch. 33),<sup>105</sup> should have been picked up by the poetic tradition in order to describe sea journeys. Rather, it seems, the association was arrived at independently by two distinct traditions. Once in place, the learned and poetic views of winter could certainly reinforce each other in the mind of an Anglo-Saxon poet. This could only go so far, however, as in the scholarly tradition the cold of water did not contrast with land temperature:

75 Wæter and eorðe wæstmas brengeað;  
 þa sint on gecynde cealda ba twa,  
 wæter wæt and ceald (wargas ymbelicgæð),  
 78 eorðe ælgreno, eac hwæðre ceald. (*Met* 20)<sup>106</sup>

(‘Water and earth produce fruits. They are both of a cold nature: water is wet and cold (it surrounds the fields); the earth is very green, but nevertheless also cold.’)

## 2.5 Hostile Environments in *Beowulf*

It has become clear in the preceding section that some of the passages collocating *ceald* and *wæter* assign the adjective *ceald* a nonliteral value centrally concerned with hostility. For instance, it was observed that there was no oceanological justification for the *Exodus*-poet to refer to the water of the Red Sea as *sinceald*. Salmon has written at some length about this phenomenon, proposing that Old English *ceald*, like Old Norse *kaldr*, bore ‘implications of “hostility”[,], “treachery” or “ill-omen”’.<sup>107</sup>

1995: 10–14); *ÆTemp* lines 385–400.

<sup>104</sup> Baker and Lapidge 1995: 12.

<sup>105</sup> Godden and Irvine 2009: I, 315.

<sup>106</sup> This 281-line metre is an extensive elaboration of a 38-line Latin original which mentions the elements and their qualities, if more briefly (*BOETH. Cons.phil.metr.* 3.9, esp. lines 10–12; see further the commentary in Godden and Irvine 2009: II, 510–12).

<sup>107</sup> Salmon 1959: 321 and *passim*.

She speaks of ‘connotations’ and ‘implications’ rather than a distinct lexical sense, a distinction resting on the question whether the word occurs without a literal referent, as Old Norse *kaldr* does in the combinations *kǫld rǫdd* ‘a cold (i.e. hostile) voice’ and *kalt ráð* ‘cold (i.e. cold-hearted) counsel’.<sup>108</sup> A cognate of the former collocation occurs once also in the Old English *Soul and Body I*<sup>109</sup> (‘cealdan orde’, 15) with a contestible but certainly figurative sense,<sup>110</sup> while a related form of the latter occurs repeatedly in Middle English, suggesting it existed at least in Anglo-Scandinavian England.<sup>111</sup> The unquestionably figurative adjective *cealdheort* (‘cold-hearted’)<sup>112</sup> is found in *Andreas* line 138. Here too, the figure may have been intended to express hostility, although sinfulness has likewise been proposed.<sup>113</sup> Moreover, several English place-names have been found in which the initial element *ceald-* (though in many cases indistinguishable from Old Norse *kald-*) seems to be used figuratively, e.g. Catcherside (‘cold cheer hill’).<sup>114</sup> A nonliteral lexical sense is thus warranted for Old English *ceald* with a semantic range from ‘inhospitable’ to ‘hostile, treacherous’.

In *Beowulf*, the hostility implied in the union of winter and water is further confirmed by the assignment of hostile supernatural categories to water landscapes. Of the various monsters on whose enmity towards humans the plot depends, nearly all are associated in one way or another with wet landscapes, and most simply inhabit water landscapes. The triad of water, winter, and monsters becomes particularly obvious in the swimming-contest. Following Unferth’s brief account, which introduces the wintry conditions of the contest (‘geofon yþum weol, | wintrys wylmum’, 515–16),<sup>115</sup>

<sup>108</sup> *Kǫld rǫdd* occurs in *Akv 2* (ed. by Neckel 1962: 240–7); *kalt ráð*, best known for its occurrence in the proverb *kǫld eru kvenna ráð* (‘women’s counsels are cold’), is found in several texts, including *Ls 51* (ed. by Neckel 1962: 96–110); *Vkv 31* (ed. by Neckel 1962: 116–23); *ÓH ch. 131* (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: 11, 226); *Nj ch. 116* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954: 292); *Gísl ch. 19* (Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 61). Cf. the adjective *kaldráðr* (‘cold-counselled’, *Sturlu saga ch. 34* (Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason, and Kristján Eldjárn 1946: 1, 112)) and similar metaphorical compounds listed in Cleasby and Vigfusson 1957.

<sup>109</sup> Ed. by Krapp 1932: 54–9.

<sup>110</sup> Spinner (1924: 105) and Salmon (1959: 318) understood it as ‘hostile’; *DOE* includes it under *ceald 6c* ‘chilling, dolorous’. What precise sense the poet intended is now impossible to ascertain.

<sup>111</sup> e.g. *Prov. Alf. 444* (Arngart 1955: 118); *Glo.Chron.A 2775* (Wright 1887: 198); *Chaucer CT.NP. 3256* (=B<sup>2</sup> 4446; ed. by Benson 1987: 253–61); see further *MED*, s.v. *cōld* sense 6a; Salmon 1959: 318–21; Magennis 1996: 176, esp. n. 54.

<sup>112</sup> It has been observed that this word could alternatively be taken as an adverb *cealdheorte* (Brooks 1961: 68, commentary to line 138 and glossary, s.v. *cald-heort*; *DOE* s.v. *ceald-heort*).

<sup>113</sup> Bugge 1887: 13; Hill 1968: 531–2; cf. *DOE* s.v. *ceald-heort*. No equivalent term is found in the Greek and Latin analogues in Blatt 1930: 36–7.

<sup>114</sup> Smith 1970, s.v. *cald*.

<sup>115</sup> ‘The ocean was surging with waves, winter’s billows.’

the monsters are introduced in Beowulf's own words:

- 539 Hæfdon swurd nacod, þa wit on sund reon,  
heard on handa; wit unc wið hronfixas  
werian þohton.  
[...]
- 544 Ða wit ætsomne on sæ wæron  
fif nihta fyrst, oþþæt unc flod todraf,  
wado weallende, wedera cealdost,  
547 nipende niht, ond norþanwind  
heaðogrim ondhwearf; hreo wæron yþa.  
Wæs merefixa mod onhrered;  
550 þær me wið laðum licsyrce min,  
heard, hondlocen, helpe gefremede,  
beadohrægl broden on breostum læg  
553 golde gegyrwed. Me to grunde teah  
fah feondscaða, fæste hæfde  
grim on grape; hwæpre me gyfeþe wearð  
556 þæt ic aglæcan orde geræhte,  
hildebille; heaþoræs fornam  
mihtig meredeor þurh mine hand.  
559 Swa mec gelome laðgeteonan  
þreatedon þearle. Ic him þenode  
deoran sweorde, swa hit gedefe wæs.  
562 Næs hie ðære fylle gefean hæfdon,  
manfordædlan, þæt hie me þegon,  
symbol ymbsæton sægrunde neah;  
565 ac on mergenne mecum wunde  
be yðlafe uppe lægon,  
sweordum aswefede, þæt syðþan na  
568 ymb brontne ford brimliðende  
lade ne letton. Leoht eastan com,  
beorht beacen godes; brimu swaþredon,  
571 þæt ic sænæssas geseon mihte,  
windige weallas. Wyrð oft nereð  
unfægne eorl, þonne his ellen deah.  
574 Hwæpere me gesælde þæt ic mid sweorde ofsloh  
niceras nigene. No ic on niht gefrægn  
under heofones hwealf heardran feohtan.

(‘We had strong bare swords in our hands when we swam out paddling; we meant to defend ourselves against sea-fish. [...] Then we were together out on sea for a period of five nights, until the tidal current drove us apart, the surging waters, the coldest of weathers, the darkening night, and the battle-grim north wind turned against us; the waves were rough. The hearts of the sea-fish were stirred up; my strong, handmade byrnie gave me aid against the hostile ones there, the woven battle-garment lay on my chest, adorned with gold. A hostile enemy dragged me to the bottom, the grim one had me firmly in his grip. Nevertheless it was given to me that I hit my fierce opponent with the tip of my blade, with my battle-sword; the battle-attack took

off the mighty sea-beast by my hand. In this way the evildoers frequently beset me closely. I served them with my excellent sword, as was fitting. They did not receive their fill, the criminal destroyers, that they should eat me, sit at banquet near the bottom of the sea; instead, by the morning they lay up with the jetsam, wounded by swords, put to sleep with swords, so that they would no longer obstruct the passage of sea-travellers in the deep crossing. Light came from the east, God's bright beacon; the waves calmed down, so that I was able to see headlands, windy walls. Fate often saves the undoomed man if his courage holds. Nevertheless it was given to me that I killed nine sea-monsters with the sword. I have not heard of a harder fight in the nighttime below the arch of heaven.')

The account is quoted at length because it outlines a number of relevant details. To begin with, the setting is described not only in terms of winter ('wedera cealdost' ('coldest of weathers', 546), in addition to the earlier 'wintrys wylmum' ('winter's billows', 516)) but also as nighttime: the poet mentions the 'nipende niht' ('darkening night', 547) and specifies that the battle with the water-monsters takes place 'on niht' ('in the nighttime', 575). Victory becomes apparent 'on mergenne' ('in the morning', 565), when 'leoht eastan com' ('light came from the east', 569); the poet thus draws on the powerful associations of light and dark with their moral as well as seasonal connotations (see above, section 1.4.1). The environment is further rendered inhospitable by a storm and strong waves (545–8). The monsters themselves are first introduced through anticipation, as the swimmers arm themselves against just such an encounter (539–41). It is suggested that the creatures belong near the bottom of the sea, as this is where Beowulf is taken (553–4) and where the banqueting imagery is brought in (562–4). They are described as *hronfixas* and *merfixas* ('sea-fish', 540, 549), *laðgeteonan* ('evildoers', 559), *manfordædlan* ('criminal destroyers', 563), and *niceras* ('sea-monsters', 575), who are accustomed to waylay sea-travellers (565–9); one of them is individually described as a *feondscaða* ('enemy', 554), *aglæca* ('fierce opponent', 556), and *meredeor* ('sea-beast', 558). In short, the episode represents a confrontation with all that is most daunting to mankind, for which nighttime, the sea, and winter weather form the setting.

Hostile creatures are likewise associated with water and night in the poem's central narrative. The element of water is most obvious in the case of Grendel's mother,

1260 se þe wæteregesan wunian scolde,  
cealde streamas, siþðan Cain wearð  
to ecgbanan angan breþer,

1263 fæderenmæge; he þa fag gewat,  
 morþre gemearcod, mandream fleon,  
 westen warode. þanon woc fela  
 1266 geoscaftgasta; wæs þæra Grendel sum,  
 heorowearh hetelic.

(‘She<sup>116</sup> who had to inhabit the terror of water, the cold currents, after Cain became the killer by the sword of his only brother, his father’s son. Then, doomed and marked with murder, he fled human society and occupied the wilderness. From there, many fated spirits arose; Grendel was one of them, the hateful, savage villain.’)

On the evidence of this passage, the *wæteregeasa* ‘terror of water’ may be understood as a subtype of the *westen* ‘wilderness’. As descendants of Cain, after all, both Grendel and his mother are banished to the same wilderness as their patriarch. In *Beowulf*, however, they are associated with three distinct landscape categories: water, marshland, and coastal highland. Moreover, only Grendel’s mother is explicitly characterised as a water creature using such terms as *brimwylf* (‘sea wolf’, 1599),<sup>117</sup> *merewif* (‘water woman’, 1519), and *grundwyrgen* (‘accursed creature of the deep’, 1518).<sup>118</sup> Descriptions of Grendel’s movements, as well as descriptions applying to both creatures, pivot on the terms *fenn* (‘marsh’) and *mor* (‘mountain’),<sup>119</sup> with further interest in *næss* (‘promontory’) and *hlið* (‘slope’). Although it has been observed that ‘[f]actually [... t]he combination of fenland and mountains, of wind-swept headlands and woods overhanging the pool is not possible’,<sup>120</sup> the poem does indeed associate both the adversaries of the first half of the poem with all these landscapes:

1357 Hie dygel lond  
 warigeað, wulfhleoþu, windige næssas,  
 frecne fengelad, ðær fyrgenstream  
 1360 under næssa genipu niþer gewiteð,  
 flod under foldan.

(‘They occupy a hidden land, wolf-slopes, windy headlands, a perilous fen-passage, where a mountain stream goes down below the dark of the headlands, a river goes under the earth.’)

<sup>116</sup> Lit. ‘he’. On the gender transgression of Grendel’s mother, see Lawrence 1928: 181–2; Wrenn 1953: 209; Goldsmith 1970: 104; Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008, commentary to lines 1260 f.

<sup>117</sup> The term is applied to Grendel’s mother a second time by emendation, where the manuscript reads *brimwyl*; the water-element is thus at any rate secure (British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian A. xv, fol. 163r).

<sup>118</sup> *Grundwyrgen* could alternatively be read as ‘accursed creature of the abyss’, i.e. of hell.

<sup>119</sup> Associations with *fenn* are made in lines 104, 764, 820, 851, 1295, and 1359; *mor* occurs in lines 103, 162, 450, 710, 1348, and 1405.

<sup>120</sup> Stanley 1955: 441; cf. Lawrence 1912.



Blickling homily 16,<sup>123</sup> in which Saint Paul has a vision of *hrimige bearwas* ('rimy groves') or *isige bearwas* ('icy groves') overhanging the waters of hell from a cliff twelve miles high. Here, the *nicoras* inhabiting the water are in reality demons, eager to snap up the black souls dangling from the trees whenever a branch gives out.<sup>124</sup> Critics have sought to read the frost in one or other of these texts tropologically or symbolically, reflecting either the moral depravity of the lost souls or the surreal quality of the visionary experience.<sup>125</sup> The former reading certainly agrees well with the visionary tradition, which makes frequent use of punitive images of hot and cold (see above, section 1.4.1). However, the shared material also partakes of a vernacular tradition of the monstrous, which seeks a more visceral response through the psychogeographical association between winter landscapes and the dangerous supernatural.

Like the sea-monsters of the swimming-contest, Grendel and his mother move at night only. Grendel is characterised as a *deorc deapscua* ('dark death-shadow', 160), *sceadugenga* ('shadow-walker', 703), and *nihtbealwa mæst* ('the greatest of nightly torments', 193). Being *æfengrom* ('evening-angry'), he comes out 'syððan heofones gim | glad ofer grundas' ('when heaven's gem has passed over the lands', 2072–3), operates 'deorcum nihtum' ('in dark nights', 275; cf. 'sinnihte' ('in the perpetual night', 161)) and concludes his attack before dawn (126). His mother follows the same pattern, attacking at night (1251–1306). This association draws the creatures further into traditional hostile environments and suggests similar associations for their underwater habitat.

The *mere* in *Beowulf* is surrounded by a further category of hostile beings, all associated with water. These are described when Beowulf and his followers arrive at the *mere*:

1425 Gesawon ða æfter wætere  wyrmcynnes fela,  
       sellice sædracan  sund cunnian,  
       swylce on næshleoðum  nicras licgean,  
 1428 ða on undernmæl  oft bewitigað  
       sorhfulne sið  on segrlade,  
       wyrmas ond wildeor.  Hie on weg hruron,  
 1431 bitere ond gebolgne;  bearhtm ongeaton,  
       guðhorn galan.  Sumne Geata leod

<sup>123</sup> Ed. by Morris 1874–80: 197–211 (there numbered XVII). A detailed comparison between these texts as well as the *Visio Pauli* may be found in Wright 1993: 116–36.

<sup>124</sup> *LS* 25 (Morris 1874–80: 209–11).

<sup>125</sup> Robertson 1951: 33; Butts 1987: 115–16; Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008: 201, commentary to line 1363.

of flanbogan feores getwæfde,  
 1434 yðgewinnes, þæt him on aldre stod  
 herestræl hearda; he on holme wæs  
 sundes þe sænra ðe hyne swylt fornam.  
 1437 Hræþe wearð on yðum mid eoferspreotum  
 heorohocyhtum hearde genearwod,  
 niða genæged, ond on næs togen,  
 1440 wundorlic wægþora; weras sceawedon  
 gryreligne gist.

(‘Then they saw many of the race of serpents in the water, strange sea-dragons swimming, as well as water-monsters lying on the outlying headlands, such as often watch a sorrowful journey on a sailing route in the morning, serpents and wild beasts. They sank away, bitter and angry; they heard a noise, the calling of a battle horn. The *Geatas* deprived one of its life and its swimming with a bow, so that a hard army-arrow stuck in his vitals; he was the worse at swimming in the water when death took him off. Soon the wondrous wave-bearer was hard pressed among the waves with sword-barbed boar-spears, attacked with hostilities, and drawn onto the headland; the men looked at the hideous stranger.’)

These *sædracan* (‘sea-dragons’) and *nicoras* (‘water-monsters’) are further confirmation that water landscapes are the primary domain of monsters in *Beowulf*. If the latter group are seen to attack sailors by day rather than night, this may be explained by a common-sense association of routine seafaring with daytime, even though in reality longer voyages on the open seas could involve around-the-clock sailing, whether to increase efficiency or simply as necessitated by the width of a body of water.<sup>126</sup>

The final monster in *Beowulf*, the dragon, is the only one with no more than a tenuous connection to water landscapes. It lives in an underground space (*eorðsele*, 2232, 2215; *eorðscræf*, 3046) prepared for human burial below a rocky elevation (*stanbeorg steap*, 2213) most likely representing a neolithic barrow,<sup>127</sup> located on a plain (*wong*, 2242). The barrow is situated in the vicinity of a headland jutting out into the sea (‘wæteryðum neah, | niwe be næsse’, 2242–3).<sup>128</sup> Although a stream flows out from the mountain occupied by the monster, its flow is not of the kind that can be grouped with the cold of winter:

2546

Wæs þære burnan wælm

<sup>126</sup> McCormick 2001: 491–500.

<sup>127</sup> On the presentation of the dragon’s abode see Owen-Crocker 2000: 61–4, and cf. *Beo* 2717, 2774 *enta geweorc*.

<sup>128</sup> ‘Nearby the water-waves, new by the headland.’

heaðofyrum hat, ne meahte horde neah  
 unbyrnende ænige hwile  
 2549 deop gedygan for dracon lege.

(‘The surge of that stream was hot with battle fires; he [Beowulf] could not hold out deep inside near the hoard for any length of time without burning on account of the dragon’s flame.’)

Evidently, the dragon inhabits an environment differing in a few critical respects from those of the other monsters. Nevertheless, there remains a considerable body of environmental overlap between the various monsters of *Beowulf*. Like Grendel and his mother, the dragon stirs only at night, returning from its attacks before daybreak,<sup>129</sup> and like all monsters in this poem, its habitat is a landscape peripheral to the human domain, in this case a rocky elevation near the sea. All these are hostile categories, and the cold associations of the water combine well with the creatures’ other environmental properties.

All the monster habitats of *Beowulf* thus converge in their participation in nighttime and the peripheral, environments distancing both the landscapes and their inhabitants from the human. Although cyclical seasonality is largely absent from *Beowulf*,<sup>130</sup> the cold of water is repeatedly mentioned in connection with dangerous undertakings and feuds taking place in this landscape category, suggesting that the hibernal quality of the water accords with the hostility of the species inhabiting it. While readings of these monsters as seasonal personifications of the natural world are strictly unwarranted,<sup>131</sup> it is fair to assume that there were overlaps between the effects of the creatures and their environments on the society that imagined them. Thus if the monsters of *Beowulf* conveyed horror to the poem’s audience, winter and water landscapes must likewise have had potential for horror. This evidence through association of winter’s antisocietal burden confirms the season’s more directly apparent role in setting the moods of such poems as *The Ruin*, *The Wanderer*, and *The Sea-*

<sup>129</sup> *Beo* 2211, 2270–4, 2302–20.

<sup>130</sup> The main exceptions, the Finnsburh-episode and the melting sword, are discussed below, section 3.3.

<sup>131</sup> The best-known instance of such an approach is Müllenhoff’s 1849 study, which reads Grendel as a literary representation of spring flooding, his mother as a personification of the sea, and the dragon attacks as autumn storms, despite the near-total absence of seasonal references in the poem’s main narrative (on which see below, sections 3.2, 3.3). Müllenhoff’s article demonstrates the dangers of an unbridled tendency, still encountered in a milder form in folkloristics today, to reduce narratives to allegories of the natural world and religious rites based therein (see, e.g., McKinnell 2005, which roots the *Vanir* narratives in earth worship (pp. 50–61)).

*farer* discussed in preceding sections, as well as its function as an affliction in *Andreas* lines 1255–65 (see below, section 3.4).

## 2.6 Hostile Environments in Old Norse Literature

The landscapes most intimately connected with winter in Old Norse literature are best arrived at via a discussion of superhuman categories not unlike those of *Beowulf*. As was observed above (p. 56), saga authors were little given to the description of landscape except where it influenced the central action, for instance as the setting of a battle.<sup>132</sup> On the other hand, myth and legend forged a strong bond between winter and social groups peripheral to society, specifically the giant races and the *Finnar* or Sami. References to these categories may be found in several genres and are firmly associated with definite landscape categories or geographical locales. The *jotnar* and related categories were thought to inhabit the mountains, a landscape of perpetual or near-perpetual winter, while their mythological associations were likewise strongly dependent on winter. Meanwhile, the *Finnar* were mapped to the elevated plains of northern and northeastern Scandinavia; their primary literary associations are with sorcery and winter. In this way, Old Norse literature reveals a grouping of hostile categories much like that of the Old English poetic tradition, but allocating dangerous creatures to the mountains and the hibernal northeast rather than the sea and the marsh.

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<sup>132</sup> See Schach 1955 and the cursory observations in Hallberg 1962: 71; Pearsall and Salter 1973: 45; O'Donoghue 2004: 59–60. For winter battles see below, section 3.5.

### 2.6.1 The Giant Races

*Jǫtnar* and related categories<sup>133</sup> are widely represented in early Scandinavian narrative. Although it is difficult to establish their representation in carved illustrations of the preliterate period,<sup>134</sup> they are attested in literature from the earliest datable texts to stories from modern times.<sup>135</sup> While the divisions between the various giant categories will not here be attempted, traits applied with considerable consistency include large body height and consequent intimidation.<sup>136</sup> Perhaps the most consistent characteristic of these creatures, however, is their hostility to the society, human or superhuman, that receives central attention in the text.<sup>137</sup> In eddic mythology, this antagonism is expressed through constant tensions between *jǫtnar* and the *Æsir* and *Vanir* protagonists.<sup>138</sup> *Jǫtnar* are likewise involved in Ragnarǫk, the cataclysmic battle heralding the end of the world, as is suggested in *Vǫluspá* 47 ‘iǫtunn losnar’ (‘the *jǫtunn* is set loose’) and 48 ‘gnýr allr iǫtunheimr’ (‘the entire land of the *jǫtnar* resounds’). A more active antagonistic role is implicit in the role of Hrymr, who bears his shield from the east (*Vsp* 50): *Hrymr* is a typical *jǫtunn*-name,<sup>139</sup> and he is identified as one by Snorri, who adds that all the *hrímpursar* (‘rime giants’) follow in his tracks, and that gods and men have reason to dread the coming of Hrymr’s ship Naglfar.<sup>140</sup>

In the sagas likewise, *jǫtnar*, *risar*, and *pursar* are typically considered antagonistic to the people

<sup>133</sup> In Scandinavian studies, the word *giant* hides a plurality of overlapping terms and concepts (see Schulz 2004, esp. the unnumbered tables on pp. 39, 51–2). As Schulz has demonstrated, whether and how a given text differentiates between such terms depends largely on the author’s particular fancy, which suggests the absence of a system in any precise sense of the word (Schulz 2004: 36; the polysemy of *troll* has since been further substantiated in Arnold 2005; Ármann Jakobsson 2008ab; Tolley 2009: 1, 239–41; but see Langeslag 2009). Since there is considerable overlap between these terms where seasonal and landscape associations are concerned, it will not here be attempted to distinguish between them. Instead, the term *giant races* will be employed as an inclusive label. Only where seasonal and landscape associations are not apparent will the terminology be discussed in greater detail.

<sup>134</sup> Fuglesang 2006; cf. Meulengracht Sørensen 1986.

<sup>135</sup> Schulz 2004.

<sup>136</sup> Schulz 2004: 62–4, 141–6.

<sup>137</sup> Schulz 2004: 58–9, 156–8, 173–9.

<sup>138</sup> See esp. *Hrbl* (ed. by Neckel 1962: 78–87), *Hym* (ed. by Neckel 1962: 88–95), *Prk*.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. the names Hymir, characterised as a *jǫtunn* in *Hym* 13, 14, 15, 25, 28, 30; Gymir, named *passim* in *Skm* and identified as a *jǫtunn* in stanza 25 and the introductory prose (see also stanza 40); Ymir, the *jǫtunn* from which the world was formed (*Vm* 20–1); Hrungnir, a *jǫtunn* in *Hrbl* 14–15 and a *bergrisi* in *Grt* 9 (ed. by Neckel 1962: 297–301); and Hrímnir, a *jǫtunn* according to *SnE* (Faulkes 1988–99: II, 110), a text that repeats most of the aforementioned identifications as well.

<sup>140</sup> *Gylfaginning* 51 (Faulkes 1988–99: I, 50). Cf. the discussion of the *Vsp* account in Schulz 2004: 110–12.

at the heart of the narrative. Detailed accounts of such creatures are mostly concentrated in the legendary sagas composed in Iceland in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, although they make occasional appearances in other prose texts, such as the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century sagas of Icelanders. In a passage often compared to the first part of *Beowulf*,<sup>141</sup> *Grettis saga* tells how a farm is plagued by a creature variously denoted *troll*, *trollkona*, and *flagðkona* (ch. 65),<sup>142</sup> following her to her hideout, Grettir is faced by a *jötunn*, described in the poetry as a *ljótr mellu vinr* ('ugly friend of a giantess') and *Gangr* (a *jötunn*-name,<sup>143</sup> ch. 66 and stanza 61).<sup>144</sup> A *jötunn* in *Fljótsdœla saga* is Geitir, who kidnaps a young girl and harms both people and livestock (ch. 5).<sup>145</sup> The hero of *Kormáks saga* is attacked by a *blótrisi* (probably 'a *risi* who makes heathen sacrifices')<sup>146</sup> able to enhance his strength by superhuman means (he is a *trollauknari* (ch. 27)).<sup>147</sup> *Jötnar* and *troll* are equated, and consistently portrayed as enemies, in a range of *fornaldarsögur* (see below, p. 100). Although from time to time *risar* show up as benevolent individuals, this motif is primarily limited to texts of the romance tradition, which depart from the remainder of the corpus in other specifics as well (see below, section 4.3.3). Even in these texts, however, the categories are invoked because of their exotic and imposing nature. In *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns*, for instance, the title character's successful interaction with *risar* serves to heighten his honour in much the same way as his resolve to explore Risaland without companions (ch. 4).<sup>148</sup>

Associations of *jötnar*, *þursar*, and *risar* with winter are most consistent in the eddic sources, although the poetry never explains the connection. The term *hrímþurs* ('rime giant') is the clearest

<sup>141</sup> Such comparisons are conveniently listed in Liberman 1986 and Fjalldal 1998. Stitt 1992 represents a comprehensive index of texts employing specific narrative patterns occurring also in *Beowulf* and *Grettis saga*. See further below, section 3.2.

<sup>142</sup> Guðni Jónsson 1936: 212–14.

<sup>143</sup> *Skáldskaparmál* stanza 417 (Faulkes 1988–99: II, 110).

<sup>144</sup> Guðni Jónsson 1936: 214–17. This episode will be explored at greater length in section 3.1 below.

<sup>145</sup> Jón Jóhannesson 1950: 222–30.

<sup>146</sup> Cf. Cleasby and Vigfusson 1957, s.v. ('an enchanted champion(?)') and contrast Fritzner 1883–96, s.v. ('Rise som er Gjenstand for Afgudsdyrkelse' ('a giant who is an object of idolatry')); *ONP*, s.v. ('?giant/troll worshipped as a god').

<sup>147</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1939: 299.

<sup>148</sup> Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón 1943–44: III, 402. McKinnell claims that 'Þorsteinn bæjarmagn is clearly derived from Þórr' (2005: 195; see further McKinnell and Ruggerini 1994: 57–86). The suggestion is not implausible, but I do not share McKinnell's confidence: though both venture into the land of giants, Þorsteinn's careful resourcefulness is a far cry from the blunt violence and overt sexuality Þórr demonstrates in *Þrk* and *Hrbl*.

indication of its existence, occurring in four of the mythological poems of the Poetic Edda. In its account of the first things, *Vafþrúðnismál* identifies Aurgelmir, patriarch of the *jötnar*, as a *hrímpurs* as well as a *jötunn*.<sup>149</sup>

Óðinn qvað:

32 Segðu þat íþ siauanda, allz þic svinnan qveða  
oc þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,  
hvé sá born gat, inn baldni iqtunn,  
er hann hafðit gýgiar gaman.

Vafþrúðnir qvað:

33 Undir hendi vaxa qváðo hrímpursi  
mey oc mǫg saman;  
fótr við fœti gat ins fróða iqtuns  
sexhǫfðaðan son.

(Óðinn said, “Tell me this seventhly, since you are said to be wise and since you know, Vafþrúðnir, how did the mighty *jötunn* beget children, since he had no joy of a giantess?”)

Vafþrúðnir said, “They said that a girl and a boy grew together below the *hrímpurs*’s arms; one foot of the wise *jötunn* begot a six-headed son on the other.”)

This suggests in the first instance that all the race of the *jötnar* may likewise be understood to be *hrímpursar*. However, the term is virtually absent from non-eddic texts,<sup>150</sup> leading Cleasby and Vigfusson to set off the *hrímpursar* as the primeval counterpart to the *jötnar*.<sup>151</sup> Such a conclusion cannot be reached on the basis of the eddic evidence itself, which extends the description at least to *jötnar* of the narrative present. The interchangeability of the terms *hrímpurs* and *jötunn* is twice suggested in *Skírnismál* (30, 34) and again in *Hávamál* (108–9). *Jötnar* are further described with the adjective *hrímkaldr* ‘rime-cold’ in two eddic poems,<sup>152</sup> while the *jötunn* Hymnir is said to have a frozen beard (*Hymiskviða* 10). The cosmological significance of the *hrímpursar* is suggested in *Grímnismál*.<sup>153</sup> This

<sup>149</sup> Snorri understood Aurgelmir to be the name given to Ymir by the *hrímpursar* (Faulkes 1988–98: I, 10). Cf. *Vm* 28, which precedes the passage here cited: ‘segðu [...] hverr ása elztr eða Ymis niðia | yrði í árdaga (‘tell me [...] who among the *Æsir*, or among Ymir’s descendants, became the eldest in days of old’). If *Ymis niðjar* is to be read as a circumlocution for *jötnar* or *hrímpursar*, the inference is plausible that Ymir is indeed the eldest and therefore identical with Aurgelmir.

<sup>150</sup> The exception is a curse in ch. 5 of *Bósa saga* invoking several supernatural categories (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: II, 474).

<sup>151</sup> Cleasby and Vigfusson 1957, s.v. *hrím-pursar*.

<sup>152</sup> *Vm* 21; *Fm* 38 (ed. by Neckel 1962: 180–8). Loki’s son Nari is called *hrímkaldr* in *Ls* 49, 50, suggesting that he too is a *jötunn* (cf. *Gylfaginning* 34 (Faulkes 1988–99: I, 27)).

<sup>153</sup> Ed. by Neckel 1962: 57–68.

text, composed before 1220,<sup>154</sup> distinguishes three roots below the cosmic tree Yggdrasill, each of which covers a world:

31 Hel býr undir einni, annarri hrímþursar,  
þriðio mennzcir menn.

(‘Hel lives below one, the *hrímþursar* below the second, humans below the third.’)

While it seems clear that the roots of Yggdrasill were not intended to correspond to a full survey of mythological races, the realm of the *hrímþursar* is here on equal footing with the world of humans and that of the dead, indicating a high centrality of this race within the mythological framework, much like the centrality of *jǫtnar* across large parts of the Old Norse corpus. Although the position in Cleasby and Vigfusson that the term refers specifically to the *jǫtnar* of an earlier era cannot be proved or disproved in absolute terms, it is clear that all *jǫtnar* in the Poetic Edda are associated with winter through their description as *hrímkaldir* and their identification with *hrímþursar*.

A second element linking the giant races of the Poetic Edda with winter receives even less clarification than their description as *hrímþursar*. In *Hymiskviða*, the gods, insisting that Ægir should organise a party for them, are told to fetch him a large cauldron. Þórr’s companion<sup>155</sup> offers a solution to this problem in the following words:

5 Býr fyr austan Élivága  
hundvíss Hymir, at himins enda;  
á minn faðir, móðugr, ketil,  
rúmbrugðinn hver, rastar diúpan.

(‘East of Élivágar lives the very wise Hymir, at the end of heaven; my bold father has a kettle, an enormous cauldron, a mile deep.’)

Hymir is expressly identified as a *jǫtunn*.<sup>156</sup> His association with winter in this passage resides in his residence ‘fyr austan Élivága’. The compound noun *élivágar*, which likewise occurs in stanza 31

<sup>154</sup> The work is extensively (and explicitly) cited in the Prose Edda, e.g. in *Gylfaginning* chs 21, 36, 40 (Faulkes 1988–99: 1, 22, 30, 33).

<sup>155</sup> Described as ‘týr’ in the preceding stanza, the speaker has traditionally been identified as the mythological character Týr, although it has been more plausibly proposed in view of context and intertextual correspondences that this is the common noun meaning ‘god’, here referring to Loki (Marteinn Sigurðsson 2005; Orchard 2011: 293)

<sup>156</sup> *Hym* 13, 14, 15, 25, 28, 30.

of *Vafþrúðnismál*, Snorri's derivative episode, and an *Íslendingaþáttur*,<sup>157</sup> translates as 'snowstorm-bays' or 'hailstorm-bays'.<sup>158</sup> The name's transparency was recognised also by Finnur Jónsson, who proposed reading it as a reference to the Arctic Ocean.<sup>159</sup> There is, in any case, no doubt as to the term invoking a hibernal environment. Such associations do not recur in the poetic context in which it is found, however. *Vafþrúðnismál* describes the body of water as poisonous rather than cold. Asked about Aurgelmir's origins, Vafþrúðnir responds,

31 Ór Élivágom stucco eitrdropar,  
svá óx, unz varð ór iqtunn;  
(þar órar ættir kómo allar saman,  
því er þat æ alt til atalt).

(‘Drops of poison were sent flying from Élivágar; so it grew, until a *jqtunn* came out of it. All our lineages derive from this; that is why they are all ever hostile.’)

As in the case of the creatures' identification as *hrímþursar*, then, an association with winter weather is suggested by the word's transparent meaning but left unexplained in the texts. Although one can guess at underlying motifs and narratives, the poets who gave the eddic poetry its surviving form either did not know these or saw no reason to expound on them.

The silences in the eddic cosmology seem to have been equally problematic to Snorri Sturluson when he set out to retell the myths in his thirteenth-century textbook for poets. Time and again the Prose Edda gives the impression of piecing together a mythological universe from sources whose references were no clearer to Snorri than they are to modern scholars.<sup>160</sup> Snorri's creative influence is no less transformative where the origins of the giant races are concerned. Against the cryptic creation account in *Vafþrúðnismál* presented above, Snorri placed the following explanation, following his invented account of the fiery land of Múspellsheimr:

Gangleri mælir: ‘Hversu skipaðisk áðr en ættirnar yrði eða aukaðisk mannfólkit?’  
Þá mælti Hár: ‘Ár þær er kallaðar eru Élivágar, þá er þær váru svá langt komnar frá upp-  
sprettunni at eitrvikja sú er þar fylgði harðnaði svá sem sindr þat er renn ór eldinum, þá varð

<sup>157</sup> *Bergþúa þáttur* (Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991: 447).

<sup>158</sup> Von See 1993–: II, 288.

<sup>159</sup> *LP*, s.v. *Élivágar*; cf. Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1860.

<sup>160</sup> Cf. Faulkes 1988–99: I, xxvi–xxiii.

þat íss, ok þá er sá íss gaf staðar ok rann eigi, þá heldi yfir þannig úr þat er af stóð eitrinu ok fraus at hrími, ok jók hrímit hvert yfir annat allt í Ginnungagap.'

Þá mælti Jafnhár: 'Ginnungagap, þat er vissi til norðrs ættar, fýltisk með þunga ok höfugleik íss ok hríms ok inn í frá úr ok gustr. En hinn syðri hlutr Ginnungagaps léttisk móti gneistum ok síum þeim er flugu ór Muspellsheimi.'

Þá mælti Þriði: 'Svá sem kalt stóð af Niflheimi ok allir hlutir grimmir, svá var þat er vissi námunda Muspelli heitt ok ljóst, en Ginnungagap var svá hlætt sem lopt vindlaust. Ok þá er mœttisk hrímin ok blær hitans svá at bráðnaði ok draup, ok af þeim kvikudropum kviknaði með krapti þess er til sendi hitann, ok varð manns líkandi, ok var sá nefndr Ymir. En hrímþursar kalla hann Aurgelmi, ok eru þaðan komnar ættir hrímþursa, svá sem segir í *Völuspá* hinni skömmu.' (*Gylfaginning* 5)<sup>161</sup>

(‘Gangleri said, “How was mankind created and how did they increase their numbers before the races came about?”

Then Hár said, “When the rivers that are called the *Élivágar* had come so far from their source that the poisonous foam that accompanied them grew hard like slag that has flown from a fire, they turned to ice. When the ice settled in one place and did not flow, the poison that came from it kept going across it in the same direction and froze in the shape of rime, and the rime accumulated all across Ginnungagap, one layer over another.”

Then Jafnhár said, “Ginnungagap, the part that faces north, was filled with the weight and heaviness of ice and rime, and a drizzling rain and wind came into it. But the southern part of Ginnungagap was brightened by the sparks and molten particles that came flying from Muspellsheimr.”

Then said Þriði, “Just as cold and everything fierce proceeded from Niflheimr, so the side that was near Muspell was hot and bright, and Ginnungagap was as mild as a windless sky. And then the rime and the warm breeze met so that it melted and dripped; and something took on life from those drops of foam through the power that the heat gave it, and it took the likeness of a man, and he was called Ymir. But the *hrímþursar* call him Aurgelmir, and all the lines of the *hrímþursar* have come from it, as it says in the shorter *Völuspá* [i.e. *Hyndluljóð*].” ’)

The transformation of the myth, for which Snorri cites only *Vafþrúðnismál* 31 (quoted above) as a source, is considerable. Firstly, Snorri identifies *Élivágar* as a group of rivers rather than an open body of water, a reinterpretation made possible by the plural form of the name. More significantly, he sets up a geographical system of climate zones reminiscent of that found in the learned culture of medieval Europe.<sup>162</sup> In the south, he locates a land of fire called Muspellsheimr, somewhat like the equatorial belt that was considered impassable for its great heat. This land has no topographical precedent and seems to derive only from the eddic character Múspellr conflated with Surtr and his

<sup>161</sup> Faulkes 1988–99: 1, 9–10.

<sup>162</sup> For a discussion of this tradition from a Scandinavian perspective, see Simek 1990: 131–43.

flaming sword.<sup>163</sup> In the north, Snorri situates a land of frost named Niflheimr,<sup>164</sup> similar to the polar belt of learned tradition. In between, the two extremes mingle, resulting in a temperate climate that may be compared to the conventional northern temperate zone that included Europe.<sup>165</sup> Significantly, however, while Snorri retains the poisonous drops of *Vafþrúðnismál* 31, he includes them as a detail in an origin myth that bears a definite focus on winter landscape. Although both heat and cold participate in the formation of the *hrímpursar*, heat is presented as a facilitator and the origin of life, while the actual substance from which the first man is formed is poisonous rime: ‘af þeim kvikudropum kviknaði með krapti þess er til sendi hitann’ (p. 11).<sup>166</sup>

Although the possibility cannot strictly be excluded that Snorri drew on nonextant sources, written or oral, in addition to the known poetry, comparison between *Gylfaginning* and the surviving poetry suggests that very little such external borrowing took place in the creation of this work.<sup>167</sup> His handling of the *hrímpurs*-material strengthens this hypothesis. Firstly, the origin of the *hrímpursar* from actual *hrím* (‘rime’) forms a convenient explanation of their name, suggesting that either Snorri or his source considered their designation as such aetiological. Such a conclusion seems natural if no other sources were consulted. Secondly, Snorri seems to have thought that the water from the Élivágar had to freeze once it was sufficiently far removed from the source that set it in motion. This suggests, again, that either he or his source was led by the transparent name to give the rivers a hibernal setting. Thus although the prose version of this origin myth has a far greater reliance on winter imagery than the succinct account in *Vafþrúðnismál*, all these winter elements are to some extent implicit in the poetry. Accordingly, winter was considered a crucial aspect of the giant races of eddic tradition both when the eddic poetry was written and in the early thirteenth-century context in which Snorri wrote his Prose Edda; and their mythological origin seems to have played a role in this connection.

Alongside their eddic association with winter, the giant races of Scandinavian tradition are in-

<sup>163</sup> See *Vsp* 51, 52; cf. *Ls* 42.

<sup>164</sup> With this name cf. *Niflhel* in *Vm* 43 and *Bdr* 2 (ed. by Neckel 1962: 277–9).

<sup>165</sup> *ISID.Nat.rer* 10 (Fontaine 1960: 209–13); *BEDA. Temp.rat.* ch. 34 (Jones 1977: 386–91).

<sup>166</sup> ‘Something took on life from those drops of foam through the power that the heat gave it.’

<sup>167</sup> Cf. Nordal 1973: 90–8.

extricably bound to the mountains, a landscape category itself connotative of winter by virtue of its high altitude. Thus Ægir is called *bergbúi* ('mountain-dweller') in the second stanza of *Hymiskviða*,<sup>168</sup> a poem that similarly describes Egill as a *hraunbúi* ('rock-dweller', 38; cf. 7) and Hymir as a *hraunhvalr* ('rock-whale', 36). The latter of these descriptions in particular suggests that the giant races had a strong connection with rocky or mountainous landscapes by the time this text was composed, since landscape kennings rely on their audience to recognise a species by its habitat. In the same way Þórr, whose enmity of *jǫtnar* is obvious from such poems as *Hárbarðsljóð*, is called *brjótr berg-Dana* ('destroyer of mountain-Danes, i.e. of giants') in the same poem (*Hym* 17). *Grottasǫngr* (composed before 1220)<sup>169</sup> is the only text in the Poetic Edda to use the term *bergrisi* ('mountain-risi'), but it does so with reference to some of the same individuals who are called *jǫtnar* elsewhere,<sup>170</sup> thereby further strengthening the connection of the giant races with mountainous landscapes.

In Old Norse poetry outside the eddic corpus, the mountain habitat of the giant categories is amply confirmed through landscape kennings. Terms like *bergstjóri* ('mountain-ruler'), *bjargálfr* ('mountain-elf'), and *fall-Gautr* ('mountain-Gautr', i.e. 'mountain-Óðinn') refer to the giant races in a wide selection of poems,<sup>171</sup> suggesting that the connection was understood to be part of the conceptual world of poetry. However, the association is clearly present in a range of prose texts as well. In *Gylfaginning*, the *jǫtunn*<sup>172</sup> Skrímir parts from Þórr with the words, 'ek á nú norðr leið til fjalla þessa er nú munuð þér sjá mega' (p. 39).<sup>173</sup> The *jǫtunn* Geitir in *Fljótsdæla saga* has his abode at Geitishamar ('Geitir's crag') on a mountain (*fall*, ch. 5).<sup>174</sup> *Jökuls þátrr Búasonar* speaks less specifically of *jǫtnar* inhabiting unsettled areas (*óbyggðir*), but their king lives in a cave surrounded by *hamrar stórir* ('large crags') and *brött björg* ('steep rocks', ch. 3),<sup>175</sup> again evoking mountainous landscape. Caves are also associated with *jǫtnar* and *troll* in the *fornaldarsögur*, which commonly understand

<sup>168</sup> This description has puzzled scholars who see in Ægir a Poseidon-like sea god on account of his transparent name ('sea'; see, e.g., *LP*, s.v. *ægir*).

<sup>169</sup> Von See et al. 1993–: III, 857.

<sup>170</sup> *Grt* 9, 10, 24; *Hrbl* 14–15, 19.

<sup>171</sup> For an index, see Meissner 1921: 256–8.

<sup>172</sup> So identified in *Skáldskaparmál*, stanzas 417–20 (Faulkes 1988–99: II, 110–11).

<sup>173</sup> 'My path now lies north to these mountains which you will now be able to see.'

<sup>174</sup> Jón Jóhannesson 1950: 225–6.

<sup>175</sup> Jóhannes Halldórsson 1959: 54.

the two categories as a single concept.<sup>176</sup> It should here be understood that caves alone do not make a winter landscape: the other mountain-dwelling category, the dwarfs, similarly live within and below the mountains, but never on them.<sup>177</sup> Since they are not exposed to the elements, *dvergar* are not associated with any season or weather type. The caves of the giant races, however, are typically situated in the mountains, and eddic references to the *høll*<sup>178</sup> and *salir*<sup>179</sup> ('halls') of the *bergbúar* should be understood to refer precisely to such dwellings.<sup>180</sup> These characteristic antagonists of Old Norse literature thus connote a hostile domain associated with winter both because they inhabit the frozen summits and because they seem to originate from an environment of rime and ice.

### 2.6.2 The *Finnar*

If social categories thus far have been delineated exclusively on the evidence of narrative literature, the *Finnar* ('Sami', occasionally hard to distinguish from *Finnar* 'Finns')<sup>181</sup> make the occasional appearance in legal texts. In fact, the only reason for law codes to bring them up is their association with the winter activity of skiing. In the Icelandic law code known as *Grágás*, the context is an oath pronounced by a court official to confirm a truce between two parties. The text is particularly concerned with the prevention of future hostilities between the parties involved, and it warns that any further disagreements must be settled with compensation not armed conflict. It then adds the following:

En sa yckar er gengr a gørvar sáttir eða vegr aveíttar trygðir, þa scal hann sva viðá vargr rækr oc rekin sem menn viðazt varga reka, cristnir menn kirkior søkia, heiðnir menn hof blóta, elldr upp breNir, iorð grør, mögr moðor callar, oc moþir mög föðir, alldir ellda kynda, scip scriðr, scildir blícia, sol scín, snæ legr, fiðr scriðr, fura vex, valr flygr várlangan dag (stendr honom byr bein undir báða vængi), himin huerfr, heimr er bygðr, vindr þytr, vötn til sævar falla, karlar korne

<sup>176</sup> An association of caves with the conflated concepts of *jöttnar* and *troll* is made in *Gríms saga loðinkinna* ch. 1 (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: I, 272–3); *Ketils saga hængs* ch. 2 (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: I, 250–1); *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* chs 9, 16 (Lagerholm 1927: 44, 74–5); and *Sgrla saga sterka* chs 3–5 (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: III, 196–202); the latter speaks also of *risar* and *flagðkonar* in the same context, while the passage in *Gríms saga loðinkinna* further uses the term *bergbúar*.

<sup>177</sup> See Halvorsen 1958.

<sup>178</sup> e.g. *Vm* 6; *Hym* 7.

<sup>179</sup> e.g. *Vm* 7; *Hym* 12.

<sup>180</sup> The mountainous associations of giants in the eddic poetry have been made sufficiently clear above.

<sup>181</sup> For the historical distinction, see Tolley 2009: I, 39–43.

sá; hann scal firaz kirkior oc cristna menn, Guðs hus oc guma, heim huern nema hæl vite. (ch. 115)<sup>182</sup>

(‘But he among you who breaks the settlement or fights in breach of the truce, he will be outlawed and driven away as widely as men will drive outlaws, as Christians attend church, as heathens bring sacrifices, as fire burns, as the earth grows, as a boy calls for his mother and a mother raises her son, as men light fires, as the ship glides, as shields gleam, as the sun shines, as the snow falls, as the Sami skis, as the pine grows, as the hawk flies the spring-long day (a direct wind stands below both wings), as the heavens turn, as the world is inhabited, as the wind whistles, as the waters fall into the sea, as men sow grain; he will be deprived of church and Christians, of the house of God and of men, of every home with the exception of hell.’)

The formula was intended to express the universally binding nature of the agreement, much like the eternity oaths known from Old Frisian law codes.<sup>183</sup> For this purpose, it employs a wide range of truisms representing core facts of life. Many of these describe the primary associations of everyday concepts: although Christians may do more than attend church, what sets them apart from non-Christians is that they do; and the characterisation of such concepts as mothers, ships, hawks, and the sun follows the same logic. *Finnar* are identified as part of the same conceptual world as the other elements here listed, and skiing (or ‘gliding’, like the ship) is their identifying characteristic. The fact that this association is cited as a truism in legal formulas suggests that society was generally agreed on this connection, as the sagas suggest that procedural error was as eagerly exploited in medieval Iceland as it is in many present-day legal systems.<sup>184</sup> Moreover, the association is not limited to a single occurrence, as the same oath occurs in a very similar redaction in the Staðarhóll manuscript of *Grágás* (chs 387–8).<sup>185</sup> A similar formula survives in the Norwegian *Gulapingslög* in fragmentary form, but the surviving lines do not contain the reference to *Finnar*, and the extant items in the list are different from those found in Iceland.<sup>186</sup> The Icelandic form of the oath, however, also appears in narrative literature: *Grettis saga* and *Heiðarvíga saga* preserve versions of the oath that are virtually identical to its form in *Grágás*.<sup>187</sup> The uniformity of this oath surviving in such various

<sup>182</sup> Finsen 1852: 1, 206.

<sup>183</sup> See Vries 1984.

<sup>184</sup> e.g. *Njáls saga* chs 141–4 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954: 374–401).

<sup>185</sup> Finsen 1879: 406–7.

<sup>186</sup> *Gul* ch. 320 (Keyser and Munch 1846–95: 1, 110).

<sup>187</sup> *Gr* ch. 72 (Guðni Jónsson 1936: 231–3); *Heið* ch. 33 (Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938: 312–13). All these occurrences are noted in Mundal 2000: 347–8.

contexts indicates that its form was carefully preserved, while its alliterative qualities suggest that this preservation was not limited to the written medium.

Suggestions that skiing and snowshoeing are the Sami's preferred modes of transportation are similarly found in non-formulaic narratives. In *Fundinn Noregr*, for instance, discussed in section 1.4.2 above, Nórr, prince of 'Finland ok Kvenland', waits for good snow before setting out on skis to rescue his sister.<sup>188</sup> The related *Hversu Noregr byggðisk* tells how Nórr's father Þorri, king of Gottland, Könland, and Finland, brings sacrifices in hopes of good skiing weather.<sup>189</sup> The protagonists of these texts are never identified as ethnic *Finnar*, but their geographical associations, not to mention their governance of these regions, would have sufficed for an Icelandic audience to make such an identification.<sup>190</sup> Expert skill at skiing is noted alongside the other accomplishments of two individual *Finnar* in a narrative in *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* (ch. 32)<sup>191</sup> that is picked up again in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* (ch. 3),<sup>192</sup> and the *Finnr* protagonists of the prose introduction to *Völundarkviða* use the same mode of transportation. The concept of Sami on skis evidently travelled further south as well, as forms like *Skritfinni* and *Scridefinnas* are attested in a range of non-Icelandic sources from Procopius to King Alfred and Saxo Grammaticus.<sup>193</sup> Needless to say, not all these authors would have understood the etymology of the word they used to refer to this northern people.<sup>194</sup> Its spread, however, bears witness to the enduring popularity of the term among North Germanic speakers. The identification of the Sami by their method of transportation in winter thus must have been impressively widespread and long-standing.

<sup>188</sup> 'Norr [...] beið þess, er snjó lagði á heiðar ok skíðfæri gerði gott' (ch. 1 (Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1965: 3–4)).

<sup>189</sup> 'Hann blótuðu Kænir til þess, at snjóva gerði ok væri skíðfæri gott' (Ch. 1 (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: II, 137)).

<sup>190</sup> Similar implications are present in other texts. In *Ketils saga hængs*, for instance, Brúni and his daughter Hrafnhildr are residents of Finnmörk, but neither of them is explicitly identified as a *Finnr*. However, Hrafnhildr's appearance is large and grotesque; her father has dealings with *Finnar*, whom he calls his friends; and Brúni's brother turns out to be Gusi, king of the *Finnar* (ch. 3 (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: I, 251–5)).

<sup>191</sup> Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: I, 135.

<sup>192</sup> Ólafur Halldórsson 1958–2000: I, 8–9.

<sup>193</sup> *History of the Wars* 6.15 (Dewing 1914–19: III, 418–19); *Gesta Danorum* 0.2.9 (Friis-Jensen and Zeeberg 2005: I, 82); *Wid 79* (ed. by Krapp and Dobbie 1936: 149–53); *Or 1* ch. 1 (Batley 1980: 13); and see further the citations and discussions in Chambers 1912: 213, commentary to line 79, and esp. Whitaker 1982; 1983.

<sup>194</sup> Certainly Paul the Deacon provides a fairly accurate etymology (Bethmann and Waitz 1878: 54–5).

A second, equally persistent association of the *Finnar* endows them with supernatural properties, particularly prophecy and sorcery.<sup>195</sup> Although these skills occasionally benefit the non-Sami protagonist, they are commonly condemned in one way or another. In Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, the proto-Christian protagonist is hesitant to enlist the services of a foresighted *Finnr*, and the feeling is mutual. Óláfr's precise objections remain unexpressed as he states that seeking out people of that sort and putting one's trust in them is displeasing to him and that he disapproves of it;<sup>196</sup> the *Finnr* provides more insight into the reciprocal unease with reference to the bright spirits that accompany Óláfr and the new faith that he is to introduce (ch. 19).<sup>197</sup> In *Vatnsdæla saga*, a *Finna* prophetess provides the bulk of the entertainment at a party, but the scene's protagonists sit off by themselves and express no interest in her. When she offers Ingimundr an unsolicited prophecy concerning his settlement of Iceland which the saga audience will recognise as accurate, Ingimundr asserts that he wishes to learn about future events only by their coming to pass, and that he has no intention of ever visiting Iceland. A heated exchange ensues, making clear that Ingimundr will have nothing to do with the seeress (ch. 10).<sup>198</sup> Active sorcery is suggested in the same story when the *Finna* conjures Ingimundr's talisman from Norway to the site of his future settlement (chs 10, 15).<sup>199</sup> She is also called *ffolkunnig* 'skilled in magic' outright (ch. 10),<sup>200</sup> an adjective similarly applied to a *Finnr* in the poetry of *Ketils saga hængs* (ch. 3).<sup>201</sup> In *Haralds saga ins hárfagra*, Gunnhildr learns *kunnusta* 'knowledge, witchcraft' from the same two *Finnar* that were mentioned above as being experts at skiing; she tells Eiríkr's men of their skills, which include the superhuman ability to induce earthquakes and kill with a look (ch. 34).<sup>202</sup> Gunnhildr next conspires with the men to have the *Finnar* killed, suggesting that their superhuman properties are considered offensive, or at least dangerous in view of Gunnhildr's unwillingness to marry either of them. In short, associations

<sup>195</sup> The definitive study of this connection is Tolley 2009.

<sup>196</sup> 'Leitt er mer oc litit um at hitta þesskyns menn eða þeira traust at sækja' (Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1932: 67).

<sup>197</sup> Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1932: 68–9.

<sup>198</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1939: 28–30; cf. *Ldn* ch. S179 (Jakob Benediktsson 1986: 217–19).

<sup>199</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1939: 29–30, 41–2.

<sup>200</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1939: 29.

<sup>201</sup> Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: 1, 252.

<sup>202</sup> Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: 1, 135.

of *Finnar* with objectionable sorcery are numerous in Old Norse prose, suggesting that their winter connotations are part of the same dark domain of magic and danger.<sup>203</sup>

## 2.7 Conclusions

As might have been expected on the basis of earlier publications on the natural world,<sup>204</sup> encounters between humans and the inanimate in medieval literature are seldom described in purely objective terms. This chapter has demonstrated that winter landscapes and weather types are invoked to circumscribe human society by means of a hostile outside world. The starkest oppositions between winter and society in Anglo-Saxon literature are found in Old English elegiac and heroic poetry. While in Adam's lament in *Genesis B* and the paradisaical description of *The Phoenix* winter is only one among several afflictions affecting postlapsarian man, winter storms represent a central threat to the structure and members of society in the elegiac *Ruin*, *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *The Wife's Lament*. Heroic descriptions in more and less religious narratives set off individual heroes against the cold sea they traverse: texts like *Andreas* and *Beowulf* make use of the hibernal connotations of water landscapes to heighten the heroism of sea voyages and other confrontations with bodies of water. In this application, the cold-water motif is divorced from the seasonal cycle, making the open sea a landscape of permanent winter to be evoked regardless of narrative seasonality.

That winter could take on the guise of a feared landscape rather than a recurring season is confirmed by its function as one association among several of hostile supernatural beings. In Old English poetry, this tendency is found in associations between winter and water; in Scandinavian tradition, it may be recognised in the deep-rooted association with winter of hostile giants and dangerous Sami sorcerers. Accordingly, the natural surroundings that might be expected to be neutral inasmuch as they are devoid of sentient life are enlisted as participants in a universal conflict, whether between good and evil, a central society and its surroundings, or both. In Christian as well as more indi-

<sup>203</sup> Further study on this association may be found in Hermann Pálsson 1997, which, however, does not always distinguish clearly between Sami sorcery and general witchcraft. An index of associations of *Finnar* with magic may be found in Boberg 1966: 82 (motif D1711.10.1).

<sup>204</sup> Esp. Neville 1999.

generously inspired literature, winter landscapes consistently side with the enemy, and it frequently takes a saint or other hero to take them on successfully. As such, they provide inspiration not only for monster stories but also for heroic tales and explorations of the exotic.

The antagonistic connotations of winter landscapes here described demonstrate the psychogeographical dynamics at play in Anglo-Saxon and early Scandinavian communities. Geographical features peripheral to social space become distrusted in consequence of their unfamiliarity, instilling fear in their occasional visitor. Narrative literature responds by projecting these fears back onto the landscape in a more tangible form, whether by attention to the landscape's cold and stormy features or by the allocation to these regions of a supernatural counterpart embodying the elusive threat associated with them. In both Anglo-Saxon and early Scandinavian literature, winter proves a potent conceptual field by which to represent such threats.

Since winter represents only one extreme of the seasonal cycle, this association of winter landscapes with the hostile and supernatural suggests that in narratives that keep track of the solar year, these categories should be more commonly encountered in winter than in summer. Exploring this connection, the chapter that follows will discuss seasonal patterns in narrative and instructional texts, thereby to confirm the thematic identity of the winter season.

## Chapter 3

### Winter in its Season

The fundamental claim made in the previous chapter is that winter in Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse literature has such potent connotative value that it is commonly evoked with disregard for the regular succession of the seasons: to Anglo-Saxon and early Icelandic authors, winter was a literary device that could be divorced from cyclical time. The thematic unity of winter was seen to reside in the margins of human society, as the season is associated with the dangerous supernatural in both Old English and Old Norse tradition, compounded in Old English poetry by personal deprivation in the hostile natural world. In the present chapter, these associations will be put to the test. If the above-mentioned motifs are indeed bound up with the winter season, texts employing a seasonal chronology will reveal a higher concentration of the supernatural in the cold season than at other times of year, while Old English poetry should describe the afflictions of the season also when a cyclical timeframe is used.

It will be seen that such texts as employ cyclical time commonly present winter as a season of incursions into the human domain and increased access to the supernatural, thereby reinforcing the delineation of the human while recognising that some individuals transcend this boundary. The supernatural aspect of this seasonal concentration is particularly evident in the sagas of Icelanders, which establish an almost exclusive connection of hauntings with winter, while prophecy is likewise associated with winter nights. As will be seen, this seasonality of the supernatural proves more

elusive for Old English poetry because this corpus rarely invokes a seasonal chronology in which to situate its action. It thus seems that the hostile connotations of cold landscapes in Old English verse did not develop into an explicit temporal-seasonal binary of the monstrous, even though the hauntings of *Beowulf* correspond to those in the Icelandic material in several other respects, including the implicitly seasonal reliance on the dark of night. Instead, Old English poetry retains an emphasis on winter as a landscape of personal affliction, commonly as an analogy to mental anguish.

### 3.1 Hauntings

The Glámr-episode of *Grettis saga*<sup>1</sup> provides a good illustration not only of the cyclical timeframe of the sagas of Icelanders in general, but also of the distribution of the supernatural within this cycle. This part of the saga is subject to a strict chronology embedded in the narrative framework. Like most narratives in the sagas of Icelanders, it begins by introducing first the setting and then the social conflict that makes the story of interest to the saga compiler. A wealthy and reputable farmer named Þórhallr governs the Þórhallsstaðir estate in Forsœludalr, an inland valley in northern Iceland first settled by his great-grandfather. This valley, however, is plagued by hauntings posing such a danger to Þórhallr's shepherds that he has difficulty filling the winter position. Although Þórhallr has sought the counsels of many wise men, none has been able to advise him to satisfaction.

It is at this point in the narrative that the seasonal cycle is set in motion. Þórhallr is accustomed to attend the *alþingi* or national assembly, which was held annually about the time of the feast of John the Baptist.<sup>2</sup> While there one year, he puts his problem to Skapti Þóroddsson, an experienced lawspeaker and legal reformer<sup>3</sup> who enjoys a reputation of wisdom in *Grettis saga*<sup>4</sup> and plays similar roles elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Skapti sets Þórhallr up with a strongly built Swedish shepherd named Glámr. Glámr is a rather unpopular man whose services would not be considered desirable were it not for

<sup>1</sup> Chs 32–5 (Guðni Jónsson 1936: 107–23).

<sup>2</sup> *Íslb* ch. 7 (Jakob Benediktsson 1986: 15); *Grg* chs 19, 23 (Finsen 1852: 1, 37, 43).

<sup>3</sup> *Íslb* ch. 8 (Jakob Benediktsson 1986: 19); Jón Jóhannesson 1974: 70–4.

<sup>4</sup> e.g. chs 27, 51, 54 (Guðni Jónsson 1936: 93, 163–4, 177–8).

<sup>5</sup> *Nj* ch. 142 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954: 387–90); *Vall* ch. 5 (Jónas Kristjánsson 1956: 247).

his strength and courage. Þórhallr and Glámr meet, and they agree on a contract commencing at a second seminal point in time, the mid-October *vetrnætr*. Glámr arrives, and while the author makes much of the shepherd's antipathy to Christian ritual and his inability to get along with the farm's other residents, there is no mention of supernatural phenomena until Christmas. On the morning of Christmas Eve, Glámr has a disagreement with Þórhallr's unnamed wife, who denies him breakfast because it is a Christian fast-day. She serves him his meal eventually, but not before prophesying that it will go badly for him if he persists in his demand. By this time the sky has gone dark and a storm has gathered, but Glámr nevertheless takes out his flock after breakfast. The gale turns into a drifting snowstorm in the afternoon, and Glámr does not come home that night. When a search party is launched early the next morning, they find the livestock scattered and injured by the storm, and Glámr's black corpse near a trodden patch that looks as though it has been the scene of a severe struggle. After a few frustrated attempts to bring the body back to the church, Glámr is interred in a cairn out in the valley, but that does not put him to rest. He makes his first appearance as a revenant immediately after Christmas, here referring to the thirteen days and nights from Christmas Eve to the Epiphany, as Glámr's burial does not take place until 27 December. The hauntings take place 'nálíga nætr ok daga' ('virtually night and day'), with Glámr riding the buildings almost to their breaking point. Many flee the farm, and people avoid passing through the valley if they can. By the spring, however, the fear seems to have diminished:

Um v́́rit fekk Þórhallr sér hjón ok gerði bú á jorðu sinni; tók þá at minnka aptrgangr, meðan sólargangr var mest; leið svá fram á miðsumar. (ch. 33)<sup>6</sup>

(In spring, Þórhallr hired servants and constructed a building on his land. The revenant hauntings then grew to be less as the course of the sun was at its longest; so it continued until mid-summer.)

This brings the year full circle. Although Glámr's struggle with the harmful spirit seem to have put an end to the original problem, his own restlessness is equally undesirable, sending Þórhallr back to square one.

The second cycle follows much the same pattern, though told in less detail and with less negative

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<sup>6</sup> Guðni Jónsson 1936: 113.

character description. After midsummer, Þórhallr learns of the arrival of another foreigner, Þorgautr, in need of a job. The two come to an agreement and Þorgautr takes up his new position at the *vetrnætr*. By this point in the narrative Glámr's visitations are nightly, but Þorgautr appears in no way disturbed by them. On Christmas Eve, the shepherd again sets out with his flock, following another prophetic exchange with the farmer's wife, though there is now no expression of ill will. The weather is particularly cold and there is a severe snowstorm. By the time of the evening mass, Þorgautr has not returned, but the churchgoers refuse to carry out a search at night since this is when malevolent beings control the valley. After breakfast the next day, the shepherd is found near Glámr's mound, his neck broken along with every bone in his body. They bury him in the churchyard, and he does not return. Glámr, by contrast, intensifies his hauntings after Christmas to such an extent that no animal is now able to cross the valley alive. By this time, everyone flees, including the farmer and his wife. Again, however, 'er váraði ok sólargangr var sem mestr, létti heldr aptrgöngunum' (ch. 33),<sup>7</sup> allowing Þórhallr to return and erect a new building. A third cycle is signalled by the return of hauntings in autumn, and this is where the narrative joins up with the saga's protagonist.

Many of the details of Grettir's encounter with Glámr need not be revisited here, but it is important to mention the chronological and seasonal aspects of the episode. This third iteration of the cycle omits the midsummer hire: instead, Grettir is visiting relatives in the region during the days leading up to the *vetrnætr*, and the nearby hauntings are the topic of constant discussion. The matter rouses Grettir's interest, and he resolves to go see Glámr for himself. It is thus that Grettir arrives at Þórhallsstaðir around the time of the winter nights. To Grettir's disappointment, nothing happens the first night; but when he stays for a second night, his horse is found dead and badly mauled in the morning. The third night satisfies Grettir's curiosity: Glámr arrives, rides the building for a long while and then enters it, triggering a fight closely resembling Beowulf's encounter with Grendel.<sup>8</sup> Following the revenant's defeat, the question of further hauntings is not explicitly addressed, as the focus is now on Grettir's fame. Since the episode's conflict consists in the hauntings, however, and

<sup>7</sup> 'When spring came on and the course of the sun was at its longest, the revenant hauntings diminished considerably' (Guðni Jónsson 1936: 115).

<sup>8</sup> See below, section 3.2.

the Forsœludalr narrative is here brought to an end, it may be assumed that Grettir's victory represents its resolution.

The seasonal associations implicit in the narrative are clear. Although the valley is categorically described as haunted ('þar var reimt mjök', ch. 32),<sup>9</sup> supernatural events are reduced to a minimum in summer ('meðan sólargangr var mestr', ch. 33).<sup>10</sup> At this time of year, Þórhallr has no difficulty travelling and constructing buildings; this is also when he recruits new staff.<sup>11</sup> Even after the mid-winter of the second cycle, when the hauntings reach their peak and all livestock in the valley dies off, the farmer evidently feels safe returning in the spring, even though he now has great difficulty hiring staff (ch. 33).<sup>12</sup> The story's basic arch of suspense thus runs from the *vetrnætr*, when the challenger arrives, to the coming of spring, when the intensity of the horror dissipates. In the first two cycles, a climax is reached on Christmas Eve, but no full denouement follows because the central conflict remains, and the hauntings intensify further after Christmastide. Grettir's visit breaks the pattern inasmuch as Grettir does not stay until Christmas but resolves the conflict immediately, around the *vetrnætr*, thereby cutting short the chronology set up by the two preliminary confrontations. A closely analogous narrative in *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, whose hauntings are not repeated in successive years, likewise has the struggle take place in autumn but without mention of the *vetrnætr* (ch. 2).<sup>13</sup> This text has been dated to the first half of the fourteenth century<sup>14</sup> and is thus contemporary with *Grettis saga*; similarities in plot suggest that the temporal setting was either borrowed by the compiler of whichever text came last or assigned before the two known versions were written down. Given the traditional primacy of the Christmas setting, which also occurs in the first two cycles of the Glámr-haunting, it may be tentatively supposed that the episode in *Hávarðar saga* is derivative of that in *Grettis saga*. Since a third full cycle survives in the analogous hauntings of *Grettis*

<sup>9</sup> 'The place was severely haunted' (Guðni Jónsson 1936: 108).

<sup>10</sup> 'While the course of the sun was at its longest' (Guðni Jónsson 1936: 113). Likewise on p. 115, 'er váraði ok sólargangr var sem mestr' ('when spring came on and the course of the sun was at its longest').

<sup>11</sup> The reference to the hiring of staff should presumably be read in the context of the annual *farðagar* when servants could seek new employment, namely in the seventh week of the summer halfyear (*Grg* ch. 78 (Finsen 1852: 1, 128–9)).

<sup>12</sup> Guðni Jónsson 1936: 115.

<sup>13</sup> Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 297–9.

<sup>14</sup> Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: lxxxix–xc.

*saga* chapter 64 and in *Hrólf's saga kraka* while cognate folktales recorded in modern times similarly resolve the conflict on Christmas Eve (see below and section 3.2), it may be assumed that the compiler of *Grettis saga* likewise was working with a pre-existing tale involving a third full cycle, which he redacted to accommodate the life and circumstances of Grettir. Even in the surviving narrative, however, winter is explicitly when hauntings take place, while summer represents a time of relief, recovery (as represented by construction work), and anticipation (signalled by the recruitment of sturdy shepherds).

The related cycle of light and dark features just as prominently as that of summer and winter. After Þorgautr goes missing on Christmas Eve, churchgoers say they will not venture out into the dominion of evil powers at night;<sup>15</sup> but no such protest is reported when a search party sets out at daytime the next day. Although the previous year's refusal has a more down-to-earth ring to it when the snowstorm is cited alongside the dark of evening as a reason to postpone the search,<sup>16</sup> the decision nevertheless confirms a pattern in which people do not leave the farm buildings at night. Glámr's first postmortem appearances are by night; although it soon becomes a matter of virtually day and night ('náliga nætr ok daga'),<sup>17</sup> the adverb *náliga* still limits their spread in time, implying a concentration at night. In fact, daylight at this latitude is limited to four hours about the time of the Epiphany (Julian or Gregorian),<sup>18</sup> so that the phrase *náliga nætr ok daga* applies equally well to the spread of darkness across the day as it does to the temporal extent of Glámr's hauntings. What is more, the haunted valley goes by the name of *Forsæludalr* ('shaded valley'),<sup>19</sup> suggesting that its winters are particularly dark on account of the hills surrounding it east, west, and south: the sun, which at this latitude barely skims across the horizon in winter even in the absence of mountains, is here out of sight for several months per year.<sup>20</sup> The supernatural potential of such valleys is demonstrated

<sup>15</sup> 'Tíðamenn [...] soggðusk eigi mundu hætta sér út í trollahendr um nætr' (Guðni Jónsson 1936: 114).

<sup>16</sup> Guðni Jónsson 1936: 111–12.

<sup>17</sup> Guðni Jónsson 1936: 113.

<sup>18</sup> At 65°17', the approximate northern latitude of Þórhallsstaðir (Guðni Jónsson 1936: map 'Húnavatnsþing', facing p. 408; Scott 2005–08).

<sup>19</sup> See Kålund 1877–82: II, 42; Fritzner 1883–96 s.v. *forsæla*.

<sup>20</sup> Kålund 1877–82: II, 42; cf. Guðni Jónsson 1936: map 'Húnavatnsþing', facing p. 408. Regarding the experiential implications of such extended darkness, see Procopius's *History of the Wars* 6.15 (Dewing 1914–19: III, 414–18); Árni Björnsson 2000: 431–2.

by the analogous usage of this type of location in the folktale *Gullbrá og Skeggi*, where it becomes the chosen residence of the witch Gullbrá.<sup>21</sup> On the whole, however, nighttime remains the time of Glámr's activity both in the Porgautr cycle and during Grettir's visit. The dark is thus Glámr's exclusive domain, and it seems likely that its prevalence in winter and relative absence in summer go some length towards explaining his seasonal conduct.

The Christmas hauntings in the Glámr-episode of *Grettis saga* have a counterpart in the Sandhaugar-episode of chapters 64 to 66, a micronarrative again containing distinct parallels to the central plot of *Beowulf*.<sup>22</sup> Although this section does not trace supernatural developments through the various times of year, nocturnal winter hauntings are again manifested in three successive years, now consistently on Christmas Eve. Further parallels with the Glámr-episode may be found in Grettir's active seeking out of the confrontation (ch. 64) and in details of the fight, such as the phrase 'allt þat, sem fyrir þeim varð, brutu þau'<sup>23</sup> and the progression from indoors to outdoors (ch. 65). Although there is thus little doubt that the two episodes within *Grettis saga* derive from a common source related to the corresponding narrative in *Beowulf*,<sup>24</sup> the repeated concentration of the motif around Christmas Eve makes clear that it concerns a deliberate association with this point on the calendar. A third episode highlighting Grettir's interest in supernatural confrontations is chapter 18 on the revenant of Kárr *inn gamli*,<sup>25</sup> an episode that shares some characteristics with the Sandhaugar-narrative as well as with Beowulf's confrontation with Grendel's mother.<sup>26</sup> This part of the saga does not place the same emphasis on seasonal patterns as the other episodes, but it is made clear at the end of the chapter that the confrontation must have taken place in winter but before Christmas.<sup>27</sup> Here too, night is governed by the revenant, while daytime is the human domain: although Grettir

<sup>21</sup> Jón Árnason 1954–61: I, 142.

<sup>22</sup> See section 3.2 below.

<sup>23</sup> 'They broke all that was in their way' (Guðni Jónsson 1936: 212); cf. ch. 35, 'allt brotnaði, þat sem fyrir varð' ('all broke that was in their way', p. 120).

<sup>24</sup> Although a connection between the Glámr and Grendel-episodes has frequently been contested (e.g. Gering 1880: 86; Turville-Petre 1977: 349; Fjalldal 1998: 41–4), the similarities between the Glámr- and Sandhaugar-episodes make clear that the same inspiration was used for both combat scenes (Smith 1881: 66–7). Whether they were available as separate narratives to the compiler of *Grettis saga* is a different matter, of no great consequence here.

<sup>25</sup> Guðni Jónsson 1936: 56–61.

<sup>26</sup> Taylor 1952: 13–14; McConchie 1982.

<sup>27</sup> Guðni Jónsson 1936: 61.

first observes the hauntings late at night, he waits until the morning before investigating the grave-mound.<sup>28</sup> Further Christmas conflicts in *Grettis saga* consist in his fight with a bear (ch. 21)<sup>29</sup> and an attack by twelve *berserkir* (ch. 19).<sup>30</sup> In short, *Grettis saga* presents winter in general and Christmas in particular as a time of hostile incursions into the human domain.

The seasonal pattern of these episodes of *Grettis saga* is found again in *Eyrbyggja saga*. Chapter 34 of this work tells how Þórólfr *bægifótr*, who has died and been firmly (*rammlega*) interred in a cairn in the previous chapter, will not lie still.<sup>31</sup> It is again specifically after sunset that one cannot venture outside in safety. Livestock and a shepherd roaming too close to the cairn do not survive; when the shepherd's body is found, it is black like Glámr's corpse and all its bones are broken, as with Glámr's victims. The seasonal sequence commences with autumn, which is announced just as the shepherd goes missing. At this point in the narrative, noises are heard and the buildings are frequently ridden at night. When winter sets in, Þórólfr begins to appear in person to residents of the farm, causing injuries, nervous breakdowns, and deaths. As in the Glámr-episode of *Grettis saga*, the hauntings intensify in the course of the winter, leading to the evacuation of all the farms in the valley, while those who are killed join in the hauntings. In spring, however, Þórólfr's body is dug up and moved out of the valley to a distant headland, where he causes no further trouble. Although this measure could not have been undertaken any earlier, since the ground had been frozen, there is again a contrast between winter, when hauntings cause the valley to be abandoned altogether, and spring, when nothing prevents the farmers from returning and digging up the culprit's body.

Somewhat further on in *Eyrbyggja saga* (chs 51–5),<sup>32</sup> another set of supernatural phenomena is described. These begin with a rain of blood one late afternoon in autumn, after which a wo-

<sup>28</sup> Guðni Jónsson 1936: 57. The grave robberies in *Bárð* and *Harð* follow a similar pattern both in time of day and on the seasonal level: although in both texts the plan of the raid is first announced during Christmas Eve feasting, it is not carried out until the spring, and at daytime (*Bárð* chs 18–21 (Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991: 160–70); *Harð* chs 14–15 (Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991: 38–44)). In *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, by contrast, a burial mound is raided at nighttime (ch. 4 (Turville-Petre 1976: 13–22)); so also *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar* ch. 4 (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: II, 276); *Gullþ* ch. 3 (Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991: 183–6); *Gesta Danorum* 3.3.8 (Friis-Jensen and Zeeberg 2005: 204).

<sup>29</sup> Guðni Jónsson 1936: 73–8.

<sup>30</sup> Guðni Jónsson 1936: 61–71.

<sup>31</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935: 92–5.

<sup>32</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935: 139–52.

man named Þórgunna falls sick, leading to her death a few days later. Hauntings begin when the execution of certain stipulations in her will is either hindered or neglected. Her first appearance takes place during the transportation of her corpse and seems intended to facilitate its removal to Skálaholt in accordance with her will. Afterwards, however, mysterious events take place at Fróðá where Þórgunna had lived. A shepherd comes home distraught and dies two weeks into the winter halfyear, after which he takes up haunting, and several more members of the household die, at least one of which joins the shepherd in his nightly visits; furthermore, supernatural seals appear and eat the farm's store of stockfish (ch. 53).<sup>33</sup> Þóroddr *skattkaupandi*, the Fróðá farmer, dies in a shipwreck with his men and all take up haunting at Fróðá. The timing of this event must be close to Christmas, because Christmas ale is served at the men's memorial service at which their revenants make their first appearance. Although the narrator remarks that in these early days of Christianity attending one's own memorial service was considered a favourable omen, the men's nightly return becomes uncomfortable to the remaining residents, particularly when they carry it on beyond the duration of the funerary feast. The hauntings continue throughout the Christmas season, and there is report of more deaths and hauntings, as well as an intensification of the pantry hauntings (ch. 54).<sup>34</sup> As with the hauntings in *Grettis saga*, there is a climax at Christmas and a further intensification around the time of the traditional midwinter, just after Epiphany. This time, the resolution occurs on the night before Candlemas, which was observed on 2 February, forty days after Christmas Eve. A priest oversees a tripartite purging, consisting in a legal element (a door-summonsing of the dead), a hygienic element (the burning of their possessions), and religious measures (singing mass and taking confessions). This puts an end to all trouble. The episode concludes with a last seasonal reference when Kjartan Þóroddsson, owner of the farm after his father's death, hires new staff in spring. No further hauntings are mentioned, and Kjartan lives at Fróðá for a long time afterwards (ch. 55).<sup>35</sup>

The connection thus established between hauntings and winter is sufficiently common in the

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<sup>33</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935: 146–7.

<sup>34</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935: 148–50.

<sup>35</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935: 152.

sagas of Icelanders to be considered a literary topos within the genre;<sup>36</sup> in fact, the connection is so strong that it has potential for reverse application, wintertime connoting hauntings and the supernatural. Not all hauntings occur at this time of year, of course, and not all are given a seasonal chronology at all. In *Laxdæla saga*, for instance, Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir encounters her dead husband Porkell Eyjólfsson in Holy Week, on the day of his drowning. This episode employs another motif, that of the instant or near-instant supernatural notification of the death of a loved one or relative.<sup>37</sup> Naturally, the timing of such notifications depends on the time of death, so there is no occasion for seasonal motifs beyond the seasonal distribution of death. Also in *Laxdæla saga*, the hauntings of Víga-Hrappur Sumarliðason are related without reference to the seasons at first (ch. 17),<sup>38</sup> even if his final appearance and disposal take place one evening in winter (ch. 24).<sup>39</sup> However, the pattern associating hauntings with winter is not limited to *Grettis saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga*. In *Flóamanna saga*, for instance, a revenant haunts a farm ‘um veturinn’ (‘in winter’) and is neutralised through decapitation ‘eina nótt’ (‘one night’) in the same season in chapter 13.<sup>40</sup> Chapter 22 of this work tells how Þorgils Þórðarson and his men are shipwrecked off Greenland because Þorgils refuses to serve Þórr following his conversion. The Greenlandic episode begins a week before the start of winter and describes hauntings commencing on Christmas Day and deaths related to these hauntings taking place between 26 December and mid-Gói (early March in the Julian year).<sup>41</sup> Another Greenlandic narrative, this time in *Eiríks saga rauða*, tells of a foreboding vision and subsequent deaths and revenant hauntings following an epidemic in early winter (ch. 6).<sup>42</sup> In the Þoðvarr–Hötrr episode of *Hrólfs saga kraka* (ch. 23),<sup>43</sup> a beast assails Hrólfr’s court annually on Christmas Eve. *Egils saga einhenda* has a vulture carry off the king’s daughter on Christmas Day (ch. 2).<sup>44</sup> Attacks on the human

<sup>36</sup> See also Danielli 1945: 29–41; Coffin 1962: 147–8; Orchard 2003b: 153–4.

<sup>37</sup> Cf., e.g., *Gunnl* ch. 13 (Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938: 104–5). For a discussion of this and related motifs, see Kelchner 1935: 62–72; for an index of motifs of divination, see Boberg 1966: 83–6 (motifs D1810–25).

<sup>38</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934: 39–40.

<sup>39</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934: 68–9.

<sup>40</sup> Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991: 255–6.

<sup>41</sup> Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991: 282–5.

<sup>42</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935: 214–17.

<sup>43</sup> Slay 1960: 78.

<sup>44</sup> Lagerholm 1927: 7–9; see also p. 9, commentary to §§1–4.

domain thus frequently take place in winter, and especially at Christmas.

The last example in the above list, that of *Egils saga einhenda*, is the only one in this group containing no suggestion that the confrontation takes place at nighttime or in the dark; all the other texts bear out such an association, rarely awarding daytime hauntings a subsidiary role. This element is certainly not unique to Icelandic tradition, as most European ghosts are likewise nightbound,<sup>45</sup> as are the pre-Conquest monsters of *Beowulf* and the majority of post-Conquest revenants according to Walter Map<sup>46</sup> and William of Newburgh.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, angels,<sup>48</sup> demons,<sup>49</sup> and the blessed departed<sup>50</sup> in England and elsewhere likewise tend to concentrate their appearances in the nighttime. In part, no doubt, this statistic results from an association between visions and dreams.<sup>51</sup> Likewise responsible, however, is the fear and heightened subjectivity associated with nighttime owing to the increased uncertainty that comes with the loss of vision.<sup>52</sup> Although this association of the supernatural with the dark of night suggests that winter should be the most haunted season, such a pattern is nowhere made as explicit as in Scandinavia.

The Scandinavian popularity and spread of the motif of winter hauntings is confirmed by more recent folktale evidence. On the one hand there is a large body of disparate local revenant tales. Not all of these employ seasonality, but winter, Christmas, and the start of the winter halfyear are common contexts, while nearly all stories take place at night.<sup>53</sup> A more unified folk-tradition is the narrative known as the Christmas Visitors.<sup>54</sup> In this tale, which has been widely recorded in Norway and Iceland, elves or *huldufólk* ('hidden people') pay an annual visit to a particular farmhouse

<sup>45</sup> Schmidt 1998: 177–8.

<sup>46</sup> *De nugis curialium* 2.27, 4.10 (James, Brooke, and Mynors 1983: 202, 348–50); an exception is 2.28 (p. 204).

<sup>47</sup> *Historia rerum Anglicarum* 5.23, 5.24 (Hamilton 1856: II, 184–5, 185–90); it is presented as an extreme case that another initially nocturnal revenant eventually walks the earth by day as well as by night in 5.22 (pp. 182–4).

<sup>48</sup> e.g. *BEDA. Hist.Eccl.* 4.24 (Colgrave and Mynors 1969: 416); *Vita Oswaldi* ch. 2 (Turner and Muir 2006: 52).

<sup>49</sup> e.g. *FELIX. Vit.Guth.* ch. 31 (Colgrave 1956: 100–6); *Vita Oswaldi* ch. 8 (Turner and Muir 2006: 82); see further Caciola 1996: 10–14.

<sup>50</sup> e.g. *Vita Oswaldi* ch. 16 (Turner and Muir 2006: 76).

<sup>51</sup> On the distinction in Macrobius and elsewhere, see Kamphausen 1975, esp. 9–58; Dinzelbacher 1981: 28–55; Adams 2007: 175–6.

<sup>52</sup> Verdon 2002: 7. For discussions of the evolutionary psychology of fear, see Darwin 1877: 288; Diel 1989; Buss 2008: 92–8.

<sup>53</sup> See Jón Árnason 1862–64: I, 222–317; Nordal 1971–73: II, 1–101.

<sup>54</sup> Catalogued as ML 6015 in Christiansen 1958: 144–56; cf. folktale 6015A (pp. 156–8).

on or around Christmas Eve to feast there, while its human residents are either gone to mass or spend the night away from home on account of the supernatural invasion of their home.<sup>55</sup> Inasmuch as the narrative always centres on the visit's final iteration, in which the supernatural visitors are scared off for good by an obscure farmhand (not unlike Glámr) or visiting stranger (like Grettir), it is tempting to see here a continuity between the various hauntings in *Grettis saga* and the more recent folktales.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the large number of occurrences of this literary pattern in both medieval and modern times renders its uninterrupted popularity more likely than a modern revitalisation of a once-popular medieval tradition. Accordingly, the medieval uses of seasonality and darkness here studied appear to have had a lasting impact on narrative conventions at least in some traditions.<sup>57</sup> Even today, traditions current throughout Iceland have it that disobedient children are devoured by a troll-woman at Christmas,<sup>58</sup> while a child that does not receive new clothes to wear on Christmas Eve will be snatched away by a large cat.<sup>59</sup>

One permutation of the Christmas Visitors-motif is worth mentioning in the form of the episode known as *Þiðrandi þáttur ok Þórhalls* contained in several redactions of the early fourteenth century *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*.<sup>60</sup> One important divergence from the other narratives, medieval and modern, is the timing, as it centres around the *vetrnætr* celebrated in mid-October. In this text, a man named Þórhallr who is gifted with foresight grows silent as the summer draws to a close because he foresees that one gifted with foresight will be killed during the autumn feast. During the *vetrnætr*, the weather turns rough; Þórhallr advises that no-one venture out of the house because he foresees great harm if anyone does. In the middle of the night, a young man named Þiðrandi hears a knocking at the door and goes out to find nine armed women in black riding from the north, and nine women in white from the south, but the women in black get to him first and attack him. He is found wounded in the frosty, moonlit morning, and he dies that day. Þórhallr now prophesies the coming of a new

<sup>55</sup> Christiansen 1946: 70–83; 1958: 144–56; 1964: 121–4; Simpson 1972: 52–5; Gunnell 2004.

<sup>56</sup> Gunnell 2004: 60–1.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Andersson 1974.

<sup>58</sup> Árni Björnsson 2000: 338–40; Gunnell 2000: 136–8; 2001.

<sup>59</sup> Árni Björnsson 2000: 368–70.

<sup>60</sup> Ch. 215 (Ólafur Halldórsson 1958–2000: II, 145–50).

religion (to be understood as Christianity) and explains the dark women as Þiðrandi's pagan *fylgjur* or accompanying spirits, who knew they would lose Þiðrandi to the new religion should they leave him alive; the women in white were representatives of the new religion, meaning to save him.

Although the haunting in *Þiðranda þáttr* has been fitted with a new religious motivation, it has considerable overlap with the various other Old Norse hauntings described above. The timing is different from most parallels, but it may be remembered that the final iteration of the Glámr-haunting in *Grettis saga* likewise takes place during the winter nights, while *Hávarðar saga Ísfríðings* speaks of autumn. That this time of year is conceptually associated with the winter season becomes clear from the details in *Þiðranda þáttr*: the storm, the frost, and the moonlit morning all connote winter, even if the festive correspondences between Christmas and the winter nights are overlooked.<sup>61</sup> Þórhallr's ominous silence at the approach of the feast is mirrored in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, in which the whole court falls quiet at the approach of *jól* because the courtiers know of the dragon that annually attacks the hall at this time of year (ch. 23).<sup>62</sup> If anything, therefore, the application of the haunting-motif to both Christmas and the winter nights demonstrates the conceptual unity in Icelandic tradition between the times of year corresponding to the Julian autumn and winter, or at least between the feasts that assume such prominent positions in the literary identities of these seasons.

That the dangerous supernatural in medieval Scandinavia had an annual cycle extending to more social categories than revenants and *fylgjur* alone becomes clear in the legendary saga *Ketils saga hængs*. This text shows considerable interest in the *Finnar*, whose associations with winter and dangerous sorcery have been outlined in the previous chapter (section 2.6.2). In *Ketils saga*, the same connections are given a place in the cycle of the seasons. Staying with Bruni in Finnmörk, Ketill intends to go on his way after *jól*, but Bruni declares that to be impossible 'fyrir vetrarríki ok illum veðrum; en Gusir Finna konungr liggr úti á mörkum'.<sup>63</sup> When spring arrives, Ketill and Bruni are both able to set out (ch. 3).<sup>64</sup> Of additional interest in this episode is the coincidence of natural

<sup>61</sup> The reference to moonlight likewise recalls Grettir's encounter with Glámr, suggesting perhaps that the (full) moon had an association with the supernatural (see *Gr* ch. 35 (Guðni Jónsson 1936: 121)).

<sup>62</sup> Slay 1960: 78.

<sup>63</sup> 'on account of the winter severity and the bad weather; and Gusir, king of the *Finnar*, is lurking in the shadows.'

<sup>64</sup> Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: 1, 252.

and supernatural dangers, suggesting some degree of mythologisation of natural threats. It is the same association between natural and supernatural winter threats that brings Ketill to the supernaturally charged Finnmörk in the first place, as he is shipwrecked there after disregarding a specific injunction not to sail out as late as the *vetrnætr*.<sup>65</sup>

A similar tendency to explain the physical implications of winter in supernatural terms may be found in the Greenlandic hauntings of *Eiríks saga rauða*. Specifically, this text may help explain the popularity among Scandinavians of hibernal revenant hauntings. The narrator suggests that the dead return as a consequence of negligent burial rites, as one deceased person returns to the living specifically to denounce Greenlandic burial customs on God's behalf. The saga goes into some detail regarding these rites:

Sá hafði háttur verit á Grænlandi, síðan kristni kom þangat, at menn váru grafnir á bœjum, þar sem ǫnduðusk, í óvígðri moldu. Skyldi setja staur upp af brjósti inum dauða, en síðan, er kennimenn kómu til, þá skyldi upp kippa staurinum ok hella þar í vígðu vatni ok veita þar yfirsongva, þótt þat væri miklu síðar. (ch. 6)<sup>66</sup>

(‘It had been the custom in Greenland since Christianity arrived there that people were interred on the farm where they had died, in unconsecrated soil. A stake had to be erected up from the chest of the deceased; later, when the clergy arrived, the stake had to be pulled out and holy water poured down [the resulting channel] and a funeral service held there, even if that was much later.’)

Missing from the account is the key piece of information that inhumation was and remains a complicated affair in Greenland. Even in locations where soil is plentiful, snow and frozen topsoil hinder the digging of graves in winter, while permafrost in many places precludes the creation of graves more than a few feet deep even in summer,<sup>67</sup> at least since the late medieval cooling set in.<sup>68</sup> Accordingly, arctic cultures have traditionally disposed of the bodies of the dead above ground,<sup>69</sup> while various

<sup>65</sup> Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón 1943–44: I, 251. Cf. *Eb* ch. 16, in which it is observed that many sea-spirits are about in early winter. Gunnlaugr ventures out at night regardless and is mysteriously killed; the consensus is it was magic (Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935: 28–9).

<sup>66</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935: 217. Cf. Lynnerup 1998: 51–2.

<sup>67</sup> During the 1921 excavation at Herjolfsnes in southern Greenland, only the topmost 70–80 cm of soil was seen to thaw in summer. The deepest archaeological finds were discovered in the permafrost at 135 cm below the twentieth-century surface level, or at least 105–110 cm below the estimated medieval surface level (Nørlund 1924: 241–2, 262–7; for the estimate of soil rise since the time of the settlement, see Nørlund 1924: 239; Nørlund 1927: 386–8). See further Weyer 1932: 263; Seaver 1996: 9, 117–118.

<sup>68</sup> Nørlund 1924: 228–44; cf. Nørlund 1927; Lamb 1972–77: II, 438.

<sup>69</sup> Crantz 1820: II, 217–18; Weyer 1932: 263–6; Birket-Smith 1936: 159; Hughes 1960: 66; Petersen 1966–67; cf. Nørlund 1924: 238 n. 1.

north-dwelling cultures, including northern communities in Western cultures, postpone burial until the spring thaw even today.<sup>70</sup> There are also present-day Greenlandic parallels to the saga account of burial beside one's own house;<sup>71</sup> this is commonly done in winter. The same practice has also been recorded for Iceland in a later period.<sup>72</sup> The saga description of a stake placed over the corpse closely follows the procedure outlined in the Norwegian *Gulapingslög* to be followed if the priest is absent, but the law code specifies that the stake is to be inserted only when the priest arrives (ch. 23).<sup>73</sup> The Greenlandic variant, to drive in the stake immediately upon burial, may be understood not just as a way of creating a channel for the holy water, but also as a means of locating the body below the cover of the snow. Meanwhile, the fact that delayed burial rites were legislated as an exception in Norway but are presented as the default procedure in Greenland reflects complicated Greenlandic logistics, which would have been at their worst in winter. In short, the practices denounced by the revenant in *Eiríks saga* seem to have followed from the difficulty of complying with Christian burial rites, especially in winter. This socioreligious concern may be understood as a practical inspiration for narratives of winter hauntings.

If bad living and bad dying are the most widespread causes of medieval revenant hauntings,<sup>74</sup> poor disposal of the dead and their possessions is at least as common a cause in the Icelandic material, and rectifying such a mistake typically ends the hauntings.<sup>75</sup> Both these patterns may be recognised in *Grettis saga*, where Glámr, not buried according to Christian law, takes up haunting but Þorgautr, killed under very similar circumstances but given a lawful burial, does not. These men's lifestyles and religious commitments are surely a decisive factor in their posthumous behaviour, but

<sup>70</sup> See, e.g., winter burial customs among the Finnish Skolt Sami (Storå 1971: 98–103) and the general population of upstate New York (Liquori 2005). It is worth pointing out that certain Sami cultures, like medieval Norse culture, require burial rites to be carried out in meticulous compliance with a normative custom to prevent the dead returning from their graves (Storå 1971: 260–1). Cf. Birket-Smith 1936: 159–9 for similar requirements among the arctic peoples of North America, and Jenness 1922: 171–8 for revenants and resurrections in the same region.

<sup>71</sup> Witness, for instance, the numerous domestic graves in the village of Kulusuk, off eastern Greenland, despite the fact that there is also a cemetery a short way outside the village.

<sup>72</sup> Nørlund 1936: 44–6.

<sup>73</sup> Keyser and Munch 1846–95: 1, 14.

<sup>74</sup> Caciola 1996: 27–9.

<sup>75</sup> Thus, e.g., *Flóam* chs 13, 22 (Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991: 255–6, 285); *Eir* ch. 6 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935: 216–17); *Eb* ch. 55 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935: 150–2).

the consequent ritual difference seems equally significant. While the climate of most of Iceland was considerably milder than that of the Greenlandic settlements, sagas set in Iceland also make reference to snow and frozen ground as obstructions to burial and reburial.<sup>76</sup> It is likely that, alongside existing connotations of winter, the type of logistic complications suggested in these texts helped popularise tales of winter hauntings resulting from bodies disposed of improperly. Such concern over burial protocol would have received considerable impetus from the strict procedures outlined in the law codes, which prescribe severe monetary and personal penalties for ritual neglect.<sup>77</sup>

### 3.2 The Grendel Season

As was observed earlier, a number of encounters with the extrasocietal in *Grettis saga* are widely held to correspond to the attacks on Heorot in the first two thousand lines of *Beowulf*. The strongest echoes of what can only be a shared tradition<sup>78</sup> surface in the *draugr* of Kárr *inn gamli* on Háramarsey (ch. 18);<sup>79</sup> a rampant bear in Hálogaland (ch. 21);<sup>80</sup> the *draugr* of Glámr as part of the hauntings in Forsæludalr (chs 32–5);<sup>81</sup> and the two *troll* around Sandhaugar (chs 64–7).<sup>82</sup> Apart from their interest in incursions into the human domain, what unites these episodes is that they all take place in winter, while the last three centre around Christmas. The saga compiler clearly associated this point on the calendar with outside threats to human society, as yet another Christmas Eve episode has Grettir ward off an attack on a farm by twelve *berserkir* (ch. 19).<sup>83</sup> Finally, a further passage that has been

<sup>76</sup> e.g. *Heið* ch. 9 (Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938: 232–5); *Eb* ch. 34 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935: 94).

<sup>77</sup> *Grg* ch. 2 (Finsen 1852: 1, 7–12); *Gulapingslög* ch. 23 (Keyser and Munch 1846–95: 1, 13–15).

<sup>78</sup> This point of widespread consensus has occasionally been challenged, most elaborately in Fjalldal 1998. Although the precise nature of the relationship between these texts has been variously understood over the years (as documented in Liberman 1986), the analogues outlined below are too close and too many to ascribe to coincidence (see, e.g., Chambers 1959; Orchard 2003b: 140–68).

<sup>79</sup> Guðni Jónsson 1936: 56–61. See Taylor 1952: 13–14; McConchie 1982; Orchard 2003b: 152–60.

<sup>80</sup> Guðni Jónsson 1936: 73–8. See Danielli 1945: 231; Wachslar 1985; Orchard 2003b: 52.

<sup>81</sup> Guðni Jónsson 1936: 107–23. The scholarship on this episode and that at Sandhaugar is extensive. The main studies on these chapters and on the connection between *Beo* and *Gr* in general are listed in Liberman 1986 and Fjalldal 1998. Some of the most persuasive evidence of a relationship between the two is drawn together in Orchard 2003b: 140–68.

<sup>82</sup> Guðni Jónsson 1936: 209–19.

<sup>83</sup> Guðni Jónsson 1936: 62–71.

proposed as an analogue to *Beowulf* is that of Grettir's death, in which Grettir himself is thought to take on the role of monster (chs 79–82);<sup>84</sup> it too takes place in winter.<sup>85</sup>

Certain motifs found in *Beowulf* and *Grettis saga* are believed to surface again in a range of further Scandinavian texts.<sup>86</sup> The closest of these is the story of *Bǫðvarr bjarki*, surviving in Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* and the legendary *Hrólfs saga kraka*. The latter tells of a dragon attacking Hrólf's court annually during the night of Christmas Eve, thus making the same unambiguous association also found in *Grettis saga* between this time of year and outside threats (ch. 23).<sup>87</sup> The episode in *Gesta Danorum*, by contrast, survives without any reference to the passing of the seasons,<sup>88</sup> which is generally true of the Old English poem as well. The precise relationship between these various texts remains a matter of debate, but the seasonal development may be assumed to answer to one of two possibilities. The first is that the Scandinavians transformed a pre-existing aseasonal tradition into a haunting taking place annually around *jól*. The other possibility places seasonality at the heart of the underlying narrative, deriving even the Grendel-episode of *Beowulf* from a winter tale. If the former scenario could be proved correct, this stemma would be further testimony to a Scandinavian association between hauntings and winter. If the latter, this would provide the attacks on Heorot with a firmer traditional context than they have hitherto enjoyed. Since either outcome would shed light on literary uses of winter in the cultures under investigation, it may be worth briefly considering the relationship between *Beowulf* and its various Scandinavian analogues. To avoid losing sight of the subject under investigation, however, the entire debate will not be rehearsed here.<sup>89</sup>

Key to an understanding of the connections between *Beowulf*, *Grettis saga*, and other analogous texts is the recognition that the material under consideration divides into two distinct episodes:

<sup>84</sup> Guðni Jónsson 1936: 249–64. See Harris 1973; Orchard 2003b: 164–6.

<sup>85</sup> For further proposed parallels, see Stedman 1913–14: 25; Benson 1970: 20–30; Orchard 2003b: 140–68.

<sup>86</sup> See Chambers 1959, esp. pp. 54–61, 451–503; Stitt 1992.

<sup>87</sup> Slay 1960: 78.

<sup>88</sup> *Gesta Danorum* 2.6.11 (Friis-Jensen and Zeeberg 2005: 1, 168).

<sup>89</sup> Scandinavian analogues to *Beo* have been the subject of numerous studies, the more seminal of which include Lawrence 1928; Chambers 1929; 1959; Garmonsway and Simpson 1968; Liberman 1986; Stitt 1992; Fjalldal 1998.



(‘The light gleamed, a light shone within, just as heaven’s candel shines brightly from heaven.’)

The hero now turns his attention to Grendel’s corpse, which he decapitates in revenge for the slaughter the monster has inflicted among the Danes (1572–90). The function of the light is unclear. While it could be conceived as a divine celebration of the hero’s victory, this reading casts a dubious light on Beowulf’s subsequent attack on Grendel, as though this part of the episode is not worthy of the same praise. At best, it would therefore be a qualified approval of Beowulf’s deeds.

With the help of a group of Scandinavian narratives including not only *Grettis saga* but also *Orms þátr Stórolfssonar*, *Harðar saga ok Hólmverjar*, *Samsons saga fagra*, and *Gull-Þóris saga*, as well as the folktale *Gullbrá og Skeggi* recorded in modern times, Chambers has demonstrated, following Lawrence’s lead, that valid explanations for all these obscure motifs are readily available in Scandinavian parallels. Firstly, several of these texts describe a fight in a cave behind a waterfall, a setting that explains how a pool combines with a descent of water, how an underwater cave can be dry, and also how blood from a fight in a dry cave ends up on the water surface.<sup>95</sup> Several of the analogues furthermore tell of a bright light or other supernatural intervention that weakens the opponent, puts him to sleep, or turns her to stone,<sup>96</sup> while in *Gull-Þóris saga* it may furthermore be understood to highlight the swords with which the cave-dwellers may be defeated (ch. 4).<sup>97</sup> The sword-motif likewise occurs in *Beowulf*. In the hero’s retelling of his fight to Hrothgar, he makes no mention of the light, but he attributes his victory to God’s intervention in showing him a sword on the wall by which he is able to overcome Grendel’s mother (1659–66, cf. 1557–69). With the help of the Scandinavian analogues, a plausible reconstruction of these elements can be achieved: it is by way of the radiant light that God helps the hero overcome the monster, in illuminating the sword and perhaps also in the monster’s incapacitation.<sup>98</sup> Finally, Chambers proposed that *Beowulf* has incorporated two different versions of the hero’s entrance, one forced and one by his own power. The former tradition

<sup>95</sup> See *Beo* 1591–9. For this argument, see Lawrence 1912: 231–45; Klaeber 1950: 182–3, commentary to lines 1357 ff.; Chambers 1959: 52–3, 451–72.

<sup>96</sup> *Harð* ch. 15 (Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991: 42); *OStór* ch. 9 (Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991: 417); *Gullbrá og Skeggi* (Jón Árnason 1862–64: 1, 150).

<sup>97</sup> Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991: 187–8.

<sup>98</sup> Chambers 1959: 466–8.

is represented by *Samsons saga*, the latter by *Grettis saga*, *Gull-Póris saga*, and *Gullbrá og Skeggi*.<sup>99</sup> In view of such repeated and plausible illumination of *Beowulf* by its Scandinavian analogues, it seems that the underlying narrative of the cave-episode was better preserved in Scandinavia than in England.

Although variants of the cave-fight may thus shed light on the spread and development of the larger shared narrative, seasonality in *Grettis saga* and *Hrólfs saga* finds its most regular expression in the motif of the haunted hall. As it happens, there seems to be nothing in *Beowulf*'s treatment of this motif that benefits from comparison with the Scandinavian material. One cannot therefore single out elements within this motif known only from Scandinavian sources and assume that the *Beowulf*-poet was familiar with them.

It is generally at this point in the narrative that many critics admit influence from a folktale with a strong Irish presence known as the Hand and the Child. This tale tells how a visiting hero defends a royal hall against a monster in the habit of stealing infants from this particular hall by sticking his arm through its chimney or window. The protagonist resists a spell of sleep and tears or hacks off the arm. The next day, he follows the trail of blood to the waterside dwelling of the kidnapper (who sometimes lives there with a female companion), kills him and rescues the children.<sup>100</sup> Although the relevance of this tale as an analogue to the texts under study is not limited to the hall-episode, the particular appeal of the Irish tale to readings of *Beowulf* consists in the same benefits of rational illumination outlined above for the Scandinavian counterparts to the cave-episode. In *Beowulf*, there is no particular reason why the hero should wrench off the intruder's arm, nor is this an expected outcome of hand-to-hand combat. Less explicable still is the *Geatas*' apparent decision to sleep through their long-anticipated hall defence without so much as keeping a guard. Both these details are satisfactorily explained by certain versions of the folktale, as the arm is the only part of the kidnapper exposed to attack, and all the residents of the hall except one are overcome by sleep against their will, often through a magic spell.<sup>101</sup> Since there was a Scandinavian presence in both Ireland and England

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<sup>99</sup> Chambers 1959: 470–2, 476.

<sup>100</sup> Kittredge 1903: 223–31; Scowcroft 1999: 23. For a detailed study, see Scowcroft 1982.

<sup>101</sup> Murphy 1953: 186; Scowcroft 1999: 23.

for the greater part of the ninth to eleventh centuries, moreover, the possibility of an Irish node in the Defence of the Hall tradition in no way challenges the connection found between *Beowulf* and Scandinavian texts.

When the Hand and Child-narratives are studied for their structure, it quickly becomes clear that seasonality plays no significant role in the Irish tradition. The versions of the tale that contain both of the central elements, namely the hand and the child, tend strongly to situate the abduction on the day the child is born,<sup>102</sup> or sometimes around its first birthday.<sup>103</sup> There is usually no explicit mention of the time of year, nor any evidence that the narrator considers this of any relevance to the tale. The fact that the protagonist usually arrives by ship and pokes himself with a hot iron to stay awake at night should thus not be taken to mean that the narrative is set at a time when the seafaring season and the period of active nighttime heating overlap, as these elements are not introduced for their seasonal value.

It should be noted that a Welsh version of the narrative exists that does rely on seasonal recurrence. In *Pwyll pendeuic Dyuet* (c. 1100),<sup>104</sup> we hear of a child disappearing only once, with inclusion of the sleep-motif. However, the story goes on to tell how a mare gives birth annually during the night leading up to the first of May, but the foal is always stolen before anyone gets to it. On the first May Night after the newborn child goes missing, the mare's owner Teirnon stays up to guard his property. Following a successful foaling, he sees an arm enter through a window intending to steal the foal; Teirnon cuts it off using his sword. He now finds the lost infant, which by implication has likewise been carried off by the horse thief.<sup>105</sup> Here is thus an analogue to *Beowulf*'s hall-episode that makes use of an annual pattern, like the similar episodes in *Grettis saga* and *Hrólfs saga kraka*, but centred around a different season. Since this version has considerably more plot complexity not paralleled in *Beowulf*, however, the Old English poem is more likely to rely on a variant closer to the

<sup>102</sup> Thus, for instance, the versions in MacInnes 1890: 32–67, at 58–67; Campbell 1891: 204–10; MacDougall 1891: 1–9; Curtin 1894: 438–62. See further Kittredge 1903: 224, 227.

<sup>103</sup> e.g. Kennedy 1891: 200–5.

<sup>104</sup> Thomson 1957: xii–xvi.

<sup>105</sup> Thomson 1957: 17–19. This analogue was pointed out to me by David Klausner (personal communication, 30 April 2012).

surviving Irish analogues, and thus probably with no mention of seasons.

In the light of the Irish lack of seasonal motifs, it is significant that an Icelandic attestation of the Hand and Child-tale makes full use of the supernatural connotations of Christmas Eve, exactly like the hauntings in the sagas: here, a king is robbed of one of his daughters every Christmas Eve.<sup>106</sup> In its larger structure, this narrative is a version of an internationally known tale referred to as Skilful Companions, in which the monster is overcome by a group of characters, each of which has one skill required for the operation.<sup>107</sup> None of the Irish witnesses to this configuration of the narrative makes reference to the seasons.<sup>108</sup> However, Skilful Companions has no witnesses predating the mid-thirteenth century,<sup>109</sup> while arguably analogous tales with neither children nor companions can be traced back to the eighth century.<sup>110</sup> It thus seems that a Skilful Companions-version of the Hand and Child-tale made its way north to Iceland only after the Viking Age. The absence of a winter theme in the Irish variants suggests that it was in Iceland that the narrative became a Christmas tale. Since the Defence of the Hall-motif is aseasonal both in *Beowulf* and in Irish folktales, the most natural explanation is that the hauntings of *Grettis saga* and related Scandinavian texts likewise received their seasonality in the Scandinavian branch only, while *Pwyll pendeuic Dyuet* developed a seasonal quality separately.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Poestion 1884: 285–9.

<sup>107</sup> See Kittredge 1903: 226–7; Scowcroft 1999: 23–5.

<sup>108</sup> Most of the versions cited above (n. 102) are representatives of Skilful Companions.

<sup>109</sup> Carney 1955: 374.

<sup>110</sup> Scowcroft 1999: 23–4.

<sup>111</sup> Contrast Tepper 2001, which proposes that the material shared between *Bwf* and *Gr* derives from an Indo-European tradition surfacing also in the Iranian branch; the Yuletide chronology is central to Tepper's argument. In addition, it should be noted that a Welsh tale published in 1935 tells of a burglar of gigantic stature fleeing to a cave behind a waterfall after one of his victims wrenches off his arm; this episode takes place 'one winter's night when the snow was falling' (Davies 1935). Puhvel asserts that the existence of the Welsh tale 'has been noted since the seventeenth century' (1979: 7, n. 28), but he gives no source for this claim. Davies herself assumed the tale had undergone change over time, but she believed its landscape to be authentic (1935). If the tale in question is to be considered a faithful retelling of a medieval folktale, its value as an analogue to the *Beowulf*–*Grettla* material can hardly be overstated. However, the fact that only a single witness to it has been recorded, and only several decades after the *Beowulf*–*Grettla* analogue was discovered, renders it probable that this tale is a modern retelling of the Sandhaugar-narrative. Even if the tale represents a genuine medieval witness to the material, there is no reason to assume that the seasonal structure is cognate with that of *Gr*. The resemblance is superficial: rather than establishing a cyclical seasonal pattern, the Welsh source makes reference to one winter's night only. Moreover, at an earlier point in the tale the robber is seen to enjoy the sun in the hills, contradicting both the Icelandic insistence on winter activity and the consistent reliance on the dark of night in the sagas as well as in *Bwf*. Finally, snowy winter nights are more commonly used to determine the mood of modern than of medieval English stories, suggesting again that the

Following the above reconstruction, it will here be assumed that the Scandinavian tradition is more authoritative for the cave-episode of *Beowulf*'s ancestral tradition, while Irish tales preserve critical elements of an earlier stage of the defence of the hall. However, it should be remembered that such general statements veil the complex dynamics by which traditional narratives are shaped. This may be illustrated with the help of a motivational question: why does Grendel attack Heorot?

The lack of the child-motif in *Beowulf* has sometimes been used as evidence against the Irish hypothesis: if the Grendel-episode derives from a Hand and Child-tale, why is only one of the two central elements represented, and imperfectly so?<sup>112</sup> In response, one can attempt to redefine the narrative core of the tradition,<sup>113</sup> or simply refer to the fact that children are not a stock ingredient of Old English poetry, so that the Anglo-Saxon redactor may have decided to leave them out.<sup>114</sup> More intriguing than this last negative, however, is the poem's positive identification of Grendel's behavioural motivation. With children left out of the equation, the creature's attacks are triggered by the sounds of merrymaking:

86 Ða se ellengæst earfoðlice  
 þrage geþolode, se þe in þystrum bad,  
 þæt he dogora gehwam dream gehyrde  
 89 hludne in healle.

(‘Then the powerful spirit, he who waited in the dark, for a time endured with difficulty that he heard loud revelry in the hall every day.’)

This motivation has its closest analogues in the Judaeo-Christian tradition of Satan deprived of his initial glory. In a version of the narrative prominent in Anglo-Saxon England, Satan's punishment for

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seasonal reference is not medieval even if the tale itself is. Thus although there seems to be no way of proving that the seasonality of *Gr* was not a feature of the source it shares with *Bwf*, the most straightforward explanation is that the winter-motif is a Scandinavian addition that did not make it to the British Isles until modern times.

<sup>112</sup> Kittredge 1903: 228–31; Chambers 1959: 478–84.

<sup>113</sup> Stitt 1992; Scowcroft 1999: 24–5.

<sup>114</sup> It may be noted that the graves of early Anglo-Saxon infants are underattested and contain relatively few grave goods, which has been interpreted as an indication that social status and emotional attachment may have been postponed until an age at which survival rates improved. On the other hand, graves of children as young as two years old begin to take on a considerably more adult form (Härke 1997: 127–8; Stoodley 2000: 458–9), a threshold that is certainly not reflected in the literary corpus. Based on the presence of grave goods, the age of transition to adulthood has been most plausibly defined as sixteen to eighteen years of age for both sexes (Härke 1997: 128; Stoodley 2000: 460–1). Law codes begin to assign responsibility to children aged between ten and fifteen years (Crawford 1999: 175–7). Since the societal focus of heroic poetry is often on men and women taking active responsibility through force, governance, or counsel (cf. Chance 1986: 1–11; Hill 2000; Porter 2001–02), it is unsurprising to find that children who were buried without weapons and who bore no legal responsibility receive little mention in this genre.

his rebellion was confinement in hell while the resulting space in heaven was set apart for mankind's habitation.<sup>115</sup> The Old English *Genesis B* places particular emphasis on Satan's consequent envy of Adam, whose happiness he cannot bear:

364                                    Pæt is me sorga mæst,  
    þæt Adam sceal, þe wæs of eorðan geworht,  
    minne stronglican stol behealdan,  
 367 wesan him on wynne, and we þis wite þolien,  
    hearm on þisse helle.

(‘That is the greatest of my sorrows, that Adam, who was made of earth, will govern my strong throne, live in happiness, and we suffer this punishment, injury in this hell.’)

It is this envy that motivates Satan to lead mankind into discord with its maker, purposefully destroying the harmony of Eden just as Grendel destroys the harmony of Heorot, implicitly likened to Eden by the scop's song of creation at the hall's inauguration (*GenB* 395–762; *Beo* 86–98).<sup>116</sup> Indeed, the passage in *Beowulf* is so constructed that the joyous life and its disruption by *an feond on helle* (‘a certain fiend in hell’), though strictly linked to the Danish setting by reference to *dryhtguman* and Grendel, reads at first sight as a continuation of the creation account, describing the joys of Eden and their termination at Satan's hands (*Beo* 99–102).<sup>117</sup> Eden is only an archetype of the devil's envy, however; the notion that he envies human enjoyment in general<sup>118</sup> and is particularly averse to the joys of divine worship<sup>119</sup> was widespread in the Middle Ages. This theological tradition thus seems to have replaced the monster's folk-traditional motive for the invasion of the hall.

There is another group of texts, however, which shares with the Grendel-episode an antagonism between the dangerous supernatural and the sound of hall-revelry. In the sagas, this pattern is commonly found in accounts of winter hauntings, receiving its fullest treatment in the Greenlandic marooning of *Flóamanna saga* (ch. 22).<sup>120</sup> Throughout this episode, Þorgils is contrasted with his fellow-castaway Jósteinn. The shelter they build is partitioned in two, Þorgils commanding half the

<sup>115</sup> Haines 1997.

<sup>116</sup> Taylor 1966; Lee 1972: 171–223; Helder 1987.

<sup>117</sup> So also Godden 1986: 215–16.

<sup>118</sup> Emerson 1921.

<sup>119</sup> Magennis 1996: 72.

<sup>120</sup> Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991: 282–6.

party and Jósteinn the other. The narrator dwells repeatedly on their contrast in governance, consistently portraying Þorgils as more industrious, judicious, and pious. Significantly, Þorgils tells his men to be quiet in the evenings, while Jósteinn spends the nights making merry with his men:

Þorgils [...] bað sína menn vera hljóðláta ok siðsama á kveldum ok halda vel trú sína. [...] Þat er sagt, at Jósteinn ok hans menn gerðu mikit um sik ok höfðu náttleika með háreysti.

(‘Þorgils [...] asked his men to be quiet and well behaved in the evenings and keep their faith well. [...] It is said that Jósteinn and his men made a lot of noise and played loud games at night.’)

Þorgils specifically repeats his injunction as Christmas approaches, adding that they should go to bed early, and he warns his men a third time, after disease strikes; in the E-text, he uses the terms *hljóðlátr* (‘quiet’) and *siðsamr* (‘well-behaved’) in all three instances, which occur in the space of 35 edited lines.<sup>121</sup> Religious piety also plays a significant role in the contrast. Although his recent conversion is described as personal conviction, contrasting especially with the attitudes of Jósteinn and his wife Þorgerðr, Þorgils takes firm pastoral command of his own men. This is apparent not only in the orders he gives his company in the evenings, but also in the determination with which he cuts all ties with Þórr, leading the renounced deity to cause their shipwrecking in the first place (chs 20–1).<sup>122</sup> Þorgils’s religious choices ultimately pay off: as the winter hauntings commence, Jósteinn’s men fall ill and die off one by one, returning as revenants, until by mid-Gói all the male members of his company are dead. None of Þorgils’s men dies, and the hauntings concentrate in Jósteinn’s half of the shelter, especially in the K-text. The E-version makes the same claim, but also states that the revenants all go after Þorgils for a time. In both versions, the protagonist’s successful endurance of these afflictions gives the narrative a distinct hagiographical flavour. Þorgils’s success in warding off the revenants is naturally understood to be a consequence of his renunciation of Þórr and his sense of discipline, suggestive of that of a responsible abbot. When in the E-text the reverse happens, this makes him no less eligible for Christian celebration, as evil spirits will naturally attack God’s favourites, as they did Guthlac; the distinguishing characteristic is only that they will not be successful.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>121</sup> Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991: 283–5; the E-text is found in the lower deck.

<sup>122</sup> Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991: 274–81.

<sup>123</sup> See Felix’s *Vita Guthlaci* in Colgrave 1956 or the Old English *GuthAB* in Krapp and Dobbie 1936: 49–88. On innocence, guilt, and demonic visitations, see Adams 2007: 95–8.

If Þorgils's stoic perseverance is to be regarded in a theological context, such hagiographical conventions do not explain why the supernatural threatens his fellow-castaways who live irreverent lives and spend the nights making merry. Where the *dream* ('merriment') that triggers Grendel's attacks in *Beowulf* is strongly religious in character, the pious thing to do in *Flóamanna saga* is evidently to engage in a more subdued expression of piety in the evenings by keeping quiet and turning in early. In fact, although a Christian motif provides the intradiegetic occasion for the marooning, the hauntings that follow are reminiscent rather of Scandinavian folk-tradition. It thus seems that a folktale haunting like those described in section 3.1 has here been developed into a religious exemplum. Indeed, keeping quiet and going to bed early are common measures against hauntings in the sagas, one or both of which occur also in chapter 13 of *Flóamanna saga*<sup>124</sup> as well as in *Heiðarvíga saga* chapter 9<sup>125</sup> and *Hrólfs saga* chapter 23.<sup>126</sup> All these episodes are explicitly situated in winter, and none is given a theological interpretation. It is certainly possible that they derive from the Christian motif of diabolical envy, but this is not evident in any of the motif's occurrences; in fact, as the only passage that gives it a Christian context, the Greenlandic episode of *Flóamanna saga* moves the Christian affiliation from the revellers to the quiet. It is perhaps more likely that the Icelandic pattern is a folktale-motif developed independently of Christian tradition. In view of the other parallels between Icelandic hauntings and the Grendel narrative, this raises the question whether Grendel's motivation was shaped by a similar tradition before receiving its theological burden. The matter cannot be taken beyond the realm of speculation, but it suggests the complex interplay of traditional synthesis, a process likewise at play in the seasonal distribution of hauntings.

The more immediate relevance of this discussion to the seasonality of the Grendel-episode resides in the seasonal context of the Icelandic hauntings in question. If Grendel's antipathy to the sounds of feasting is not seasonally situated, its Icelandic parallels are exclusively attested in winter. This correspondence, which is suggestive of a shared tradition in the temporal extent of the hauntings, adds to *Beowulf*'s text-internal association between monstrous activity and the dark of night to suggest a

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<sup>124</sup> Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991: 255.

<sup>125</sup> Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938: 233.

<sup>126</sup> Slay 1960: 78.

faint trace of winter hauntings, if no more.

### 3.3 The Text-Internal Seasons of *Beowulf*

It was observed above that the central narrative of *Beowulf*, in which the protagonist takes on supernatural adversaries threatening the Danes and *Geatas*, makes no explicit use of a seasonal timeframe. As with the Irish Hand and Child-tales, one can make contextual inferences: here too, for instance, the hero arrives by ship on the day preceding his confrontation with the monster, which could be taken to suggest that the episode with Grendel and his mother does not take place in winter. However, it would be misguided to make such connections where the author expends no effort to associate the action with any time of year. Even the *hrinde bearwas* ('frosted groves', 1363) overhanging the *mere* are not indicative of the time of year, since Hrothgar describes them as part of the landscape permanently surrounding the monsters' habitat, which thus seems to take no part in the succession of the seasons (see above, pp. 87–8). The closest the poet comes to making a stable seasonal connection is in his association of nearly all his monsters with the dark of night (see above, section 2.5), which is of course more strongly concentrated in winter than in summer, both in England and in the poem's Scandinavian setting. However, references to seasonal progression are not altogether absent from the poem. An analysis of the relevant passages will make it possible to compare *Beowulf*'s use of seasonal themes with that in Old Norse as well as other Old English literature.

Like the Old English elegies, *Beowulf* makes extensive use of the figurative connotations of the seasons. Not a single passage in the poem has been generally understood as exclusively descriptive of the natural progression of the year. Nonliteral implications have already been noted with regard to water temperature and the landscape of the poem's monsters, which in the previous chapter were found to represent the landscape of winter rather than the season's recurrence in the solar year. They are equally present, however, in *Beowulf*'s occasional references to cyclical time. The only such passage to make ostensible mention of the seasonality of the action, thus using the seasons as a structuring device, is the Finnsburh-episode. Following the battle at Finn's hall, a truce is estab-

lished between Hengest, leader of the Danes, and Finn, who commands the Frisians in this narrative, and oaths of loyalty are taken from the former. The latter's extended army, it seems, then disperses across Frisia to spend the winter in their own homes,<sup>127</sup> or perhaps warriors from both sides who are not part of either immediate retinue find winter quarters across the region.<sup>128</sup> Hengest and his retainers, however, have no choice but to spend the winter with their one-time enemy Finn now that the seafaring season has ended:

1125 Gewiton him ða wigend wica neosian  
 freondum befeallen, Frysland geseon,  
 hamas ond heaburh. Hengest ða gyt  
 1128 wælfagne winter wunode mid Finne;  
 he unhlitme eard gemunde,  
 þeah þe ne meahte on mere drifan  
 1131 hringedstefnan — holm storme weol,  
 won wið winde, winter yþe beleac  
 isgebinde — oþ ðæt oþer com  
 1134 gear in geardas, swa nu gyt deð,  
 þa ðe syngales sele bewitiað,  
 wuldortorhtan weder. Ða wæs winter scacen,  
 1137 fæger foldan bearm. Fundode wrecca,  
 gist of geardum; he to gymwræce  
 swiðor þohte þonne to sælade,  
 1140 gif he torngemot þurhteon mihte,  
 þæt he Eotena bearm inne gemunde  
 — swa he ne forwyrnde worldrædenne —  
 1143 þonne him Hunlafing hildeleoman,  
 billa selest on bearm dyde,  
 þæs wæron mid Eotenum ecge cuðe.  
 1146 Swylce ferhðfrecan Fin eft begeat  
 sweordbealo sliðen æt his selfes ham,  
 siþðan grimne gripe Guðlaf ond Oslaf  
 1149 æfter sæsiðe sorge mændon,  
 ætwiton weana dæl; ne meahte wæfre mod  
 forhabban in hreþre. Ða wæs heal roden  
 1152 feonda feorum, swilce Fin slægen,  
 cyning on corþre, ond seo cwen numen.  
 Sceotend Scyldinga to scypon feredon  
 1155 eal ingesteald eorðcyninges,  
 swylce hie æt Finnes ham findan meahton  
 sigla searogimma. Hie on sælade

<sup>127</sup> So, e.g., Fry 1974: 42–3, commentary to line 1125; Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008: 187, commentary to lines 1125 ff.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. the discussions on the identities of the *wigend* in Williams 1924: 78–82; Girvan 1941: 18; Malone 1943: 274–5 and n. 14; 1945: 83–4; Tolkien and Bliss 1982: 115–17.

1158 drihtlice wif to Denum feredon,  
læddon to leodum.

(‘Then warriors, bereft of friends, went to Frisia in search of lodgings, estates and the main town. Hengest then still dwelt with Finn for a bloodstained winter. He keenly<sup>129</sup> remembered his homeland, although he could not sail his ring-prowed ship on the sea — the ocean welled up with storm, it strove against the wind; the winter locked up the waves with a bond of ice — until another summer<sup>130</sup> came to the dwelling-places, as it still does now, those gloriously bright weathers which perpetually observe their proper times. Then the winter was past, the bosom of the earth beautiful. The exile, the visitor was eager to leave that dwelling-place. He thought more keenly of avenging his injury than of a sea-voyage, whether he would be able to bring about a meeting motivated by anger, because inwardly he remembered the sons of the Jutes — since he had not refused rulership — when Hunlafing placed the battle-light in his lap, the best of swords, whose edges were known among the Jutes. Thus a cruel sword-death then came upon bold-spirited Finn in his own home, after Guðlaf and Oslaf remembered the grim attack, made mention of their grief by the seaside, blamed him for their share of woes; the restless mind could not restrain itself in their breast. Then the hall was reddened with enemy bodies, and Finn killed, the king among his troop, and the queen taken. The Scylding-warriors carried all the king’s hall possessions to their ships, such precious gems of treasures as they were able to find at Finn’s home. They took the royal woman on a sea journey to the Danes, led her to their people.’)

The restrictions on travelling here posed by winter influence the social action of the narrative in a way most typical of Old Icelandic prose. Virtually all the sagas of Icelanders and contemporary sagas, as well as many legendary sagas, make use of such seasonal limitations to structure their narratives (see above, section 1.5). The specific element of tensions during a winter stay is likewise mirrored in the sagas. In chapter 50 of *Grettis saga*, Grettir asks for winter lodging at Reykjahólar, where the foster-brothers Þorgeirr and Þormóðr are also staying. Although they try to avoid confrontation out of respect for the farmer, Þorgeirr and Grettir are engaged in constant rivalry during the winter, and only the farmer’s interference keeps them from fighting it out to the death.<sup>131</sup> The same motif is explored with a different timeframe in *Fóstbræðra saga* when the same Þorgeirr finds a single night’s lodging on a farm where a vagrant named Butraldi is also staying. The narrator describes to great effect the tension between the two men as they share a meal, while similarly emphasising the winter

<sup>129</sup> I assume with Fulk, Bjork, and Niles (2008: 187–8, commentary to lines 1128b–9a) that the adverb *unhlitme* could by this time be used without invoking its literal sense ‘not assigned by lot, i.e. voluntarily’ to mean ‘keenly, eagerly’.

<sup>130</sup> For a discussion of Old English *gear* denoting the warm season in a two-season taxonomy, see Anderson 1997: 238–9, 255–8.

<sup>131</sup> Guðni Jónsson 1936: 159–63; cf. the brief account in the Hauksbók redaction of *Fbr*, ch. 13 (Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 191).

conditions that effectively lock them in. Here too the farmer, now portrayed as a cowardly miser, asks that they do not make trouble while at his farm. Accordingly, the two keep themselves in check until Butraldi leaves the next morning, at which point Porgeirr intercepts and kills him (ch. 6).<sup>132</sup> The passage in *Beowulf*, though itself surely unrelated to these episodes, may reflect a cognate narrative tradition in its structural and social deployment of the winter season.

In its figurative and connotative uses of winter, however, *Beowulf* stands firmly in the Old English poetic tradition. Although the historical or legendary sources of the Finnsburh-episode may well have contained the surviving seasonal structure from their inception, *Beowulf* at least does not limit its relevance to practical considerations. No agreement exists regarding the interpretation of the phrase *wælfah winter*,<sup>133</sup> but the seasonal imagery of the wider passage, including six lines devoted exclusively to the quality and progression of the seasons, is rich in nonliteral connotations. Two lines of reasoning may here be singled out. On the one hand, the 'binding' quality of winter (1132–3) has been thought to extend into the sphere of social action, as the truce is reached after the end of the seafaring season and broken as soon as fair weather returns.<sup>134</sup> Conversely, the violent sea-storm (1131–3) has frequently been understood to mirror Hengest's emotional state by way of pathetic fallacy during this winter that prevents him from seeking revenge.<sup>135</sup> These readings are not at odds as long as it is agreed that the former pertains to action, the latter to the psychological experience. However, the psychological reading relies on a degree of interpretation, as the text does not strictly indicate that Hengest experiences vengeful emotions during the winter. Rather, it states that he is keen to go home when prevented by the season to do so (1129–33), but at the return of the naval season his desire for his homeland is surpassed by his thirst for revenge (1137–40). Thus rather than mirror Hengest's anger, it may be proposed that the storm imagery cleverly taps into the winter seascape associated with exile (as in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*), forcefully illustrating Hengest's

<sup>132</sup> Björn K. Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 142–7.

<sup>133</sup> Suggestions have ranged from 'bloodstained' (here adopted) to 'hostile to moving waters', i.e. 'cold' (for an overview, see the commentary to line 1128 in Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008: 187).

<sup>134</sup> Burlin 1974: 81–2; Anderson 1997: 256–7.

<sup>135</sup> Williams 1924: 89–90; Shippey 1972: 23–4; Burlin 1974: 81–2; Fry 1974: 23, 43–4, commentary to lines 1133–6; Vickrey 1977; Anderson 1997: 256–7.



the blade to melt or indeed burn up ('forbarn brodenmæl', 1616,<sup>137</sup> confirmed in 1666–8), although the poisonous quality of its victim is given as an additional explanation (1615–17).<sup>138</sup> Whatever the role of the poison, heat is the default means by which iron is dissolved, and the heat of the monster's blood certainly strengthens the analogy with the melting of ice in spring.

Although the poet does not here use a description like *wuldortorht weder* to express an affection for the spring season, the loosening-imagery still suggests that the passing of winter is thought of as a form of relief. Indeed, in view of the cold habitat of the monsters, the frosty landscape surrounding them, and the fact that their reign of terror has just ended, the spring simile may be understood to extend to the larger narrative. The winter of Grendel's supremacy that afflicted the Danes and 'bound' their hearts with fear has passed; a time of metaphorical spring has arrived. Of course, no worldly spring lasts indefinitely; accordingly, the poet announces future afflictions for the Danes through his hints at discord to come (81–5), a pattern of rise and fall that recurs throughout the poem as one of its most persistent themes.

### 3.4 The Bonds of Winter

Both of the above-mentioned descriptions in *Beowulf* of the passing of winter make use of an image of remarkable popularity in Old English poetry, namely the bonds of winter. This metaphor, which describes water or land as fettered by the winter weather, has been most fully explored by Martin (1969), who demonstrated that the motif is not in fact exclusive to Old English poetry, as a range of classical and medieval Latin poetic and also prose texts employ images of striking similarity. Many of these texts are known to have been available in Anglo-Saxon England. Thus even Isidore's widely

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and his mother die in the cave, of course, and although the masculine demonstrative is here used, the same form is applied to Grendel's mother elsewhere (1260, 1497). Although apparently dead by this time, Grendel is the sword's last victim, suggesting that the reference is to him, and this is the most commonly held view (e.g. Orchard 2003a: 135; Anlezark 2007: 107–8; Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008: 210, commentary to lines 1616b f.; contrast Köberl 1987: 125). Since Grendel and his mother are portrayed as the same category of being, however (e.g. 1345–61), the question is irrelevant: it is after Beowulf completes his feat by disposing of both monsters that the sword, having fulfilled its task, loses its functionality (cf. Viswanathan 1979: 361).

<sup>137</sup> 'The pattern-welded sword burned up.'

<sup>138</sup> A parallel to poisonous monster blood melting iron is given in Orchard 2003a: 135.



(‘Abject I went from there, winter-sorrowful, across the binding of the waves; sad I sought the hall of a dispenser of treasure.’)

It should be pointed out that *wintercearig* could certainly have the pragmatic sense ‘anxious about the coming of winter’, both because long-distance seafaring was dangerous at this time of year<sup>144</sup> and because winter constituted a warrior’s off-season, not to mention that homelessness is most distressing in winter. However, the seasonal element in the compound seems also to suggest that the narrator’s state of mind merits comparison with this season, whose association with grief is readily apparent throughout the poem (see above, section 2.3).<sup>145</sup> In this capacity, *wintercearig* undergoes variation with the unambiguous *dreorig* (‘sad’) and is the third in a series of rare *-cearig* compounds, following *modcearig* (line 2, ‘sorrowful at heart’) and *earmcearig* (line 20, ‘wretched and sorrowful’);<sup>146</sup> the bound waters further reinforce this mood.

The otherwise unique noun phrase *wapema gebind* (‘binding of the waves’) recurs in line 57, suggesting once again the poet’s central interest in this binding-image. While not entirely transparent, this concept has been understood by many critics as a circumlocution for ice or the freezing of the water traversed, thereby contributing to the winter imagery already in place.<sup>147</sup> Whether this is its intended reference, however, is far from certain. This interpretation is indeed suggested by the analogous ‘winter yþe beleac | isgebinde’<sup>148</sup> of the Finnsburh-episode (*Beo* 1132–3), and rendered likely by the general emphasis on cold and winter throughout *The Wanderer*. On the other hand, *Andreas* 519 speaks of God as ‘se ðe brimu bindeð’,<sup>149</sup> recalling the creator’s agency in separating land and sea; at least one authoritative editor has therefore understood *gebind* as ‘expanse’.<sup>150</sup> Analogy between the *Andreas*-passage and *wapema gebind* in *The Wanderer* is encouraged by the observations

<sup>144</sup> McCormick 2001: 450–61.

<sup>145</sup> Whitbread 1938: 367; Stanley 1955: 436; Malmberg 1973: 220–1; Orchard 2002: 10–11. The interpretation ‘sad with old age’, relying on the seasonal analogue to the four ages of man and listed as an alternative reading by Sweet (from the first edition, in 1876 (s.v. *winter-cearig*) to the fourteenth, in 1959 (ed. by Onions, s.v. *winter-cearig*)), is unnecessarily indirect.

<sup>146</sup> Orchard 2002: 10–11.

<sup>147</sup> Rosier 1964: 367–8; Dunning and Bliss 1969: 42; Malmberg 1970: 98; Cook 1996: 130.

<sup>148</sup> ‘Winter closed off the waves with the binding of ice.’

<sup>149</sup> ‘He who binds the waters.’

<sup>150</sup> Leslie 1966: 70, commentary to line 24; cf. Pope 1966, s.v. *je-bind*.

that one cannot sail a frozen sea<sup>151</sup> and birds cannot bathe in one.<sup>152</sup> These objections, of course, become irrelevant if the binding is taken as less than categorical, so that the poem describes a body of water containing drift ice. Although the point cannot perhaps be settled to full satisfaction, it will provisionally be assumed that this is the landscape intended.

The remaining occurrence of the binding-motif in *The Wanderer* is more explicitly connected with winter, but it is not now the sea that is bound:

102 Hrið hreosende hrusan bindeð,  
wintres woma, þonne won cymeð,  
nipeð nihtscua, norþan onsendeð  
105 hreo hæglfare hæleþum on andan.

(‘The raging storm, blast of winter, binds the earth; when the darkness comes, when the shade of night grows dark, it angrily sends a savage cargo of hail to men from the north.’)

Martin in his article is mostly interested in the binding of water, which occurs in the two passages from *Beowulf* (i.e. Finnsburh and the melting sword) and twice in *The Wanderer* if *wapema gebind* is so interpreted. Another point of interest for Martin is the function of ice as a bridge, occurring in *Andreas* 1260–2 and *Maxims I* 71–2.<sup>153</sup> The Latin sources, however, are not so constrained, as Isidore’s etymology of *gelu* demonstrates: the soil can perfectly well be bound, since it too freezes. Nevertheless, this image does not fully explain the passage in *The Wanderer*, which specifies that it is the winter storm, not the frost, that binds the earth. Moreover, *The Wanderer* is not alone in this detail. *The Seafarer*, which shares many other particulars with *The Wanderer*,<sup>154</sup> contains a similar passage:

31 Nap nihtscua, norþan sniwde,  
hrim hrusan bond, hægl feol on eorþan,  
corna caldast.

(‘The shade of night grew dark; it snowed from the north; hoarfrost bound the earth; hail fell on the earth, the coldest of grains.’<sup>155</sup>)

<sup>151</sup> Greentree 2002: 308. The remark by the same author that waves cannot be frozen ignores the metonymic qualities of Old English verse.

<sup>152</sup> Leslie 1966: 70, n. to line 24; the birds in question occur in line 47.

<sup>153</sup> Ed. by Krapp and Dobbie 1936: 156–63.

<sup>154</sup> See, e.g., Stanley 1955; Calder 1971; Green 1975; Klein 1975; Woolf 1975; Cornell 1981; Orchard 2002: 19–20.

<sup>155</sup> This description of hail is paralleled in Old Norse as well as elsewhere in Old English: cf. *MRune* 25 ‘H byþ hwitust

Here hoarfrost is specified as the binding agent, although the motif occurs in between references to snow and hail. Since hoarfrost as well as snow can be thought of as visible evidence of frost, the passage need not be at variance with the Latin tradition. *Andreas* too specifies precipitation, here snow, as the material with which the earth is bound ('snaƿ eorðan band | wintergeworþum', 1255–6). What is more, in the verse *Solomon and Saturn II*<sup>156</sup> snow binds the fruits of the earth:

124 Ac forhwon fealleð se snaw, foldan behydeð,  
 bewrihð wyrta cið, wæstmas getigeð,  
 geðyð hie and geðreatað, ðæt hie ðrage beoð  
 127 cealde geclungne?

(‘But why does the snow fall, hide the earth, cover the shoots of plants, bind plants, press and oppress them, so that for a time they are congealed<sup>157</sup> with cold?’)

Reading these passages in conjunction, it seems that all present winter precipitation as the agent in the metaphor. To bind the earth, then, here means to cover the earth and suppress its production of plant life, but a connection with the effects of frost is also made. Snow, hail, and hoarfrost are thus treated as visible manifestations of frost.

The pluriformity of Old English winter-binding metaphors is demonstrated again by *The Seafarer*, which contributes the image of limbs gone numb with the bonds of frost:

8 Calde geprungen  
 wæron mine fet, forste gebunden,  
 caldum clommum.

(‘My feet were oppressed with cold, bound with frost, with cold bonds.’)

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corna’ (‘hail is the whitest of grains’, ed. by Dobbie 1942: 28–30); *Norwegian Rune Poem* 13 ‘\* er kaldastr korna’ (‘hail is the coldest of grains’, ed. by Finnur Jónsson 1912–15: A2.229–30); *Icelandic Rune Poem* 7 ‘h er kaldakorn’ (‘hail is a cold grain’, ed. by Page 1999: 27–30, and cf. the transcriptions on pp. 7, 11, 17, 19, 22). The image transcended metaphorical status at least in Scandinavia, where Old Norse *haglkorn* (lit. ‘hail-grain’) and its modern forms are attested as the default terms for ‘hailstone’, *korn* thus coming to refer to grain-shaped or grain-sized particles much like modern English *grain* (Fritzner 1883–96, s.v. *haglkorn*; Dahlerup and Jacobsen 1918–56, s.v. *hagl-korn*; *korn* sense 3; Mattisson 1898–, s.v. *hagel-korn*; *korn* sense 6; Mördur Árnason 2007, s.v. *korn* sense 2; *snjó-korn*; *OED* s.v. *grain*, n.<sup>1</sup>, senses under II).

<sup>156</sup> Ed. by Anlezark 2009: 78–95.

<sup>157</sup> Although the lexicographical consensus is to read (*ge-*)*clingan* in this passage as ‘shrivelled’ (BT s.v. *ge-clungen*; Clark Hall 1960, s.v. *clingan*; *DOE* s.v. *clingan*; Anlezark 2009 s.v. *geclingan*), the reading ‘congeal’, which is the primary sense of *clingan* in Clark Hall and *DOE*, accords better with the parallel verb *getigan* (‘bind’) and represents more accurately the state of hibernating plant life at a time of snowfall. That the object of the verb is hibernating plant life in general rather than *wæstmas* in the precise sense ‘fruits’ is suggested by the adverbial *þrage* (‘for a time’).

The phrase *cealde clommas* ('cold bonds') is also found in *Andreas* 1212 and *Christ C* 1629,<sup>158</sup> where it refers to the literal bonds of Saint Andrew and the literal or figurative bonds of hell respectively. There is thus no question that the bonds of winter as found in the Old English poetic corpus constitute too complex a motif to have been adopted from Latin literature in all its parts, although it is not impossible for several or all of its forms to have developed from a single borrowed figure of speech. What characterises the Old English motif as a whole, however, is an association with personal deprivation and subjective experience where the Latin metaphor is on the whole more disinterested.

Following its foreboding reference to *cealde clommas*, *Andreas* describes their application in great detail, again in a context of personal suffering like that of *The Wanderer* or *The Seafarer*. Here, however, the afflictions of winter are used to increase the heroism of Saint Andrew, who withstands its onslaught unaffected:

1253 Pa se halga wæs under heolstorscuwan,  
 eorl ellenheard, ondlange niht  
 searþancum beseted. Snaw eorðan band  
 1256 wintergeworpum; weder coledon  
 heardum hægelscurum, swylce hrim ond forst,  
 hare hildstapan, hæleða eðel  
 1259 lucon, leoda gesetu. Land wæron freorig  
 cealdum cylegicelum; clang wæteres þrym  
 ofer eastreamas; is brycgade  
 1262 blæce brimrade. Bliðheort wunode  
 eorl unforcuð, elnes gemyndig,  
 þrist ond þrohtheard in þreanedum  
 1265 wintercealdan niht.

(‘Then the saint, the courageous man, was beset with schemes in the dark throughout the night. Snow bound the earth with winter showers. The weathers cooled down with harsh hailstorms as well as rime and frost, grey warriors; they closed off the homeland of men, the home of the people. The lands were freezing with cold icicles; the sound of water resounded over the river-streams, ice formed a bridge across the dark riding of the waters. Joyful, the man remained unafraid, mindful of courage, confident and resistant to hardship in his afflictions throughout the winter-cold night.’)

This extended weather description, which has no parallel in the Greek and Latin analogues,<sup>159</sup> com-

<sup>158</sup> Ed. by Krapp and Dobbie 1936: 27–49.

<sup>159</sup> Brooks 1961: 107.

bines binding-imagery with a personification of rime and frost which may be compared with a personification in the *Menologium* discussed below as well as a parallel in the Old Norse *Fóstbræðra saga*.<sup>160</sup> In terms of elegy, the *Andreas*-passage not only invokes the binding image in a passage concerned with personal affliction, but the onslaught of winter mirroring the protagonist's condition similarly recalls a number of elegiac texts, particularly *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. A crucial difference is that Andrew does not allow the external violence to weaken his spirit, and it is in this that his sainthood resides.<sup>161</sup>

Even the *Menologium*, a sober poem describing the course of the year with reference to the major feasts of the Church, admits a sense of loss, not to mention a high degree of poetic elaboration, when it speaks of seasonal binding:

202 Syþþan wintres dæg wide ganged  
 on syx nihtum, sigelbeortne genimð  
 hærfest mid herige hrimes and snawes,  
 205 forste gefeterad, be frean hæse,  
 þæt us wunian ne moton wangas grene,  
 foldan freatuwe.

(‘Then, six nights later, Winter’s Night arrives far and wide. It captures sun-bright autumn with an army of rime and snow, fettered with frost by the Lord’s command, so that green fields, the ornaments of the earth, are unable to remain with us.’)

The metaphor here used is the most elaborate of binding images in Old English poetry, again containing a martial personification, now presenting autumn as a prisoner of war and bound with a fetter of frost. The elegiac element expressed in this passage is far less personal in nature than that found in the other instances of the motif, consisting instead in a communal regret, rare in Old English poetry, that the warmer season has passed. Given the thematic restraints on the genre of calendar poetry, it is remarkable that the poet makes space for elegiac elaboration at all.

<sup>160</sup> In the *Möðruvallabók* redaction, ‘fjúk ok frost gekk alla nóttina’ (‘fog and frost went (strictly ‘walked’) round all night’, Björn K. Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 136). The image is even more elaborate in *Hauksbók*, which reads ‘fjúk ok frost kveða helgaldra um húsþekjur ok sýna þeim, er út sjá, sinn snarpan leik með litilli mæði ok mikilli ógn’ (‘fog and frost sing a death-song around the roofs and show those looking out their rough game with little weariness and great terror’, n. 1 in the same edition). The personification is remarkable because authors in this genre are seldom given to affective language.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. Mora 1999: 236.

If the general displeasure expressed at winter's binding of nature is ever matched by a sense of relief at the corresponding loosening in spring, this does not receive proportionate expression. One text that makes mention of the unloosening is another text on general truths, *Maxims I*. This gnomic poem contains a section describing the entire cycle of the year in similar imagery, interspersed with other facts of life:

- 71 Forst sceal freosan, fyr wudu meltan,  
 eorþe growan, is brycgian,  
 wæter helm wegan, wundrum lucan  
 74 eorþan ciþas. An sceal inbindan  
 forstes fetre felameahtig God;  
 winter sceal geweorpan, weder eft cuman,  
 77 sumor swegle hat, sund unstillle.

(‘Frost must freeze, fire melt wood, the earth grow, ice form bridges, water carry a covering,<sup>162</sup> wondrously close off the earth’s saplings. One very powerful God must unbind the fetter of frost; winter must pass by, good weather return, the summer hot with the sun, the unquiet waters.’)

The description seems neutral in tone, unless it is maintained that metaphorical bonds must always be perceived as undesirable. A better case for relief at the unloosening in spring can be made with reference to the two instances of the motif in *Beowulf*. Such a reading can be achieved of the image of the melting sword (quoted above, p. 136), although this still requires bold interpretation. Much as in the *Maxims*-passage, the *Beowulf*-poet simply states that ice melts when God releases the bonds of frost (1608–10). He then follows up this observation with a brief glorification of God, but strictly in his capacity as governor of the seasons, not favouring spring over winter (1610–11). The only imaginable subjective reading of the passage, once again, is one that reads the reference to spring as a metaphor for the defeat of the episode’s monsters and consequent relief (see further above, section 3.3). The seasonal passage in the Finnsburh-episode (quoted above, pp. 133–4) does offer unequivocal praise of spring. It makes reference to *wuldortorht weder* (‘gloriously bright weathers’, 1136) and calls the bosom of the earth in spring *fæger* (‘beautiful’, 1137). The only detraction from this explicit praise of the warm season consists in the bloody revenge that follows. Thus there is certainly irony in the

<sup>162</sup> The verse may alternatively be read ‘water wear a helmet’. However, martial imagery would here be less fitting than in the passages in *Andreas* and the *Menologium*, where it is the time of year or the precipitation that is personified as the bringer of winter weather and not, as here, an objective landscape.

juxtaposition of fair weathers and violent deeds, but this seems to affect the burden of the latter rather than the poet's appraisal of the former. This passage, of course, does not strictly refer to a release from bonds, but it may be said to imply as much given its earlier reference to the winter-binding of the sea. In much the same way, an implicit relief may be understood to accompany the undoing of the bonds of winter in all the texts that describe those bonds as an affliction. Nevertheless, winter in Old English poetry is both more commonly mentioned than spring or summer and more explicitly associated with subjective experience.<sup>163</sup>

### 3.5 Winter Conflict

Even more so than in the Mediterranean,<sup>164</sup> long-distance sea-travel in medieval northern Europe was dangerous in winter and therefore seldom practised at that time of year, whether for economic or military purposes.<sup>165</sup> Land-based warfare was not restricted in the same way: if some routes were impassable in winter, others, especially fjords, lakes, and marshes, were easier to traverse when frozen, as is occasionally made clear in the sagas.<sup>166</sup> This reliance on waterways during winter travel and winter combat logically entailed the possibility of battles carried out on ice and in otherwise hibernal landscapes. Scenes of winter combat are indeed widely represented in medieval Scandinavian literature, though it is difficult to assess in what proportion they stand to the historical frequency of winter expeditions.

Among the episodes that should be awarded some historical credibility are the battles found in the kings' sagas, as these often implicate larger armies and regional cultures enabling historiography through communal memory. Of course, a distinction should be made between events written down within a few generations of their occurrence and accounts of the earliest known Scandinavian kings,

<sup>163</sup> Exceptions to this tendency include *Phoen* and *GenB*, discussed in sections 1.3 and 2.3 above.

<sup>164</sup> Military expeditions were, in fact, one of the main exceptions to the Mediterranean winter hiatus in sea-travel. This practice has been explained as strategic, fleets setting out to surprise the enemy at a time of limited vigilance, thus confirming the overall trend (McCormick 2001: 462–8).

<sup>165</sup> *Kgs* chs 22–3 (Brenner 1881: 59–63); *Rat* 1998: 27–8.

<sup>166</sup> e.g. *Eb* chs 37, 45 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935: 99–100, 125–6); see further Schach 1949: 47–55. Naturally, weather extremes still negatively impacted land-based travel (see, e.g., *Svinfellinga saga* ch. 9 (Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason, and Kristján Eldjárn 1946: 11, 97)).

whose transmission has a strong mythological motivation.

The first chapters of *Ynglinga saga* belong firmly in the latter category for their euhemerisation of the Æsir, but when in chapter 29 the text describes a battle fought between Aðils and Áli on the ice of Lake Vænir, now Vänern, Sweden's largest lake (ch. 29),<sup>167</sup> it has sufficient realism to it to have its roots in a historical encounter. It is worth observing that this battle is referenced also in *Beowulf* as one of the Swedish conflicts that help sketch the *Geatas'* geopolitical situation, making clear that the conflict had a strong and widespread narrative presence, again reinforcing the likelihood of a historical referent of some sort. While *Beowulf* does not mention that the battle takes place on ice, it is within the poem's account of this event that the phrase *cealde cearsiðas* ('cold sorrow-journeys') is used (2391–6), leading Bugge to suppose a literal reference of the adjective *ceald* alongside its figurative sense in this passage.<sup>168</sup> Although this reading has found little resonance with later critics,<sup>169</sup> it would not be beyond the associative style of narration proper to the Old English heroic tradition to gesture towards a known story in this way, as one has only to glance at the concise references in *Deor*<sup>170</sup> or *Waldere B*<sup>171</sup> to acknowledge. Exclusively metaphorical uses of *ceald* do exist, as was noted in section 2.5 above (pp. 82–3), but in a case like that of the *Beowulf*-passage, where a winter setting is externally attested, to discount the suggestive connection between wording and context would be unduly to detract from the poet's command of his medium. It is the dynamic range of semantic reference in *cealde cearsiðas*, from the bitter feelings that motivated these expeditions<sup>172</sup> to their hibernal setting, that exemplifies the richness of Old English poetic expression.

Winter battles are also found in the more contemporary kings' sagas, where there is generally little reason to doubt their historical basis. *Sverris saga*, commissioned by King Sverrir himself and thus contemporary with many of the events it describes,<sup>173</sup> describes several winter campaigns.

<sup>167</sup> Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: I, 57.

<sup>168</sup> Bugge 1887: 13.

<sup>169</sup> Wyatt and Chambers 1915: 120, n. to line 2396; Spinner 1924: 105; Whitbread 1938: 366; Wrenn 1953, s.v. *ceald*; Stanley 1955: 436; Salmon 1959: 316; Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008: 244, commentary to lines 2395b f. and glossary, s.v. *ceald*; *DOE* s.v. *ceald* adj., sense 6c.

<sup>170</sup> Ed. by Krapp and Dobbie 1936: 178–9.

<sup>171</sup> Ed. by Dobbie 1942: 5–6.

<sup>172</sup> The plural, of course, resists explanation in the absence of a detailed historiography.

<sup>173</sup> Þorleifur Hauksson 2007: xxii–xxiv.

Chapter 163 recounts a sequence of winter encounters between the loyalist *Birkibeinar* and the *Túnsbergsmenn* opposing them. The season's effects on this campaign do not go unnoticed: the snow is mentioned as advantageous to the king's scouts who wear skis, but an obstacle to walking. Similarly, the final confrontation of the chapter takes place on ice, and this helps decide the battle in the king's favour, as his men wear crampons while the *Túnsbergsmenn*, who arrive by ship, do not.<sup>174</sup> Winter expeditions and the military challenges and advantages proper to them are recounted at various other turns in this same text, making clear that the concept was not an alien one at least in narrative.<sup>175</sup> The most spectacular such episode is found in chapter 19, where Sverrir and his soldiers are caught in a snowstorm in which they lose over 120 horses and eat nothing but snow for eight days; the wind is so severe that a man is thrown to the ground and dies of a triple spine fracture by the force of the gale alone.<sup>176</sup> Though this account has no doubt been embellished, it must still be assumed that the campaign, reported so shortly after the event, did indeed take place in winter, and the logistic difficulties following from the time of year were familiar ones.

An episode in Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* parallels the battle on ice in *Sverris saga*, though Saxo harms his historical credibility by surrounding the passage with romance features. Alf encounters a fleet of *Blacmanni* whose ships are trapped in ice, and orders his men to run across the ice 'caligatis vestigiis' ('with booted feet') rather than in their slippery standard issue, resulting in an easy victory.<sup>177</sup> Unsurprisingly, some translators have understood the boots to refer to spiked shoes,<sup>178</sup> but such a translation relies on interpretation and is not strictly warranted by the text. In either reading, however, it is appropriate equipment that proves decisive in winter battle.

*Hákonar saga herðibreiðs* likewise contains a winter campaign, and here too the winning party is the one that succeeds in making the season into an ally. Grégóriús Dagsson pursues Hákon and his army late during Christmastide, and catches up with him at a river. The ice separating the two armies has, however, been sabotaged by Hákon and covered up with snow; Grégóriús falls through

<sup>174</sup> Þorleifur Hauksson 2007: 252–5.

<sup>175</sup> Esp. chs 12, 19, 160 (Þorleifur Hauksson 2007: 20, 32–4, 247).

<sup>176</sup> Þorleifur Hauksson 2007: 33.

<sup>177</sup> *Gesta Danorum* 7.6.5 (Friis-Jensen and Zeeberg 2005: 1, 462).

<sup>178</sup> e.g. Friis-Jensen and Zeeberg 2005: 1, 463.

the ice and is killed with an arrow (ch. 14).<sup>179</sup>

Despite their common occurrence in the kings' sagas, the best-known of Scandinavian winter battles are doubtlessly those depicted in the sagas of Icelanders. *Njáls saga*, often cited in discussions of landscape for its exceptional inclusion of a brief *locus amoenus*-passage,<sup>180</sup> tells how Njáll's sons fall into disagreement with Þráinn Sigfússon over damages incurred in Norway (chs 88–91).<sup>181</sup> Three or four weeks into the winter, word reaches them that Þráinn is visiting a friend in the district, and the brothers decide to confront him. When they intercept him, the two groups of men are separated by the glacial river Markarfljót. The river is not fully frozen, and the nearest ford some distance away. However, Skarphéðinn comes in running and leaps across twelve ells of water to land on the ice sheet supporting his enemies, driving his axe into Þráinn's skull as he slides past him. If the remainder of the fight also takes place on the ice sheet, no further use is made of the landscape (ch. 92).<sup>182</sup> *Eyrbyggja saga* tells of another ice battle, now on Vigrafjörðr, just north of Snæfellsnes. Here, Steinþórr and eight of his men come upon their enemies, the sons of Þorbrandr, in a group of six. It concerns a chance encounter: the season is conducive to it only inasmuch as Steinþórr has delayed an errand but wants it done before Christmas, while the sons of Þorbrandr are on their way to a Christmas celebration. The winter landscape here plays a critical role in the development of the battle. On first eye contact, the smaller of the two groups make a stand on a skerry surrounded by sloping ice floes resulting from the fjord's tidal flow. This makes the company difficult to attack other than with arrows, and the chapter recounts a series of slippery attempts. Not on the ice but similarly concerned with winter landscape is the Butraldi-episode of *Fóstbræðra saga* mentioned earlier in this chapter. This episode tells how Butraldi and his men have difficulty climbing the slope

<sup>179</sup> Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: III, 363–4.

<sup>180</sup> The passage is Gunnarr's fatal resolution not to leave Iceland on account of his outlawry: 'fögr er hlíðin, svá at mér hefir hon aldri jafnfögr sýnzki, bleikir akrar ok slegin tún, ok mun ek ríða heim aprt ok fara hvergi' ('the slope is fair, it has never seemed as fair to me; the fields are white and the home field mowed, and I will ride home and go nowhere', ch. 75 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954: 182)). It is invariably referenced as an exception where the genre's lack of nature description for its own sake is discussed (Hallberg 1962: 71; Pearsall and Salter 1973: 45–6; O'Donoghue 2004: 59–60). It is not entirely unique, however: indeed, it has been proposed that Gunnarr's phrase *bleikir akrar* came to the *Njála* compiler from having read it in a landscape description in *Alexanders saga*, itself based on the Latin *Alexandreis* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954: xxxiv–xxxvii; Lönnroth 1976: 149–54).

<sup>181</sup> Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1954: 214–29.

<sup>182</sup> Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1954: 232–4. For further discussion of the episode, see Schach 1955: 2–3.

out of Gervidalr on account of the firm snowdrift that has gathered there. Þorgeirr ascends the slope on the other side of the river where it is easier and reaches the top of the ridge when Butraldi is still making his way up the steep slope, cutting footholds with his axe. Þorgeirr then rides his spear down the snow bank, dealing Butraldi his death stroke with his axe in passing (ch. 6).<sup>183</sup> Further winter-episodes include the ambush of Egill's tax mission in *Egils saga*, where the winter landscape serves only to betray the assailants' tracks (chs 75–7),<sup>184</sup> the occasional wintertime outlaw hunt in *Gísla saga* and *Grettis saga*,<sup>185</sup> and various games of *knattleikr* on ice turned violent.<sup>186</sup>

A recurring element of strategic advantage in winter battles is access to crampons or spiked snowshoes. It was seen above that access to this equipment is decisive in the ice-based battle between the *Birkibeinar* and the *Túnsbergsmenn* depicted in *Sverris saga*, and that Alf's encounter with the fleet of *Blacmanni* is decided in his favour owing to a similar advantage. Likewise, during the above-mentioned conflict in *Eyrbyggja saga*, Þorbrandr's foster-son Freysteinn wears crampons, which is apparently not to be taken for granted, as his opponent Steinþórr, at least, lacks this advantage (ch. 45).<sup>187</sup> It seems nevertheless to have been a fairly common type of equipment: in a wintertime conflict in *Íslendinga saga*, most members of a group confronted with a slippery passage are said to have them (ch. 156).<sup>188</sup> Interestingly, in both the accounts taking place in Iceland this strategic difference between the two parties is cancelled out in one way or another by the skill or cunning of the disadvantaged party. In *Eyrbyggja saga*, Steinþórr kills Freysteinn despite the latter's stronger foothold (ch. 45).<sup>189</sup> The attacking force in the episode of *Íslendinga saga* is outwitted by

<sup>183</sup> Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 145–7. Cf. the descent in *Þórðar saga hreðu* ch. 9 (Jóhannes Halldórsson 1959: 209–10).

<sup>184</sup> Bjarni Einarsson 2003: 137–41.

<sup>185</sup> *Gísl* chs 20, 34 (Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 64–7, 109–16); *Gr* ch. 59 (Guðni Jónsson 1936: 188–94).

<sup>186</sup> *Knattleikr* was played both on land and on ice, but the sagas treat it as one and the same game regardless, so that it is sometimes hard to see what surface is intended in a given passage. The game's narrative function is typically to cause or escalate tensions between men, as in *Eg* ch. 40 (Bjarni Einarsson 2003: 53–5); *GHR* ch. 9 (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: II, 379–81). Such escalations take place on ice in *Gísl* ch. 15 (Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 49–50); *Gr* ch. 15 (Guðni Jónsson 1936: 42–4); *Þórð* ch. 3 (Jóhannes Halldórsson 1959: 177–8). They also take place in winter in *Eg* ch. 40 (Bjarni Einarsson 2003: 53–5); *Harð* ch. 23 (Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991: 61–2); *GullÞ* ch. 2 (Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991: 181); and probably in *Þorstvík* ch. 10 (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: II, 203–4).

<sup>187</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935: 125–30.

<sup>188</sup> Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason, and Kristján Eldjárn 1946: I, 463.

<sup>189</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935: 128.

the opposing party, whose foresight in watering the passage results in an ice sheet that proves treacherous even to a well-outfitted troop; moreover, the use of snowshoes necessitated by this situation means that no dense front can be formed (ch. 161).<sup>190</sup> In general, it may be said that crampons or skis in literary winter campaigns serve to accentuate the foresight of those wearing them; thus the author of *Sverris saga* sees to it that it is the king himself who recommends their use (ch. 163).<sup>191</sup> In the two Icelandic texts, however, the crampons heighten the achievement of their owners' opponents in defeating those who came better prepared.

Such literary effects of winter battles draw attention to the fact that however truthful an account may be, the season and its landscapes take on literary significance within each text as well. This may take the form of propaganda, as when Sverrir has the foresight to bring skis and crampons, or it may serve narrative embellishment. It is important to recognise that there is here no overarching theme or motive. If some writers, such as the author of *Egils saga*, express limited interest in the narrative potential of winter landscape, others show themselves more attuned to this type of setting, and the reasons and emphases of the latter group vary considerably. The ice battle in *Sverris saga*, for instance, profits aesthetically when it states that 'ísinn gerðisk háll af blóði' ('the ice turned slippery with blood'),<sup>192</sup> making it not just a historical report but a story worth telling. The ice battle in *Njáls saga* draws attention to Skarphéðinn's prowess, since environmental interest ceases immediately following his feat; that of *Eyrbyggja saga*, by contrast, makes full use of the strategic implications of the frozen landscape. In the Butraldi-episode of *Fóstbræðra saga*, the winter landscape emphasises the ignominy in the actions of Þorgeirr, who derives a tactical advantage from the same slope that renders his opponent defenceless. The only thing uniting all these episodes is that human conflict gives the authors a reason to draw attention to the landscape, something they seldom do when not prompted by social action.

If there is no one function that explains all such winter references in the sagas, an author may nevertheless employ his winter imagery in a consistent way. Perhaps the most striking example of

<sup>190</sup> Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason, and Kristján Eldjárn 1946: 1, 463.

<sup>191</sup> Þorleifur Hauksson 2007: 252.

<sup>192</sup> Þorleifur Hauksson 2007: 255.

such usage is *Gísla saga*, whose interest in landscape and winter has been signalled by a number of scholars.<sup>193</sup> From the perspective of the present study, what characterises the winter landscapes of *Gísla saga* is the danger they signal to human life. Gísli is careful not to leave any tracks in the snow when he sets out to kill Þórgrímr, yet is almost betrayed by the snow on his boots (chs 16–17).<sup>194</sup> Near the end of the saga, tracks in the hoarfrost are instrumental in revealing his whereabouts to Eyjólfur (ch. 34).<sup>195</sup> Snow is a means of malicious sorcery when the witch Auðbjörg causes an avalanche;<sup>196</sup> by contrast, Freyr honours Þórgrímr posthumously by the absence of snow from the southwestern face of his grave-mound, indicating that there is no hostility between them (ch. 18).<sup>197</sup> Even in figurative usage, snow has connotations of danger: towards the end of his life as an outlaw, it is said of Gísli that ‘þykkir honum nú fokit vera í öll skjól’ (ch. 23),<sup>198</sup> indicating his lack of options by means of an expression translating as ‘now it seems to him that there is drift-snow in all his shelters’. Finally, quiet cold spells and windless snowfalls serve to forebode violence at various turns in the saga (chs 15, 18, 34).<sup>199</sup> Although the use of winter landscapes as immediate settings for hostilities is limited in this text, all these references to winter landscapes and winter weather serve to signal violence and danger. The associations of winter in *Gísla saga* thus correspond closely to connections between winter and threats to the individual found more widely in Old Norse as well as Anglo-Saxon literature.

<sup>193</sup> Hansen 1978; Vésteinn Ólason 1997: xxii; McCreesh 2010.

<sup>194</sup> Björn K. Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 53–5. Cf. *Piðreks saga*, in which Vǫlundr escapes suspicion of having killed the king’s young sons by telling the boys to walk backwards to his smithy following a fresh fall of snow, making it look as though they survived the visit (chs 121–2 (Bertelsen 1905–11: 1, 116–18)).

<sup>195</sup> Björn K. Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 109–11; see also Schach 1949: 40; Vésteinn Ólason 1997: xxii.

<sup>196</sup> Björn K. Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 59–60. Winter storms are likewise conjured up in *Eb* ch. 40 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935: 109–10) and *Vígl* ch. 12 (Jóhannes Halldórsson 1959: 83), but on the whole there is no distinct seasonal pattern to the malicious sorcery in the sagas as indexed in Boberg 1966: 89–91 (motifs D2050–99).

<sup>197</sup> Björn K. Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 57 and n. 2.

<sup>198</sup> Björn K. Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 102.

<sup>199</sup> Björn K. Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 52, 59, 109. The noun *logn* (‘calm’) and its compounds mark the quiet and imply the bloodshed to come in all three passages. Vésteinn’s murder, by contrast, takes place in a storm (ch. 13 (Björn K. Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 43–4)). See further Hansen 1978.

### 3.6 Prognostication and Prophecy

The Christmas season, which signalled the start of the year in early medieval Insular cultures adhering to the Julian calendar,<sup>200</sup> was a time for resolutions in Old Norse culture. This is reflected in the sagas, which relay a tradition of Yuletide boasts to be fulfilled before the year is over.<sup>201</sup> The year's events were also determined by factors outside human control, however, and winter was a time of increased access to such information.

Although the tradition in which they stand is indigenous neither to Scandinavia nor to Anglo-Saxon England,<sup>202</sup> a select group of written prognostics provides some insight into the seasons of the supernatural as observed by the literate classes in these regions. Leaving aside lunaries, the seasonally balanced Egyptian Days, and non-temporal prognostication, the texts that remain strongly concentrate prophetic days around the start of the year, and therefore in the winter season. Most commonly, auguries are attributed to Christmas Day, the twelve days of Christmas, or the kalends of January. In Anglo-Saxon England, the most widely attested genre of this type is the year prognosis, which predicts the year's outlook in terms of weather, farming, peace, and health on the basis of the weekday that marks the kalends of January or the twenty-fifth of December.<sup>203</sup> Often, the forecast was given for each of the year's four seasons, in the format 'ðonne forme gearesdæg byð sunendæg; hit byð god winter, ⁊ windig lænctetid, dryge sumer, god hærfest, ⁊ scep tyððrigeð, ⁊ hit byð grið, ⁊ wæstme manigfeald' (*Prog 5.1*).<sup>204</sup> Three Anglo-Saxon texts hold the entire Christmas season to be prophetic, taking either sunshine or wind on each of the twelve days as indicative of the year's

<sup>200</sup> In Anglo-Saxon England, 25 March was never New Year's Day. This date seems to have had some currency in mainland Scandinavia in the thirteenth century, but this is nowhere reflected in the prognostics, which hold rather to 25 December and the kalends of January (*BEDA. Temp.rat.* ch. 15 (Jones 1977: 330); Hødnebo 1963; Jansson 1967; Hutton 1996: 8; Árni Björnsson 2000: 393).

<sup>201</sup> See the index in Boberg 1966: 191 (motif M119.3) and above, p. 51. If the tradition of boasts at *jól* predates the conversion, as the legendary sagas purport, the Midwinter festival was a time to deliberate on the year's plans even though it did not correspond to the start of the calendar in vernacular tradition. On the other hand, the association may be taken as evidence that Christmas boasts were introduced late.

<sup>202</sup> Hødnebo 1963; Nordland 1968; Chardonens 2007: 2.

<sup>203</sup> For a discussion of the genre and for texts, see Chardonens 2007: 491–500; for a discussion of its monastic popularity and an overview of textual witnesses, see Liuzza 2001.

<sup>204</sup> 'If the first day of the year falls on a Sunday, it will be a good winter, and a windy spring, a dry summer, a good autumn [*or*: harvest], and the sheep will breed, and there will be peace, and an abundance of fruits' (Chardonens 2007: 495).

fortunes.<sup>205</sup> It may be telling that the two closely related texts on sunshine predict more favourable outcomes than negative ones on sunny days, while predictions based on the wind are exclusively bad news.<sup>206</sup> This common-sense association of sunshine with good fortune and storm with hardship, and by implication analogous associations of the sunny and stormy season respectively, may be compared with the connotative value of winter in Old English poetry. In fact, it could be argued that the sunshine prognostics assume as unique a place within their genre as the descriptions of pleasant weather in the poetry, since the two surviving texts on sunshine are of small statistical significance compared to the numerous texts on the ominous value of thunderstorms, reflected also in the occasional chronicle entry.<sup>207</sup> Of the latter type of prognostic, the group most relevant to the present discussion is that of the weekday brontologies, which interpret the year's fortunes on the basis of the weekday of the year's first thunderstorm.<sup>208</sup> According to these, thunder is most commonly a harbinger of death, though occasionally of crop failure; the main variable determined by the day of its occurrence is the segment of the population affected or the manner of the death. Although thunderstorms are characteristic of warm weather rather than cold, the year's first thunderstorm would usually have taken place relatively early in the year. Of the two Anglo-Saxon brontologies that base their predictions on the occurrence of thunder in certain months, the Latin text is equally gloomy in all its predictions, but the Old English text prophesies both good and bad with no distinct seasonal pattern, and it frequently indicates good fortune in one aspect of life and bad in another between such domains as weather, crops, health, and peace.<sup>209</sup> Such differentiation between good and ill luck is more representative of Anglo-Saxon brontologies as a genre, although death is always a prominent feature.

What unites most of the prognostics introduced above is their reliance on the prophetic properties of the start of the year and the time immediately surrounding it. Since the tradition and its

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<sup>205</sup> Ed. by Chardonnens 2007: 483–5, 489–90.

<sup>206</sup> Cf. Chardonnens 2007: 489.

<sup>207</sup> Most famously *ChronD s.a.* 793.

<sup>208</sup> For a discussion and edition, see Chardonnens 2007: 257–61.

<sup>209</sup> For a discussion and edition, see Chardonnens 2007: 262–5.

temporal organisation are demonstrably imported,<sup>210</sup> the most straightforward reading of the evidence is to assume that New Year's prognostics were adopted along with the Julian calendar and the encyclopaedic tradition that came with foreign learning. Even so, this connection between winter and prophecy accords well with the Anglo-Saxon connection between the domain of winter and extrasocietal forces inasmuch as prophecy is a foreign power making itself available to human society at the darkest time of year.

The prophetic nature of winter reflected in the learned prognostic tradition fits even more seamlessly with the Scandinavian portrayal of winter as a time in which the supernatural manifests itself, as may be recognised in the hibernal concentration of supernatural threats in the sagas of Icelanders demonstrated in section 3.1 above. Apart from judicial astrology, a tradition that has left no traces in Anglo-Saxon culture,<sup>211</sup> the Scandinavian genre of written prognostics differs little from that of the British Isles. Most texts are concerned with dreams, Egyptian Days, and lunar cycles, with no interest in any particular phase of the solar year,<sup>212</sup> but a version of the Pseudo-Bedan year prognosis survives in several witnesses.<sup>213</sup> Thus it may be said that imported prognostic traditions added to the supernatural character of winter in medieval Scandinavia as in Anglo-Saxon England, but this did not set these cultures apart from the rest of Europe.

A richer source for the chronology of the Scandinavian supernatural consists in the prophetic dreams found in the narrative sources, but no strong seasonal chronology emerges from these. Of course, not unlike the supernatural notification of the death of a loved one, the timing of prophetic dreams often depends on the season of the referent event. Furthermore, the fact that dreams are not usually given an explicit chronology suggests that the season of their occurrence was not widely held to be of great significance, contrasting in this respect with the hauntings described in section 3.1.<sup>214</sup> Nevertheless, the seasonal structure of the sagas of Icelanders makes it possible to deduce

<sup>210</sup> Chardonnens 2007: 2; for the origins of Anglo-Saxon calendar traditions, see section 1.3 above.

<sup>211</sup> Chardonnens 2007: 112–13.

<sup>212</sup> See, e.g., the texts edited in Kålund 1908: 84–9; 1917–18: 105–8, 119–21. For an overview of the corpus, see Nordland 1968.

<sup>213</sup> e.g. in *Hauksbók* p. 468 (ed. by Finnur Jónsson 1892–96; discussion on pp. cxxvii–cxxviii, where other witnesses are also listed). See further Hødnebo 1963; Jansson 1967.

<sup>214</sup> Although prophetic dreams are sometimes related without any temporal framework, the sagas of Icelanders rely

the timing of most prophetic dreams with some accuracy. If these dreams are indexed and all are brought into the four-season framework,<sup>215</sup> table 3.1 emerges.<sup>216</sup> This table makes clear that the seasonal differentiation of the motif is so slight as to carry little statistical significance. A greater difference emerges if the evidence from *Gísla saga*, which displays a disproportionate interest in both dreams and heathen autumn ritual,<sup>217</sup> is left out: dreams then enjoy a more exclusive relationship with winter, as chapters on summer and autumn dreams are reduced to four and three while winter dreams remain at nine and spring at five. This tendency is consistent with the general prognostic emphasis on the beginning of the Julian calendar year. However, the more significant finding in this tally is that dreams occur in all seasons, making clear that they are generally invoked where the plot calls for them, the seasonal context being awarded a secondary position at best.

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on the social seasons as a primary structuring device, so that a rough seasonal context can often be deduced for most episodes. All the same, dreams in the sagas of Icelanders are experienced with no clear reference to the time of year in *Bárð* ch. 1 (Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991: 104); *BjH* chs 25, 32 (Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938: 177–8, 196–7); *Gísl* ch. 30 (Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 94); *Harð* chs 6, 7 (Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991: 15, 18); *Laxd* chs 74, 76 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934: 215, 223–4); *Ljósv* ch. 11 (Björn Sigfússon 1940: 58); *Vatn* ch. 36 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1939: 95).

<sup>215</sup> Since some references are more specific than others, and some use the quadripartite calendar while others seem to depend on a bipartite cycle of summer and winter, the index necessarily entails some imprecision.

<sup>216</sup> The index is largely based on the information in Boberg 1966: 84–5 (motifs D1812.3.3, D1812.3.3.8, D1812.5.1.1.3, D1812.5.1.2). Prophetic dreams occur in winter in *BjH* ch. 26 (Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938: 178); *Fbr* chs 4 (Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 138; although the timing of the dreams is not specified, they are introduced following an episode of harsh winter weather), 11 (pp. 172–7); *Laxd* ch. 33 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934: 87–92); *Ljósv* ch. 16 (Björn Sigfússon 1940: 85); *Nj* chs 133, 134 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954: 346–8, 351–2); *Glúm* chs 9, 21 (Jónas Kristjánsson 1956: 30–1). They occur in summer in *Gísl* chs 33, 34 (Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 102–6, 109–10); *Háv* ch. 20 (Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 349–50); *Vápnf* ch. 13 (Jón Jóhannesson 1950: 48–9). Autumn dreams are almost exclusive to *Gísl* (chs 13, 14, 22, 24, 33 (Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943: 43, 46, 70–3, 75–7, 106–9)), but one occurs in *Gunnl* ch. 11 (Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938: 87–8), one in *Heið* ch. 26 (Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938: 291–2), and one in *Laxd* ch. 31 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934: 84–5). Spring dreams are found in *Flóam* chs 23, 24 (Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991: 286–7, 291–5); *Gunnl* ch. 2 (Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938: 52–5); *Nj* ch. 157 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954: 459–60). In the case of Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir in *Laxd*, the reference of winter may be particularly broad, but it retains a contrast with summer. She relates her dreams in summer, namely in the time leading up to the *alþingi*, when Gestr Oddleifsson interrupts his journey to the assembly grounds at her family's farm. Guðrún asks him to interpret her dreams, remarking, 'dreymt hefir mik mart í vetr, en fjórir eru þeir draumar, er mér afla mikillar áhyggju, en engi maðr hefir þá svá ráðit, at mér líki' (ch. 33 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934: 88; 'I dreamed a great deal last winter, but there were four dreams that keep me greatly occupied, yet no-one has interpreted them to my liking')). If Guðrún meets Gestr annually at this time of year, it may be that *vetr* is here used to refer to the sum of time passed since Gestr's last visit, thereby approaching the synecdochical use of *vetr* for 'year'. Even so, the encounter takes place in summer, so that a contrast with the time around midsummer remains. Whatever the extent of time expressed by *vetr*, therefore, it still centres around the cold season.

<sup>217</sup> The seasonality of the *dísir* in *Gísla saga* and other texts is discussed in some detail in Gunnell 2000. See also above, pp. 43–4.

text	spring	summer	autumn	winter
<i>BjH</i> 26				x
<i>Fbr</i> 4				x
<i>Fbr</i> 11				x
<i>Flóam</i> 23	x			
<i>Flóam</i> 24	x			
<i>Gísl</i> 13			x	
<i>Gísl</i> 14			x	
<i>Gísl</i> 22			x	
<i>Gísl</i> 24			x	
<i>Gísl</i> 33a		x		
<i>Gísl</i> 33b			x	
<i>Gísl</i> 34		x		
<i>Glúm</i> 9				x
<i>Glúm</i> 21				x
<i>Gunnl</i> 2	x			
<i>Gunnl</i> 11			x	
<i>Gunnl</i> 13		x		
<i>Harð</i> 31		x		
<i>Háv</i> 20		x		
<i>Heið</i> 26			x	
<i>Laxd</i> 31			x	
<i>Laxd</i> 33				x
<i>Ljósv</i> 16				x
<i>Nj</i> 112	x			
<i>Nj</i> 133				x
<i>Nj</i> 134				x
<i>Nj</i> 157	x			
<i>Vápn</i> 13		x		
total	5	6	8	9

Table 3.1: The seasonality of prophetic dreams in the sagas of Icelanders

A final prophetic motif, that of the travelling prophetess or *vǫlva*,<sup>218</sup> shows a more pronounced seasonal identity. The feast in *Vatnsdæla saga* mentioned in section 2.6.2 centres on a *Finna* prophetess and takes place in winter (ch. 10).<sup>219</sup> That this timing is no coincidence is suggested by the

<sup>218</sup> This is the second sense of the word according to Halvorsen 1976, contrasting with the witch who, often living within or in the margins of a sedentary society, uses sorcery to affect the lives of others.

<sup>219</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1939: 28–31.

Greenlandic episode on Þorbjörg *lítilyǫlva* ('little prophetess') in *Eiríks saga rauða*, which makes the winter connection explicit when it states that '[þ]at var hátt Þorbjargar um vetrum, at hon fór at veizlum, ok buðu þeir menn henni mest heim, er forvitni var á at vita forlög sín eða árferð' (ch. 4).<sup>220</sup> Like the *Finna*, Þorbjörg performs her craft in the winter evenings: 'hon kom um kveldit'; 'at áliðnum degi var henni veittr sá umbúningr sem hon þurfti at hafa til at fremja seiðinn.'<sup>221</sup> Depending on the textual interpretation, it may likewise be in winter that a travelling *ǫlva* attends a feast in *Hrólfs saga kraka* (ch. 3).<sup>222</sup> Regardless of the temporal reference, however, it should be remembered that feasts in the sagas are fairly consistently organised in autumn or winter (see above, section 1.5),<sup>223</sup> so that it may be safe to conclude that the author and audience of this text share an understanding that follows the same convention. Similarly, although *Orms þáttr Stórolfssonar* and *Qrvar-Odds saga* do not give prophecy a place in the seasonal cycle, these texts make clear that this activity is to take place 'um kveldit' ('in the evening', *OStór* ch. 5)<sup>224</sup> or 'um nóttina' ('in the night'), the latter text even coining the term *náttfarsseiðr* ('night-travel witchcraft', *Qrv* ch. 2).<sup>225</sup> It is reasonable to conclude that prophecy in all these texts has an association with darkness, which explains the winter references in the first two or three texts and suggests that the last two at the very least should not be understood to refer to the bright summer evenings. A conceptual connection is thus implied between the darkest time of day during the darkest season, when society is reduced to the smallest domain, and the time at which higher powers may be consulted.

<sup>220</sup> 'In winter, it was Þorbjörg's custom to attend feasts, and those who were curious to hear their destiny or the year prognosis invited her into their homes most' (Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935: 206).

<sup>221</sup> 'She arrived in the evening'; 'when the day was drawing to a close, she was given the equipment she needed to carry out her witchcraft' (Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935: 206, 207).

<sup>222</sup> Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson read '[þ]eir eru þar upp á þriðja vetr' ('they remain there into the third winter'), suggesting that the events that follow take place in winter (1943–44: II, 7). Slay, however has 'þeir voru þar [vppa/vppi] iij vetur' ('they were there for three winters [i.e. years]'), reading a cardinal numeral and taking the *a* or *i*, which is found in some witnesses only, as part of the adverb.

<sup>223</sup> Though this tendency is especially strong in the sagas of Icelanders, the pattern generally holds true for the legendary sagas as well except where occasional (e.g. funerary) feasts are concerned.

<sup>224</sup> Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991: 405.

<sup>225</sup> Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: I, 286–9.

### 3.7 Conclusions

It has been demonstrated that the Anglo-Saxon and early Icelandic literary traditions both describe winter as a time of intense activity in the periphery of the human domain. Their respective interests within this niche, however, differ considerably. Old English poems of various genres and subject matter agree in associating winter with personal affliction. Rather than describe the effects of the cold and the agricultural low on society as a whole, these texts employ winter's effects on the individual as vehicles by which to explore the psyche of a solitary protagonist. Most commonly, the poet taps into a branch of the elegiac mode, studying the individual as both a victim of the winter weather and a mind in agreement with this metaphor for melancholy. In these cases, invoking winter as one phase of a seasonal cycle implies that the mental state described is equally subject to alternation with less tortured conditions. It bears repeating, however, that the coming of spring is almost never accompanied by the same detail of subjective experience found in descriptions of winter. In several cases, as with the melting sword of *Beowulf*, it is left to the reader to supply a metaphorical reading to the loosening of the bonds of winter, even though the coming of winter is frequently accompanied by descriptions of personal suffering. Only the Finnsburh-episode makes detailed mention of the protagonist's emotional development into the warmer season, but here the homesickness of winter only gives way to the vengeance of spring. Thus the traditional analogy between season and psyche should not be thought absolute, as the balanced cycle of seasonal variation does not extend to psychological development in Old English literature.

In contrast with the Anglo-Saxon focus on the solitary subject, the sagas of Icelanders explore winter's otherly connotations through the delineation of society and social categories peripheral to humankind. Here, the function of the individual is mostly limited to a heroic confrontation with otherly categories on behalf of society as a whole. The most categorical association of winter is with the dangerous supernatural, as hauntings in particular rarely occur outside the winter halfyear and are closely associated with Christmas and the dark of night. The seasonality of social space is closely implicated in this tradition, since dangerous creatures, normally bound to mountainous habitats, impinge on the inhabited valleys along with the dark, the cold, and the snow of winter. The phys-

ical human domain is smallest at this time of year, and those who continue their work beyond the confines of the farm, shepherds especially, are the first to be affected by the hauntings. But as in classical and medieval European culture, where winter and the start of the year in particular was a prophetic time, the human sphere also benefits from the annual redrawing of boundaries defining the human sphere. Icelandic prognostics generally follow English and Continental examples in this regard; the prophetic dreams so characteristic of Icelandic prose display no marked seasonality. The temporal distribution of the *vǫlva*-motif, on the other hand, does suggest that winter is the time of greatest access to prophecy. In this tradition, while society is spatially confined in winter, it receives the benefit of a temporal extension beyond the present.

Despite close connections between the recurrent hall-attacks of *Beowulf* and the seasonal hauntings of *Grettis saga* and related Scandinavian texts, it seems unlikely that the narrative underlying *Beowulf* was a winter tale like its northern analogues. Instead, the Old English poem employs one or other of the traditional Anglo-Saxon motifs of pathetic fallacy and the bonds of winter whenever it makes mention of the seasons. Its only temporal reference reminiscent of saga convention is Hengest's winter-induced exile in Frisia. Here, however, the subject matter itself indicates the implication of historical or pseudohistorical Scandinavians whose open-sea voyages would indeed have been restricted to the summer halfyear. The defence of Heorot, although Scandinavian in its setting, is more universal in its subject matter and subject to seasonality only insofar as the monsters exclusively attack at night.

Although many of the texts here discussed depict winter as a time of human confrontations with natural and supernatural outside threats, social tensions also develop within the human realm. On the one hand there is a continuation of hostilities between autonomous forces, in which the winter landscape fulfils a range of literary functions; this type of conflict often takes place with the season's ice and snow as its immediate setting. On the other hand, the confined social conditions of winter have a tendency to escalate suppressed antagonism, as may be seen in the Þórmóðr narratives, *Gísla saga*, and the Finnsburh-episode. Rather than a military off-season, winter is portrayed as a time of treachery requiring men of power to be on their guard against friend and foe.

By its investigation of seasonal cycles in Anglo-Saxon and Old Icelandic literature, this chapter has confirmed the central role of winter in literary explorations of what lies beyond the human sphere, whether it is the natural world (more common in Old English literature) or the domain of the supernatural (a firmer association in Scandinavian texts). Described from the perspective of a seasonally static geography in the preceding chapter, these connections have been shown to hold also where one season gives way to the next, so that extrasocietal associations intensify at the start of winter and diminish as the dark season draws to a close.

The Icelandic literary corpus is not, however, limited to the lives of Icelanders and their bishops, and English literature did not end with the Conquest. The genres in vogue in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Europe found a market in Iceland as well as England. Some of these, among which the romance and the dream-vision are especially notable, reveal very different assumptions regarding the seasonal and geographical context of encounters with the natural and the supernatural. It is the aim of the following chapter to show that the rise of the romance aesthetic brought in summer as a rival setting to winter for explorations outside the human domain in a number of Middle English genres and to a lesser degree in Icelandic romance and legend. Although this new context for extrasocietal contact did not fully displace pre-existing conventions, it will be seen that it came to be the central seasonal setting for expeditions in Middle English verse.

# Chapter 4

## Summer Encounters

### 4.1 Introduction

The prominence of spring and spring landscapes as contexts for later medieval treatments of love, particularly in lyric poetry, and the relationship of this motif to late Antique tradition, is well documented and needs little elaboration here.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, the more general topos of the *Natureingang*, which frames a wide range of medieval poetic narrative by means of a natural setting most commonly in spring renewal or summer splendour, has long been acknowledged and described in great detail.<sup>2</sup> A third category of nature description, overlapping with both of the aforementioned, is the *locus amoenus*, the description of a pleasant natural setting (and therefore inevitably suggestive of spring or summer), so defined regardless of the narrative or structural function of the passage.<sup>3</sup> This motif relates to the present discussion wherever it bears on mankind's confrontation with the extra-societal domain, whose seasonality in Middle English verse and Old Norse romance will be analysed in this chapter.

As in the two preceding chapters, here likewise Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope is relevant to an understanding of the dynamics of narrative space and time. It is particularly applicable to

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<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm 1965; Alamichel 1998; cf. Groos 1976.

<sup>2</sup> Ross 1953; Von Wulffen 1963; Pearsall and Salter 1973: 165–7; Williams 1989–90.

<sup>3</sup> Curtius 1942; 1969: 191–209; Thoss 1972; Pearsall and Salter 1973 *passim*; Matonis 1980: 42–56; Haß 1998; Barrar 2004. For the various functions fulfilled by the *locus amoenus*, see especially Curtius 1942: 246–9.

medieval romance, as Bakhtin recognised, because of its extensive use of an adventure-space contrasting with the social environment that forms the protagonist's familiar sphere.<sup>4</sup> It is the seasonal implications of this adventure-space that will form the central object of study in what follows. It will furthermore be demonstrated that the functions and seasonality of the natural world in Middle English dream-visions and debates have considerable overlap with those of romance.

In Middle English as in Old English literature, and to a degree in Old Norse literature, much of the narrative action takes place beyond the safety of the court, hall, or farm. However, Middle English literature relies more heavily than either of the other corpora on the concept of adventure in the sense of unforeseen or chance events befalling its protagonists when they are already beyond the confines of the home. By contrast, narratives in Anglo-Saxon literature and the sagas of Icelanders imbue their heroes with more teleological purpose: whether it be the Israelites escaping from Egypt, Guthlac facing the wilderness and its demons, or a group of Icelandic farmers setting out to settle a score, the general tendency is for characters to know exactly where they are going and why.

The Middle English convention in which narrators themselves undertake solitary journeys into wild or natural landscapes, especially prominent in visions and debates, has its literary roots in the Old French *chanson d'aventure*. This twelfth-century genre, whose Middle English counterpart gained popularity in the mid-fourteenth century, uses the solitary journey as a context for an encounter with another individual, most commonly a girl or religious authority, whose monologue or wooing is the heart of the narrative. In the *chanson d'aventure* itself, English poets were less interested than their French counterparts in elaborating on the natural environment, although a rudimentary setting by the side of a forest or meadow is typically included, while spring (May) and dawn or the morning are usually identified as the temporal setting.<sup>5</sup> In any case, the convention helps place the prominence of the adventure-motif and its reliance on natural settings in later medieval literature.

The reliance on chance encounters in this period created a need for new ways in which to draw

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<sup>4</sup> Bakhtin 1981: 151–5; see further Gurevich 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Sandison 1913: 1–33.

solitary protagonists into the sorts of environment conducive to adventure. The home, whether it took the shape of a court, monastery, or farm, was a familiar, social space, and consequently permitted less deviation from realism than the unfamiliar outside world whose features could be beyond the reach of strict verification. In this respect, there is a continuity between all the corpora considered in this study that owes more to a universal among territorial species than to formative influence. After all, if unfamiliar spaces are home to predators and other dangers, the mind is more likely to err on the side of caution in their consideration by allowing for a wider range of contingencies, thus leaving room for the irrational and supernatural. What is new in Middle English literature and the foreign traditions on which some of its genres relied, however, is outdoor recreation as a means of drawing individuals out into outdoor spaces. In chivalric romance, it will be seen, adventure is often prompted by a mixed mode of recreation and purpose inasmuch as knights explicitly set out into the wilderness to win renown in whatever may come their way. This approach does not work for visionaries and witnesses to debates between birds, deities, or abstractions, which rely more exclusively on unforeseen encounters. These characters thus need other excuses to find their way into spaces sufficiently removed from society to allow for such suspension of realism. Nature recreation is the typical answer to this need, doubly useful because it not only draws protagonists into the right sorts of landscape, but also provides sufficient leisure to explain their dozing off or their stopping to hear a full-length debate. Since most texts of this type were aimed at a literate and educated audience,<sup>6</sup> leisure and recreation were surely familiar concepts in the cultural sphere in which they were read or heard.

If the recreational activity engaged in was the hunt, it could take place at virtually any time of year, provided the plot did not require any particular species of game animal. More commonly, however, the protagonist is passively enjoying the scenery or resting from a journey. In these cases, spring and summer are natural choices of setting. This is particularly true of dream-visions, which

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<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Brunner 1961. Chaucer in his dream-visions makes such frequent intertextual references that he must have expected some part of his audience to understand them, though he frequently takes pains to explain, and sometimes himself misunderstands, classical myth (see the discussions in St John 2000: 13–17; Boitani 2003; Spearing 2010: 160–3).

require the protagonist to fall asleep, a development especially plausible on a warm summer's day.

## 4.2 Visions and Debates

As popular as the genres of (dream)-vision and debate were in the high and later Middle Ages, it should be recognised that there was at least a general continuity in contents and style between these and earlier incarnations of the same or related genres. Medieval vision literature is usually considered greatly indebted to the biblical Apocalypse as well as to the visions of Peter and Paul dating back to the second and third centuries CE;<sup>7</sup> medieval debates are generally thought to have begun with the *Conflictus veris et hiemis* attributed to Alcuin,<sup>8</sup> itself a direct response to the singing-contests in Virgil's *Eclogues*<sup>9</sup> but also contributing to a more uniform tradition of seasonal debates whose earliest known model is found among the Greek Aesopian texts.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, the seasonal aspect of the literary contest was no invention of Middle English poets, as, for instance, the pastoral summer setting can be found in fully conventionalised form in Virgil's writings, while the personified debaters winter and spring are present in the Aesopian debate. Nevertheless, the spring opening came to take on specific functions in literary visions and debates of the Middle English period, and is as such especially well attested for England during the highly productive second half of the fourteenth century.

The eighth-century *Conflictus veris et hiemis* employs a brief pastoral form of the *locus amoenus*. Alcuin's only notably divergence from the Virgilian setting is found in the timeframe, which he moves from a hot summer's day to spring, though equally warm by implication, when the arrival of the cuckoo provides the occasion for the debate between the passing and the coming season:

- 1       Conveniunt subito cuncti de montibus altis  
           pastores pecudum vernali luce sub umbra  
           arborea pariter laetas celebrare camenas.  
 4       Adfuit et iuvenis Dafnis seniorque Palemon;  
           Omnes hi cuculo laudes cantare parabant.

<sup>7</sup> Kamphausen 1975: 76–82; Jiroušková 2006: 7–17.

<sup>8</sup> Conlee 1991: xiii. The edition consulted is Godman 1985: 144–48.

<sup>9</sup> Ed. by Boyle 1976. The *Conflictus* is especially close in form to the third Eclogue.

<sup>10</sup> The Aesopian debate between winter and spring is edited in Perry 1952: 425–6 (no. 271).

(‘All the cattle-herds from the high mountains suddenly convene in the shade of trees on a spring day equally to celebrate the joyful Muses. Young Daphnis was also present, and old Palemon; they were all preparing to sing the praises of the cuckoo.’)

From the twelfth century onwards, a range of Latin contests between seasons followed which likewise made use of Virgilian settings. Not all of these follow the *Conflictus* in setting the debate in a transitional season whose meteorological fluctuations are mimicked in the debate. Two related *altercationes hiemis et estatis* (debates between winter and summer) from the late twelfth century, for instance, are set in the heat of summer.<sup>11</sup> A further text, likewise a late twelfth-century poem identified in the manuscript as an ‘altercatio yemis et estatis’, is set in autumn but is resolved in peace rather than (as one might expect for this time of year) a victory at the hands of winter.<sup>12</sup> The genre by the twelfth century thus does not present the debate as a microcosmic representation of concurrent seasonal strife but instead views the differences between summer and winter as more of a perpetual conceptual conflict.

The earliest known Middle English debate, *The Owl and the Nightingale* (c. 1200),<sup>13</sup> trumps the Latin debates of its time in the brevity of its introduction. Although this poem takes up almost 1800 lines, it scarcely introduces the setting at all, let alone explain it. Before diving straight into the debate, the speaker only states,

1 Ich was in one sumere dale,  
In one suþe diȝele hale;  
Iherde ich holde grete tale  
4 An hule and one niȝtingale.

The humorous altercation that follows is not a debate between seasons like the Latin debates of its time, but it does implicitly compare the benefits and disadvantages of summer and winter in the debaters’ associations with those seasons. Its central interest is in the qualitative differences between the owl and the nightingale and in their relative benefit to mankind, involving the seasons in the debate inasmuch as the owl is associated with winter while the nightingale is only found in

<sup>11</sup> Walther 1920: 203–6, 206–9 (discussion at 41–4).

<sup>12</sup> Walther 1920: 191–203 (discussion at 37–41). Contrast winter’s conquest of autumn in the Old English *Menologium* discussed above, p. 143.

<sup>13</sup> Ed. by Cartlidge 2001. For the dating, see Cartlidge 2001: xv; cf. Conlee 1991: xxi–xxii.

England in summer. In this matter, winter is unambiguously associated with gloom and hardship, but the owl defends her winter song by the observation that this is the season for carolling, while summer is merry enough as it is and in need of tempering lest men turn to sin (409–542). Although the debate ends undecided, the unpleasant associations of winter here recalled are certain to pull the nightingale ahead in the favour of the audience.

Given the popularity of avian debates in Middle English, many of the later fourteenth-century debates are set in the bird season, like the *Conflictus* and *The Owl and the Nightingale*. Unlike these earlier poems, however, the later texts show an increased interest in the physical setting of the debate,<sup>14</sup> developing a highly conventional form of the *locus amoenus* based around the solitary walk in a natural setting (following the *chanson d'aventure*), the riverside slumber, and the dream. In all these particulars, the debates strongly converge with the dream-vision, and indeed dreams and debates frequently show up in conjunction in poems of this period. As both the *locus amoenus* and the *chanson d'aventure* are strongly associated with the summer season, these visions and debates have a marked interest in seasonal setting. Since the natural world they describe is usually an extrasocietal space, there is commonly a touch of otherness to its depiction.

A typical dream-visionary setting is found in *Piers Plowman*, whose first two redactions were composed in the 1370s.<sup>15</sup> The long B-redaction of this poem opens with the following scene:

1        In a somer seson,    whan softe was þe sonne,  
           I shoop me into shroudes    as I a sheep were,  
           In habite as an heremite    vnholý of werkes,  
 4        Wente wide in þis world    wondres to here.  
           Ac on a May morwenyng    on Maluerne Hilles  
           Me bifel a ferly,    of fairye me þoȝte.  
 7        I was wery ofwandred    and wente me to reste  
           Vnder a brood bank    by a bournes syde;  
           And as I lay and lenede    and loked on þe watres,  
 10       I slombred into a slepyng,    it sweyed so murye.  
           Thanne gan me to meten    a merueillous sweuene.

The summer season is the first environmental aspect provided, and it is closely followed by the narrator's aim in setting out, namely 'wondres to here'. This is an adventurous aim, set in the season of

<sup>14</sup> Conlee 1991: xxix–xxx.

<sup>15</sup> Ed. by Schmidt 2011; for the dating, see Schmidt 2011: II, 273–81.

the adventure poem, thus preparing the audience for a marvel through convention even before the marvel is announced outright ('me bifel a ferly, of fairye'). The May morning then further narrows down the temporal aspect, while also confirming that the bipartite year continued to be used (and indeed it continued to be the norm)<sup>16</sup> in narrative poetry of the later fourteenth century. The narrator rests by a brook, a convention whose constant murmur is bound to put him to sleep, and it is in this way that he experiences the poem's first vision.

Much the same convention may be recognised in the late fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century debate *Death and Liffe*.<sup>17</sup> Its narrator describes in detail his wanderings through a forest rich in flowers and with a river running through a meadow. Though he gives no reason for his excursion, his references to the joys of the scenery suggest its enjoyment is his aim: 'methought itt lengthened my liffe to looke on the bankes' (29). Resting at last from his wanderings he falls asleep by the riverside and enters into a visionary space (33–8) in which he witnesses a debate between Lady Life and Lady Death. Thus without reference to time of year or time of day, the *chanson d'aventure*-motif and the narrator's dozing off connect the action with the time of floral beauty and the heat of the day.

The introduction to *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale*, likewise written in the late fourteenth century,<sup>18</sup> has certain critical aspects in common with that of *Death and Liffe*. Both are debates, yet both are set up as dream-visions. *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale* is set in early May (42, 55), and again the excursion into the natural world is prompted by leisure: the speaker desires to hear the nightingale sing, and so he sets off 'unto a wode' (58), as he says,

61     Til I came til a lavnde of white and grene;  
        So faire one hade I neuer in bene,  
        The grounde was grene, i-poudred with daise,  
 64     The floures & þe grenes like heigh,  
        Al grene and white; was noþing ellis sene.

The month of May, the outdoor leisure time, the search for the nightingale, and the *locus amoenus* are elements so thoroughly conventional that the events that follow could be anticipated by anyone

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Fischer 1994.

<sup>17</sup> Ed. by Donatelli 1989. For the dating, see Donatelli 1989: 17.

<sup>18</sup> Ed. by Conlee 1991. For the dating, see Conlee 1991: 249–50.

familiar with the genre. The speaker decides to sit down in the clearing by the side of a stream, and the sounds of birdsong and rushing water soon induce a slumber (66–88). This state of half-waking, half-sleeping provides the elements necessary for the avian debate: the sleeper still hears the birds, but dreams he can interpret their intent (106–10).

Though the mid-fourteenth century fragment *Wynnere and Wastoure*<sup>19</sup> is earlier than *Death and Liffe*, *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale*, and even *Piers Plowman*, which it influenced,<sup>20</sup> it demonstrates through subtle parody that the *chanson d'aventure*-setting was already conventional by the middle of the century. Following a brief prologue on the prevalence of marvels in the present age, the poet sets the stage for a dream-vision in the first person:

32 Als I went in the weste wandrynge myn one,  
 Bi a bonke of a bourne bryghte was the sonne,  
 Vndir a worthiliche wodde by a wale medewe  
 35 Fele floures gan folde ther my fote steppede.  
 I layde myn hede one ane hill ane hawthorne besyde  
 The throstills full throly they threpen togedire  
 38 Hipped vp heghwalles fro heselis tyll othire  
 Bernacles with thayre billes one barkes thay rounge  
 Þe jay janglede one heghe, jarmede the foles,  
 41 Þe bourne full bremlly rane þe bankes bytwene.  
 So ruyde were þe roughe stremys and raughten so heghe  
 That it was neghande nyghte or I nappede myghte  
 44 For dyn of the depe watir and dadillyng of fewllys.  
 Bot as I laye at the laste þan lowked myn eghne  
 And I was swythe in a sweuen sweped belyue.

The references to flowers, birds, and the stream by a forest side all identify this setting as a *locus amoenus*; the reference to the bright sun in conjunction with the birds and flowers alerts the audience to fact that the action must be situated in the warm season. Indeed, the audience may already have concluded that this is a Maytime setting, considering the prevalence of this calendrical detail in analogous texts. The parodical element in *Wynnere and Wastoure* is that rather than put him to sleep, as in *Piers Plowman* and *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale*, the birdsong and the sound of the running water keep the narrator awake until the evening, at which point he is finally able to sink into

<sup>19</sup> Ed. by Trigg 1990. For the dating, see Trigg 1990: xxii–xxvii.

<sup>20</sup> Schmidt 2011: II, 289–90.

his dream, half a day later than is conventional.

Occasionally, the hunt was adduced as the motive for the conventional excursion into the natural world. This is seen, for instance, in *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*,<sup>21</sup> whose narrator spends a May morning (identified as ‘the sesone of somere when softe bene the wedres,’ 2) poaching in a private forest but falls asleep while guarding his buried catch against swine. Despite his purpose, the poacher still has an eye for the natural world, which he describes as pleasant and in full bloom. Here as in other texts, the heat of the sun plays a role in the protagonist’s dozing off (1–16, 91–103). A modified version of the motif is found in Paris’s vision in the late fourteenth-century *Destruction of Troy*,<sup>22</sup> which takes place during a summer hunt but after sunset, and his sleep is prompted by exhaustion from the day’s exercise rather than the lazy enjoyment of a pleasant landscape (2340–79).

Perhaps the most extensive frame narrative for a Middle English dream-vision is that of Chaucer’s early poem *The Book of the Duchess*.<sup>23</sup> Most of this is to do not with setting, but with theme: the poem centres around a dialogue with a knight bereft of his lady, and the introduction tells how the speaker, unable to sleep for what must be interpreted as love-longing, turns to the tale of Alcyone’s love for her husband Ceyx, perished at sea. The one common thread between this introduction and those of other dream-visions and debates is season: the vision’s thematic focus on love connects it with the season of love and the month of May. This link is only made explicit within the speaker’s dream, however, which contains a subtle transition between waking environment and dreamscape: although the dream’s opening scene is set in the narrator’s bed, this setting is brought as close to the outdoors as possible, with clear glass windows admitting bright sunlight, birdsong, and the sounds of a nearby hunt (290–353). It is when the protagonist’s dream-self rises and joins the hunting-party that he comes upon the knight whose story forms the focal element of the poem.

Where other dream-visions emphasise the spring setting of the frame narrative, *The Book of the Duchess* introduces it only within the visionary space, demonstrating that the season has a role to play beyond that of portal into the otherworld, namely as the natural setting of that otherworld

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<sup>21</sup> Ed. by Offord 1959.

<sup>22</sup> Ed. by Panton and Donaldson 1869–74; for the dating, see I, liii–lxiii.

<sup>23</sup> Ed. by Benson 1987: 329–46.

itself. This connection between the otherworld and the season of renewal is highly typical of the dream-vision (and, it will be seen below, of other Middle English encounters with the supernatural). Chaucer employs it again in his *Legend of Good Women*,<sup>24</sup> a series of tales of female suffering framed by a dream-visionary gathering of legendary women in a springtime clearing. The central image in this poem's prologue is that of the daisy, a symbol for Alceste, whom Chaucer introduces as the spouse to the god of love. The speaker recounts at length his love for daisies and his Maytime habit of visiting this flower (always in the singular) in the early mornings and the evenings (40–63). One night as he returns from a visit to his daisy, he has a bed made in an arbour, with flowers strewn about it; it is in this cultivated outdoor environment that he experiences his dream (197–211). The visionary space, however, is the same meadow in which the speaker spends his waking hours:

210 Me mette how I lay in the mede thoo,  
to seen this flour to sprede, as I devyse.  
And from afer com walkyng in the mede  
213 The god of love, and in his hand a quene.

Convention has it, of course, that May is the only season appropriate for an encounter with the god of love, and a *locus amoenus* the only appropriate setting. Since the work is also a dream-vision, however, the connection of this genre with the spatioseasonal context of a green spring environment is here likewise confirmed for both the frame narrative and the visionary space.

A further text making use of the *locus amoenus* in both these environments is *Pearl*.<sup>25</sup> Composed in the late fourteenth century but in more northerly parts than Chaucer's visions,<sup>26</sup> this text has its speaker enter an 'erber grene' (38) with rather different a motivation than is customary, namely to mourn his lost daughter. The poem's allegorical style has this green environment be the location where the speaker has lost his pearl, as he says: 'þurȝ gresse to grounde hit fro me yot' (10). The straightforward explanation (and the imagery of the frame narrative does encourage straightforward interpretation) is that the *erber* here is simply an abstraction of the cemetery which the speaker visits to mourn his daughter, rather than her actually having died in such a location. Either way, this poem,

<sup>24</sup> Ed. by Benson 1987: 587–630. I use the F-text.

<sup>25</sup> Ed. by Gordon 1953.

<sup>26</sup> Gordon 1953: xliii–xliv.

not at all interested in Chaucer's erotic brand of love, still makes use of the conventional pleasant landscape for its waking environment.

If carnal love is not an object in *Pearl*, the poem is nevertheless in need of a context that allows its protagonist to fall asleep. Not now bound to the May convention, the poet opts for the August grain harvest as his seasonal setting (39–40). Here, the visionary is beset by a sorrow-induced sleep that bears some thematic resemblance to the sleep enjoyed by Chaucer's love-starved protagonist in *The Book of the Duchess*. What *Pearl* shares with many other dream-visions is that it takes an outdoor summertime environment to inspire a dream with a message from a world beyond our own.

The world which the visionary enters in his dream is presented as perfect in every way. Its description employs several of the characteristic features of the *locus amoenus*: forest, birds, and a stream, here further accompanied by tall cliffs. Not satisfied with mere repetition of the convention, however, the author takes great pains to stress that the beauty of this world is beyond human description. One of his ways of accomplishing this is that also found in the biblical depiction of the New Jerusalem (which indeed it is meant to represent),<sup>27</sup> namely by substituting gems for other, in this case natural, materials, and in other cases by comparing those materials to precious metals. Thus the leaves on the trees are like silver, the gravel underfoot consists of pearls, and the riverbed is likewise embellished with diverse precious stones. In addition, the visionary continually proclaims the beauty of the place, in one passage using the term *dubbement* ('splendour') four times in the space of fourteen lines (108–21). The central message of this description is that 'þe derþe þerof for to deuyse | nis no wiȝ worþé þat tonge bereȝ' (99–100; cf. 69).<sup>28</sup>

In all of this, the time of year is not once mentioned. However, the passage describes an unambiguous *locus amoenus*, a convention positively exclusive to spring and summer, as confirmed in this text by the forest in bloom, birdsong, and the fragrance of fruits. In addition, of course, this poem differs from the others by describing a paradisaical landscape, so that it has centuries of theology to consider for the notion that paradise is a place of eternal fruit harvest and devoid of dark and cold.

<sup>27</sup> Apc 21.18–21; cf. 21.11.

<sup>28</sup> The full landscape description prior to the introduction of the girl and the opposite bank extends from lines 65 to 136.

Therefore, if this poem conveys information about the typical environment and seasonality of the otherworld, then it is of paradise only; the physical settings of visions of hell present quite a different picture (see above, section 1.4.1). On the other hand, it is surely significant that the paradisaal landscape of *Pearl* shares its central landscape features with secular dream-environments, suggesting that the *locus amoenus* and its season are characteristic of the literary otherworld,<sup>29</sup> and hellscapes are the exception rather than sharing equal weight in a binary between desirable and undesirable visionary spaces.

Where unpleasant dreamscapes do occur, their analysis may serve the negative delineation of their more desirable counterparts. This may be seen in the thirteenth-century debate *Als I lay in a winteris nyt*.<sup>30</sup> Although its seasonality is revealed only in the eponymous opening line, this poem employs its temporal setting to evoke a sentiment not fully present in any of the texts mentioned above, namely horror.<sup>31</sup> *Als I lay* is part of a popular subgenre of the medieval debate poem that pits the soul against its body following death in a frustrated accusation of having effected the soul's eternal damnation.<sup>32</sup> This genre cannot be detached from its didactic aim, which is to deliver the most urgent message of the medieval Church, namely for individuals to turn away from their sins in order to attain salvation. Accordingly, the sentiment expressed is equally urgent, and the resulting horror considerably more intense and transitive than that of the typical Middle English encounter with the world beyond society. Whereas romance narrative serves entertainment above all else and rarely strives to convey intense emotions, let alone guilt, the audience of the body-and-soul debate must have been constantly aware that the message applied to them, and the poems' use of horror seeks to exploit this awareness.

*As I lay* demonstrates this tendency through a range of unpleasant associations, one of which is the seasonal image of cold and winter. In order of appearance, the poem's three central interests are the *ubi sunt*-motif expressing the fleeting nature of earthly goods (13–120), the exploration through

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Spearing 1976: 4 and discussions of individual poems in that work, such as at pp. 26, 41, 130–1, 134.

<sup>30</sup> Ed. by Conlee 1991: 18–49.

<sup>31</sup> Conlee 1991: xxix–xxx; Phillips 2007: 377–8.

<sup>32</sup> Conlee 1991: xxiv–xxvii.

debate of the soul's lifelong struggle with its body to abstain from sin (121–464), and the torments that await the soul in hell (465–608). Along the way, however, there is some attention for the cold reality awaiting the corpse, a motif essential to medieval English body-and-soul debates.<sup>33</sup> Here as elsewhere, there is reference to the worms and the decay that will consume the body (46, 153) in conjunction with other discomforts of the grave as compared to life above ground:

77      Fram þe palays þat þou i lay,  
             Wiþ wormes is now y-taken þin in;  
             Þi bour is bilt wel cold in clay,  
 80      Þe rof schal take to þi chin.

While the narrow confinement of the grave recalls the spatial constriction attributed to hell in Anglo-Saxon tradition,<sup>34</sup> its cold quality is another unpleasant negation of the palace previously inhabited by the body. The *winteris nyt* of the poem's opening line, however, is uncharacteristic of the genre in that it refers not to the temporal aspect of the graveyard setting but to a frame narrative in which the narrator witnesses the debate in a dream. The body-and-soul debate is here merged with the dream-vision, and the poet has chosen to set the frame narrative on a winter's night. This choice of seasonal setting is telling, because it suggests that winter nights were considered appropriate for tales of horror in late medieval England as they were in late medieval Iceland as well as the modern Western tradition. The deviation from the pleasant summer landscape of other dream-visions is thus to be explained by generic considerations. In this way, the prevalence of seasonal references in a given period or corpus is firmly rooted in generic fashion, which in turn reflects the type and intensity of sentiments authors sought to convey.

The role of seasonal settings in Middle English visions and debates thus fulfils a number of functions. In many of these texts, the summer halfyear (most typically in the guise of a May morning) serves to make outdoor leisure and drowsiness plausible. However, this need itself reveals a further convention, namely the connection of dreams and supernatural debates with the outdoors. This element presumably accords with a universal tendency to give the supernatural a place outside the boundaries of familiar spaces. The seasonal aspect, however, reveals a glimpse of the author's

<sup>33</sup> See, e.g., *Soul I* (ed. by Krapp 1932: 54–9); *The Grave* (ed. by Conlee 1991: 3–6).

<sup>34</sup> e.g. *GenB* 356–7 and the illustration on p. 36 of Oxford, Bodley, MS Junius XI.

emotive aims: a pleasant summer landscape is most commonly the context for an exciting adventure that is desirable if not on the part of the protagonist then at least to the audience, while winter is reserved for more disturbing material. If this tendency holds true for the other corpora here under study, it may signal profound differences in authorial aims between Old English and Old Norse literature on the one hand and the Middle English verse tradition on the other. This question will be taken up in the conclusions. In the section here following, it will be seen that summer as the season for Middle English encounters with the unfamiliar extends beyond dreams and debates, forming a critical element of romance narrative.

## 4.3 The Forest of Romance

### 4.3.1 Origins and Influences

Space in courtly romance is strongly dualistic. Although exceptions merit discussion below, the court typically functions as a safe haven, while the outside world is the setting for adventures. That outside world is remarkably homogeneous, the forest taking centre stage as the prime landscape of adventure.<sup>35</sup> Although the highways, foreign cities, and sea-crossings of the military campaign trail may be thought of as equally valid geographical loci of romance, these do not allow for the individual adventures that establish a knight's worth,<sup>36</sup> as they are social spaces: the military campaign is a court on the move, a walled city in the wilderness<sup>37</sup> in which adventure is communal by default. In these settings, individual adventures take place only when the protagonist is separated from his companions or takes on an individual quest, like Gawain when he meets Priamus in *The Alliterative Morte Arthure* (2513–716),<sup>38</sup> or Arthur when he confronts the giant at Mont Saint Michel in the same poem (840–1221).<sup>39</sup> That the latter episode takes place not in a forest but on a rocky headland makes clear that the prominence of the forest, though pronounced, is not absolute.

<sup>35</sup> Stauffer 1959: 11–12; Putter 1995: 10–50; cf. Curtius 1942: 254.

<sup>36</sup> Saunders 1993: ix.

<sup>37</sup> This image is based on Piehler 1971: 72–5; see further Saunders 1993: 40–1.

<sup>38</sup> Ed. by Benson 1986: 113–238.

<sup>39</sup> On the landscape of this episode, see Elliott 1961: 67.

The forest of medieval romance was informed by a variety of socioeconomic and traditional factors, several of which have been described by Stauffer and Saunders.<sup>40</sup> This landscape possessed considerable economic value as a source of food, fuel, and construction materials and as pasture-land, primarily for swine, while its clearance made way for further economic exploitation as arable land.<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, the rate of forest clearance generally kept up with population growth.<sup>42</sup> On a larger timescale, the reverse reasoning also holds true: since forest was the primary landscape of Western Europe prior to the spread of populous civilisations, most areas were woodland until they came within range of resource-intensive settlements; indeed, if left alone for long enough, they could return to forest.<sup>43</sup> In southern Britain, most land was turned to agricultural uses in the Bronze Age, with a further wave of deforestation taking place in Roman times;<sup>44</sup> on the Continent north of the Alps, woodland remained a far more prominent part of the landscape, with vast stretches surviving into the Middle Ages,<sup>45</sup> and other regions returning to their forest state following the decline of the Roman Empire.<sup>46</sup>

The dualistic nature of romance space is an exaggeration of the old Continental environment, in which forest had simply been the space between settlements, the natural setting of the road.<sup>47</sup> However, it was precisely when the historical predominance of the European forest had come to an end through extensive clearing that it began to assume such a prominent role in the literature.<sup>48</sup> On the Continent, the impressive but more isolated dense forests that in large part still survive today inspired the reimagining of a past in which this landscape covered much of Europe. In England,

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<sup>40</sup> Esp. Stauffer 1959: 54–104; Saunders 1993: 1–43.

<sup>41</sup> Birrell 1980; Schmid-Cadalbert 1989: 28–9.

<sup>42</sup> Nicholls 1972; Mantel 1990: 52–64; Hooke 2010: 113–18. For more recent illustrations of the same principle worldwide, see Mather and Needle 2000 and cf. Wunder 2000: 37–40.

<sup>43</sup> Mantel 1990: 52. Forest regeneration in the absence of human activity is not, however, automatic: in temperate zones, the presence of wild herbivores precludes the formation at least of dense forests (Hooke 2010: 113).

<sup>44</sup> Dark 1999.

<sup>45</sup> Hasel 1985: 33–52; Schmid-Cadalbert 1989: 29–31; Mantel 1990: 48; Schraml and Winkel 1999: 117; Hooke 2010: 116; cf. the Mediterranean situation described in e.g. Durand and Ruas 2004. As has been pointed out, the spatial extent of Continental forests was not everywhere alike, eastern regions typically retaining more forest cover by the early Middle Ages, and settlements being generally unevenly distributed across the region (Hasel 1985: 38–44; Schmid-Cadalbert 1989: 28).

<sup>46</sup> Bechmann 1990: 76–7.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Putter 1995: 41–2.

<sup>48</sup> Schmid-Cadalbert 1989: 29–31; Putter 1995: 16–17.

where extensive forests had long been cleared, the aristocrats in whose circles romances thrived<sup>49</sup> would have enjoyed enough mobility to take them through medieval forests the likes of the Weald or Forest of Dean even if they had not travelled abroad. With the rise of the royal hunting-forest, moreover, aristocrats of the high and later Middle Ages in Britain and Europe alike came to spend regular time in carefully-protected woodlands,<sup>50</sup> some of which were planted specifically for the purpose of the hunt.<sup>51</sup> The popularity of the hunt from the eleventh century onwards may certainly be understood as both an inspiration for authors of romance and a point at which the literature resonated with its audience on the level of personal experience.

Since the forests constituted economic space and travelling-space but not social space, they attracted activities best carried out outside the confines of society. Highwaymen took naturally to woodlands coinciding with roads, as these offered cover as well as food when needed. Poachers were drawn to forests for both sustenance and profit. Religious recluses and monastic communities settled in the forest because it represented the wilderness and primeval chaos, a place to be tested and tempted by supernatural powers directly as opposed to through the evils of society.<sup>52</sup> Outlaws were driven to find economic spaces away from society, and often found these in the forests, where they had no choice but to live off the natural resources or the property of travellers. All these associations contributed to the psychogeography of the forest to make it a place at once foreign and necessary, dangerous yet exciting, a place where the chaos of the subconscious could be confronted in the guise of a physical wilderness.<sup>53</sup>

The romance forest inherited some of its literary associations from classical literature, while others developed independently. In her book on the subject, Saunders describes how twelfth-century romance formed in part under direct influence from Virgil and Ovid, while also building on Celtic elements and the *roman d'Antiquité*-tradition constituting an earlier medieval reinterpretation of the late Antique material. The chief difference as far as the forest is concerned is that the classical

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<sup>49</sup> Brunner 1961.

<sup>50</sup> Billett 1994: 81–3; Birrell 1996; Pluskowski 2007.

<sup>51</sup> Saunders 1993: 6–9; but cf. Hooke 1998.

<sup>52</sup> Saunders 1993: 10–19; cf. Stauffer 1959: 97–104.

<sup>53</sup> Piehler 1971: 72–8; Saunders 1993: 19–24.

narratives cast it as a place where men could encounter pagan deities, an association abandoned by the other traditions, seemingly out of a Christian intolerance of pagan elements. Indeed, the *romans d'Antiquité* abandoned the emphasis on the forest altogether, but this returned in the romance tradition under influence of the growing interest in chivalrous adventure. The supernatural aspect of the Roman forests had lived on in a more abstract guise as an association with unexpected turns of events, and was now merged with the Celtic interest in fairies and the otherworld.<sup>54</sup> Through its association with the *Tristan*-material, in which it serves as a refuge for lovers, the forest gained a bipolar quality: normally an unfamiliar space where the irrational could be confronted, the similarly irrational quality of love made it familiar to lovers. In the same way, hermits and other exiles make the outside spaces their own, thereby relinquishing their bonds with society. It is important to observe that the forest's experiential value is able to change polarity within a text, so that the *locus amoenus* is a fleeting moment situated in a sheltered refuge within the larger landscape, which retains its hostile connotations.<sup>55</sup>

#### 4.3.2 Summer Forests, Summer Fairies

The passive psychogeographical experience, in which the individual is affected by a subjective evaluation of his or her surroundings, has the greatest force when undergone in isolation from other members of society. The greater the company, the more will the individual's confidence be bolstered against irrational impressions. A distinction should therefore be made between chivalric romances of individual adventure and social or military romances, in which much of the adventure centres on jousts and confrontations between large armies. The former type, in which a knight wins renown through individual achievement, is here of greater interest, although occasional episodes in the military romances likewise answer to the model of individual adventure. Two observations may be made that generally hold true for individual adventure: the forest is the central setting of adventure in its twin senses of chance events and heroic challenges, and the forest is normally a summer landscape,

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<sup>54</sup> Saunders 1993: 25–46.

<sup>55</sup> Saunders 1993: 81–94, esp. 91–2.

particularly where supernatural events and encounters with fairies are concerned.

The forest's role as a landscape of adventure follows from the premise, usually implicit, that heroism is proved outside the social sphere. In social romances, again, this is far less the case: in *Guy of Warwick*,<sup>56</sup> which centres heavily on large-scale battles, Guy's first instinct when told to prove his valour is to enter the jousting-circuit (735–1074). Since Guy invariably wins both his numerous jousts and his many battles, however, the episodes of greatest narrative appeal are instead those whose development neither protagonist nor audience can foresee, and these tend to take place in the forest.

A key episode is that in which Guy first finds Tiri, soon to become his close friend. As Guy rides towards England with his men, coming upon a forest he orders his companions to find lodging in the nearby town while he enters the forest to enjoy the birdsong:

4499 Toward Ingland is Gij y-drawe,  
       & wiþ him Herhaud, his gode felawe.  
       Swiþe hastiliche þai gun ride,  
 4502 Þe weder was hot in somers tide.  
       In May it was also ich wene,  
       When floures sprede & springeþ grene:  
 4505 Into a forest sir Gij is go  
       Neye a cite, nouȝt fer þer-fro.  
       Pan seyð Gij to his meyney:  
 4508 'Wendeþ swiþe wel an heye,  
       Mine in to nim in þe cite;  
       Ich wil a while here pleye me,  
 4511 For to here þe foules singe.'  
       Þer-in was þo his likeinge.

Had the poet continued by telling merely how Guy enjoyed the birdsong before returning to his companions, of course, the audience would have been disappointed: no romance would have its protagonist enter a forest alone with such a limited narrative purpose. The episode is so designed that the audience anticipates an adventure, thereby heightening the suspense of this expedition into an extrasocietal space. The time of year is here introduced to convey the appeal of a forest ride, but combined with the heat of the day, the summer setting also exploits the convention, established below, of hot noontimes in or by the forest as foreshadowings of encounters with fairies and other

<sup>56</sup> Ed. by Zupitza 1883–91. Except where otherwise stated, the Auchinleck redaction is cited.

unfamiliar agents. In this case, the text is not concerned with fairies but with human affairs, and Guy comes upon the wounded knight Tiri, which prompts him to rescue Tiri's lover from a band of outlaws and enter into a complex sequence of adventures to bring both Tiri and the lady to the safety (i.e. the social domain) of the town (4513–930). In this episode, the forest is employed both as a setting for adventures and as a hostile social space, the domain of outlaws and enemies. However, its natural beauty is used as an occasion for the adventure, and the summer season makes this motif possible.

Elsewhere in the text, forest and season are employed in similar ways. It is 'upon a somers day' (4939) that Guy and Tiri learn that Tiri's father is under siege over Tiri's elopement with the duke's daughter, announcing a further sequence of adventures (4939–5504). The association of forest landscape with adventures and hostile encounters is further reinforced by a dangerous boar (6716–68), an ambush (1304–1518), and, in the Caius manuscript, a lion and a dragon (4111–48);<sup>57</sup> in the last of these, the adventure is again prompted by Guy's desire for entertainment, although the term used, *play*, is usually associated with hunting and fowling when found in the context of natural landscapes, as it is here (4112).<sup>58</sup>

The search for forest adventures occurs also in *The Alliterative Morte Arthure*, a text that everywhere else bears an even stronger emphasis on military campaigns than *Warwick*. The adventure occurs during a campaign in Lorraine, in late July or early August (2390), when Gawain is sent into the wilderness with a few other men to obtain wildlife provisions for the army. At dawn, however, Gawain abandons his company 'wonders to seek' (2482–514, at 2514). He soon encounters an exotic knight named Priamus, and they wound each other severely before making friends. Both extrasocietal setting and summer season are once more emphasised when Gawain returns to his companions,

<sup>57</sup> The motif of the knight rescuing a lion from a dragon was first used in Chrétien's *Yvain* (ed. Foerster 1902), but subsequently became a commonplace in romance, associated with various characters. In the Scandinavian retellings, for instance, the lion is saved by Trancival (*Ectors saga* ch. 10 (Loth 1962–65: I, 122–4)), Sigurðr þoggli (*Sigurðar saga þogla* chs 16–17 (Loth 1962–65: II, 138–44)), and Vilhjálmr sjóðr (*Vilhjálms saga sjóðs* ch. 13 (Loth 1962–65: IV, 26–7)) as well as by Íven himself (*Hærra Ivan* lines 2691–752 (ed. by Kalinke 1999: III); *Ívens saga* ch. 10 (Kalinke 1999: II, 72–4)). In all these cases, the setting for the encounter is a forest or forest clearing.

<sup>58</sup> The lion and dragon also appear in the Auchinleck manuscript, but they are there found 'toward a pleyn plas | þat bisiden a doun was'; the knights encounter them while resting from their travels (4109–26). For *play* in the context of hunting and fowling, see lines 1203–12, 3147–54 of the Caius redaction.

who have been lulled to sleep by birdsong; the extraordinary (and therefore adventurous) nature of the encounter is demonstrated by Priamus's possession of a magic plant that heals their injuries (2690–709).

Summer encounters tend to be less universally desirable when it is women who venture into the forest or other extrasocietal space. *Sir Degaré*<sup>59</sup> is a good example of this. Degaré's mother, princess of Little Britain, is separated from her father's party on their way to the queen's tomb and dismounts in a clearing with no-one but two handmaidens by her side. It is at this point that the morning heat is brought in, a tell-tale sign of the otherworld encounter:

69 Thai nist what hem was best to don.  
The weder was hot bifor þe non;  
Hii leien hem down upon a grene,  
72 Under a chastein tre, ich wene,  
And fillen a-slepe everichone  
Bote the damaisele alone:  
75 She wente aboute and gaderede floures  
And herknede song of wilde foules;  
So fer in þe launde 3he goth, iwis,  
78 Pat 3he ne wot nevere whare 3he is.  
To hire maidenen 3he wolde anon.  
Ac hi ne wiste never wat wei to gon.

In this *locus amoenus* turned hostile, the princess is approached by a man who politely introduces himself as a fairy knight, but goes on to make clear that he has come to have intercourse with her, which he does to her great distress (89–114). A similar episode sets the stage for the narrative of *Sir Orfeo*<sup>60</sup> when the queen entertains herself in the domesticated forest, the orchard:

57 Bifel so in þe comessing of May  
(When miri & hot is þe day,  
& o-way beþ winter-schours,  
60 & eueri feld is ful of flours,  
& blosme breme on eueri bou3  
Ouer-al wexeþ miri anou3)  
63 Þis ich quen, Dame Heurodis,  
Tok to maidens of priis,  
& went in an vndrentide  
66 To play bi an orchard-side,

<sup>59</sup> Ed. by Schmidt and Jacobs 1980: 11, 57–88.

<sup>60</sup> Ed. by Bliss 1966. The Auchinleck redaction is cited throughout.

To se þe floures sprede & spring,  
 & to here þe foules sing.  
 69 Þai sett hem doun al þre  
 Vnder a fair ympe-tre,  
 & wel sone þis fair quene  
 72 Fel on slepe opon þe grene.  
 Þe maidens durst hir nouȝt awake,  
 Bot lete hir ligge & rest take.  
 75 So sche slepe til after none,  
 Pat vnder-tide was al y-done.

The seasonal setting is explicitly one of spring (still categorised as the summer halfyear in this period),<sup>61</sup> and both the *locus amoenus*-motif and the hot morning of fairy encounters are put into place right at the outset. Once awake, the queen is beyond herself with distress, as the king of fairies has come to her in her sleep, shown her his kingdom, and informed her that he will return the next day to take her away for good (77–174). This text thus overlaps with the genre of vision literature (see section 4.2 above), but its interaction with a fairy otherworld makes it a romance first and foremost.

Not only do the fairies of *Sir Orfeo* strike on a hot May morning, their kingdom itself is a bright summer world whose likeness to the heavenly Jerusalem can hardly be overlooked. When Orfeo finds his way to the fairy kingdom after years of forest exile, self-imposed out of grief over his lost queen, he is faced with a brilliant sight:

351 He com in-to a fair cuntray,  
 As briȝt so sonne on somers day,  
 Smoþe & plain & al grene  
 354 — Hille no dale nas þer non y-sene.

The paradisaic analogue begun with the absence of hills and valleys<sup>62</sup> continues with the description of the castle, which is inlaid with various gems like the heavenly Jerusalem, so that

369 Al þat lond was euer liȝt,  
 For when it schuld be þerk & niȝt  
 Þe riche stonnes liȝt gonne  
 372 As briȝt as doþ at none þe sonne.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Anderson 1997: 261–2.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. *Phoen* 21–7.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *Apc.* 22.5.

The king's crown, moreover, shines 'as briȝt as þe sonne' (152), and the royal couple's crowns and clothes 'schine so briȝt | þat vnneþe bihold he hem miȝt' (415–16). The fairy kingdom is thus presented as universally bright, associated with summer and by implication devoid of seasonal variation; in all things it seems to Orfeo like 'þe proude court of Paradis' (376).

The fairy encounter is found once again in *Sir Launfal*,<sup>64</sup> this time with a female fairy seeking the (now voluntary) favour of a knight. Launfal, having left Arthur's court because he does not get along with the new Queen Gwenore, rapidly spends his monetary reserves living in the town of Caerleon and becomes the scorn of all the townspeople. Ashamed of his situation, Launfal seeks comfort in a nearby forest clearing, as he says,

208 Pat y myȝte confortede be  
By a launde unþer þys cyté,  
Al yn þys vndermyde.

Once there, the knight settles in precisely the type of context that attracts fairies:

220 He lyȝte adoun, & gan abyde  
Vnder a fayr forest;  
And, for hete of þe wedere,  
223 Hys mantell he feld togydere,  
And sette hym down to reste.  
Þus sat þe knyȝt yn symplyté,  
226 In þe schadwe, vnder a tre,  
Per þat hym lykede best.

As he sits there reflecting on his misery, two fairy maidens approach him and ask him to follow them to their lady Tryamour, who lives in a forest pavilion and wants Launfal for her lover, showering him with riches in return (229–336). As Saunders observes, there is here less of the violence associated with the fairies in other texts; indeed, Launfal's life with Tryamour improves greatly on life in the human sphere, whether in Caerleon or at Arthur's court. The harsh nature of the fairy world is reflected only in Tryamour's instant disappearance when, against the instructions of the fairy princess, Launfal tells Gwenore that he has a lover, and in Tryamour's blinding of Gwenore after the latter is shown to have committed perjury in an attempt to bring Launfal into discredit (361–5, 673–810,

<sup>64</sup> Ed. by Bliss 1960.

925–1008).<sup>65</sup> Whether dangerous or desirable, however, the fairy kingdom in this text, as in *Sir Degaré* and *Sir Orfeo*, is again accessed on a hot summer's day about noon. In this instance, it is worth remarking that the poem's source, Marie de France's *Lanval*, makes reference neither to the time nor to the heat of the day;<sup>66</sup> the English poet appears to be modifying the material to conform to the broader convention, which is particularly well attested in English romances.

The hunt provides another fertile occasion for forest adventures. Previously discussed as the context of dream-visions, this motif also shows up in knightly adventures like *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*.<sup>67</sup> Here, the hunt takes place during the 'grass-time of the yeere', when the deer have fattened up sufficiently to be desirable game (B19; cf. A31). This period began at the Nativity of Saint John, according to John Giffard,<sup>68</sup> so that the action of the poem is set in summer: the red hart chased by Gawain, Kay, and Bishop Bodwin was, according to the evidence gathered by Baillie-Grohman and Baillie-Grohman, not hunted after 14 September on the Julian calendar.<sup>69</sup> It thus seems to be an attachment to comfort or courtliness, not the cold of the season, that prompts Kay's insistence that the knights should seek out lodgings rather than sleep out of doors (B91–4). Accordingly, the group make their way to the carle of Carlisle, whose residence, a forest castle, is a typical otherworld location.<sup>70</sup> The audience's expectations in this regard soon prove to be correct, as the carle is a superhuman creature who has never yet allowed a guest to escape alive (B175–88, 409–15).

These examples show the forest to take clear primacy among romance landscapes of contact with fairies and the superhuman. As part of this association, the forest is bound up with a number of further conventions of the genre. It is a landscape of isolation, for instance, in which characters tend to end up by themselves either by choice or through misadventure. In its capacity as a

<sup>65</sup> Saunders 1993: 145–7.

<sup>66</sup> Ed. by Wanke 1925: 86–112; the relevant lines are 39–79.

<sup>67</sup> Ed. by Kurvinen 1951.

<sup>68</sup> In Giffard's reworking of the Middle English text of William Twiti's *Lart de venerie*, ed. by Scott-Macnab 2009: 17, lines 97–8.

<sup>69</sup> Baillie-Grohman and Baillie-Grohman 1909: 254. Their information derives largely from an early fifteenth-century translation of Gaston de Foix's *Livre de chasse*, itself begun in 1387 and thus contemporary with much of the literature discussed in this chapter (Baillie-Grohman and Baillie-Grohman 1909: xii).

<sup>70</sup> Whitaker 1984; cf. Saunders 1993: 154.

fairly landscape, the forest is also overwhelmingly a summer environment. In this respect, it joins and overlaps with the dream-visionary chronotope, which centres on the same season and a similar landscape category.

### 4.3.3 Old Norse Adventures

As romance literature was translated into Old Norse, the configuration of the European adventure was left largely unaltered. Nevertheless, the Old Norse manifestation of the motif requires some discussion of its own with a view to its adoption by original Icelandic narratives of the genres legendary saga and nordic (as opposed to translated) romance.

Most importantly, Old Norse narrative tradition already knew several motifs of seasonal adventure involving geographical distancing. Perhaps the most characteristic convention of this sort has a protagonist or group of protagonists spend the summer raiding, typically in the Baltic region (referred to as *Austrvegr* or *Eystrasalt*, occasionally specifying an eastern Baltic region such as Kúrland). This pattern is found in the sagas of Icelanders and the kings' sagas, but is especially prominent in the legendary sagas. It tends to award the Baltic lands no supernatural or other remarkable characteristics; in other words, the interest is purely in the adventure of raiding and warfare.<sup>71</sup>

A second motif, here particularly relevant, consists in journeys to Finnmörk in the farthest north, and sometimes to Bjarmaland east of Finnmörk; this motif too is particularly common in the legendary sagas. As was demonstrated in section 2.6.2 above, the *Finnar* are commonly associated with sorcery.<sup>72</sup> Accordingly, journeys to northern and northeastern lands are often journeys to a

<sup>71</sup> e.g. *Eg* chs 19, 36, 46, 49 (Bjarni Einarsson 2003: 23, 49, 63, 70); *Nj* ch. 119 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954: 302); *Ynglinga saga* chs 27, 31, 32 (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: I, 54, 60, 61); *Haraldar saga hárfagra* chs 24, 32 (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: I, 123, 134); *Haralds saga gráfeldar* chs 9, 12, 13 (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: I, 213, 216, 217); *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* chs 43, 90 (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: I, 287, 338–41); *Óláfs saga helga* chs 54, 62, 65 (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: I, 71, 82, 83); *GHR* chs 6, 38 (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: II, 374, 460); *HálfðEyst* chs 1, 10, 12 (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: III, 286, 297, 298); *Hversu Noregr byggðisk* ch. 2 (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: II, 142); *Qrv* ch. 23 (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: I, 355–6); *Ragn* ch. 18 (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: I, 143); *RagnSon* ch. 2 (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: I, 153); *Sqrla* ch. 4 (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: II, 102); *StSt* ch. 24 (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: II, 314); *ÞorstVik* chs 7, 21, 22, 24, 25 (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: II, 198, 233, 235, 241, 243).

<sup>72</sup> pp. 100–4.

realm of the supernatural. When Eiríkr *blóðøx* first encounters Gunnhildr in Finnmörk, she explains she is there to learn witchcraft under the supervision of two *Finnar* sorcerers.<sup>73</sup> The protagonist of *Bósa saga* is sent to obtain an ornamented vulture egg from Bjarmaland, here specifically near the river Dvina which issues into the southeastern part of the White Sea (chs 6–7).<sup>74</sup> The priestess who guards this egg is a prophetess and sorceress; her superhuman qualities in this respect are emphasised through her identification as a *troll*,<sup>75</sup> a concept with various referents, all tending towards the supernatural.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, when Ketill *hængr* sails by Finnmörk, he has to put in to land on account of bad weather; he is awoken at night by a *trollkona* rocking his ship (ch. 3),<sup>77</sup> and he later experiences a series of adventures among the superhuman *Finnar* inhabiting this region. A similar encounter is described in *Gríms saga loðinkinna*, whose title character wakes up first to a storm that chases off all game animals, and then to the laughter of two women identified as *jotnar* and *troll* (ch. 1).<sup>78</sup> In short, journeys to northeastern Scandinavia have strong overtones of the supernatural and in this respect bear some similarity to the individual adventures of European romance.

The first thing to observe about these journeying-motifs is that they seem to have arisen independently of European influence. The raiding-motif is so omnipresent in saga tradition, and so central to medieval Scandinavian history and culture, that there can be no doubt as to its nordic origins. The motif of the supernatural northern or northeastern realm, meanwhile, may rely on a spatial premise much like that of Continental romance, but the wider connections between the *Finnar* and witchcraft, between *troll*, giants, and the north, are too widespread to be explained as an offshoot of a foreign tradition borrowed in the thirteenth century.<sup>79</sup> If anything, Old Norse journeys to Finnmörk are reminiscent of the Finnish-Karelian *Kalevala* cycle of poetry, which tells of seaborne expeditions to a witch-governed northern land in order to recover a precious object.<sup>80</sup> Thus when Continental

<sup>73</sup> *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* ch. 34 (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51: I, 135); cf. *Eg* ch. 37 (Bjarni Einarsson 2003: 50–1).

<sup>74</sup> Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón 1943–44: II, 475–6.

<sup>75</sup> Ch. 8 (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón 1943–44: II, 478).

<sup>76</sup> See Árman Jakobsson 2008ab; Langeslag 2009.

<sup>77</sup> Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón 1943–44: I, 251.

<sup>78</sup> Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón 1943–44: I, 270.

<sup>79</sup> See Tolley 2009. As is observed in that work (1, 61), the Sami are not associated with magic in Greek and Latin sources until the mid-thirteenth century.

<sup>80</sup> See Lid 1951.

narratives of summer forests as sites of adventure and thresholds to a supernatural realm reached the north, an analogous tradition was already in place.

Even so, once the romance tradition came to Iceland it did have an impact on the way journeys to the north and east were depicted. In nordic romance as well as legendary sagas, foreign romance-motifs were incorporated into a preexisting nordic geography and literary social order.<sup>81</sup> Accordingly, even if a Scandinavian tradition of spatial othering may be established, many individual instances of journeys to these regions are difficult to separate from the international romance tradition. A good example of this is found in *Helga þáttur Þórissonar*. Here, the protagonist loses his way in a maple forest not far from Finnþórk (ch. 1).<sup>82</sup> The ensuing events are probably borrowed from the Lanval-tradition<sup>83</sup> whose Middle English adaptation *Sir Launfal* was introduced above, although it differs from that narrative in particulars.<sup>84</sup> As in *Lanval*, the protagonist encounters a fairylike maiden who invites him to be her lover. In the Icelandic text, however, the forest is set in northern Scandinavia near Finnþórk, and the maiden is the daughter of the superhuman King Guðmundr of Glæsisvellir, a region east of Bjarmaland representing an otherworld in many texts of this genre.<sup>85</sup>

*Helga þáttur* demonstrates how the season of encounters with the supernatural in legendary sagas coincides with that of European romance, but nevertheless comes across as a less immediate concern than in the romance tradition. In legendary sagas as in Continental romance, virtually all of the encounters take place in summer. However, this seasonality is presented in a considerably different way. Whereas in traditional romance the time of year only becomes relevant as a way of foreshadowing the supernatural encounter when the protagonist alights by a forest or in a clearing, Old Norse adventures typically describe the timing of expeditions relative to the seafaring season: it is after the winter that one sets sail, and the adventure must be complete, or else the journey interrupted, at the onset of winter.<sup>86</sup> Accordingly, *Helga þáttur* mentions the end of the summer only because it prompts

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<sup>81</sup> Cf. Power 1985a: 156.

<sup>82</sup> Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón 1943–44: III, 421–2; cf. Heggstad, Hødnebo, and Simensen 2008, s.v. *Vimund*.

<sup>83</sup> Power 1985b.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Wanke 1925: 86–112.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Power 1985a; Simek 1986: 264–70.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. *Kgs* chs 22–3 (Brenner 1881: 59–63).

the travellers to conclude their trading-expedition to Finnmörk; it is on their return that Helgi encounters Guðmundr's daughter. The heat-of-the-day motif so consistently found in Middle English fairy encounters is found in the north only in translated romance, and only on rare occasion.<sup>87</sup> Like other texts of its genre, *Helga þáttur* is an amalgam of nordic and southern motifs, but the seasonality of the action, coinciding in both traditions, is presented in a typically Icelandic way.

#### 4.3.4 Exile

Forests in medieval romance do not function exclusively as thresholds to the world of fairies, of course; they are home to a varied set of motifs, as Saunders makes clear.<sup>88</sup> Prominent among these is that of exile, as might be expected both from the sociohistorical role of the forest discussed in section 4.3.1 above and from the binary division of romance space. As will be seen, forests are not exclusively lush and warm when described as places of exile; instead, natural winter landscapes remain a powerful image of personal deprivation.

Among the longer-standing traditions of self-imposed exile to the natural world is one that is not, perhaps, voluntary in a present-day legal sense, namely the exile of madness. The image of the powerful Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar reduced to the state of a wild animal by divine punishment was well known throughout the Christian Middle Ages.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, Jerome purports that the association of madness with feral life in the fields and forests was generally recognised in his day.<sup>90</sup> The motif of a mad king relocating to the woods likewise had a strong presence in Celtic tradition, notably in the twelfth-century Irish text *Buile Shuibhne*, antecedents of which have been dated to the tenth century or earlier, and several Middle Welsh poems from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries, all of which are thought to have roots in the eleventh century or before.<sup>91</sup> One of the fullest expressions of the motif is found in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*, written about 1150.<sup>92</sup> In the opening

<sup>87</sup> e.g. *Hect* ch. 5 (Loth 1962–65: 1, 92); *Vikt* ch. 1 (Loth 1962–65: 1, 5–7).

<sup>88</sup> Saunders 1993.

<sup>89</sup> Doob 1974: 54–94; cf. Henze 1999, esp. 179–201.

<sup>90</sup> PL 25, col. 513; Saunders 1993: 13.

<sup>91</sup> O'Keeffe 1931: iii–v; Clarke 1973: 1–5, 22–5.

<sup>92</sup> Ed. by Clarke 1973; for its date and authorship, see Clarke 1973: 36–2. For discussions of its relation to the wider tradition of wild men, see Lot 1900; Bernheimer 1952; Walter 1999.

scene of this Latin poem, King Merlin takes part in a large battle, repeatedly stopping to bewail the loss of his companions in a manner reminiscent of the Psalmist's lamentations (23–71). Upon victory, Merlin disappears to take up life in the forest, from which point onwards both the narrator and the other characters classify him as a madman (72–83, 299–304). He is repeatedly brought back to court and the nearby town by force, but when among men he always longs to return to the forest (e.g. 278–9, 499–500). Eventually cured after drinking from a magic spring, he attributes his gift of prophecy to his former madness (1136–68). Following his recovery, he is offered to be restored to the throne, but he elects to continue living in the forest instead, now in the service of God (1259–91; cf. 1442–60). This narrative thus demonstrates the associative overlap between prophecy, madness, and religious seclusion.<sup>93</sup>

From the beginning of his exile, Merlin expresses distress at winter and its effects on his living-conditions:

78     Utitur herbarum radicibus, utitur herbis,  
           utitur arboreo fructu morisque rubeti.  
           Fit silvester homo quasi silvis deditus esset.

81     Inde per estatem totam nullique repertus  
           oblitusque sui cognatorumque suorum  
           delituit silvis obductus more ferino.

84     At cum venit yems herbasque tulisset et omnes  
           arboreos fructus nec quo frueretur haberet,  
           diffudit tales miseranda voce querelas:

87     ‘Celi Christe deus, quid agam? Qua parte morari  
           terrarum potero cum nil quo vescar adesse  
           inspicio, nec gramen humi nec in arbore glandes.

90     Tres quater et juges septene poma ferentes  
           hic steterant mali; nunc non stant. Ergo quis illas  
           quis michi surripuit, quo devenere repente?

93     Nunc illas uideo, nunc non. Sic fata repugnant;  
           sic quoque concordant cum dant prohibentque videre.  
           Deficiunt nunc poma michi, nunc cetera queque.

96     Stat sine fronde nemus, sine fructu; plector utroque,  
           cum neque fronde tegi valeo neque fructibus uti.  
           Singula bruma tulit pluviisque cadentibus auster.

99     Invenio si forte napes tellure sub ima  
           concurrunt avideque sues aprique voraces  
           eripiuntque napes michi quas de cespite vello.’

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Doob 1974: 134–207.

(‘He eats the roots of grasses, he eats grasses, he eats the fruit of trees and mulberries of the thicket. He becomes a man of the woods as though he had been consecrated to the woods. From then on throughout the summer, met by no-one and forgetful of himself and of his acquaintances, he hid in the woods, enveloped in a beastly mode of life. But when the winter came and had borne off the plants and the fruits of the trees and he had nothing to eat, he poured out complaints like these in a pitiable voice: “Christ, God of heaven, what shall I do? In what part of the world can I dwell when I find nothing on which I might feed, neither a plant of the earth nor acorns in a tree? Nineteen fruit-bearing apple trees stood here together; now they don’t. Who then has taken them away from me, where have they suddenly gone? Now I see them, now I don’t. Thus the fates oppose me; thus also they conspire against me, since they permit and forbid me to see. Now I am lacking in fruits and all other things. The wood remains without foliage, without fruit; I am punished in both respects, since I am able neither to be sheltered by the foliage nor to enjoy fruits. The winter and the south wind with its falling rains have carried them all off. If perhaps I find turnips below the deepest soil, pigs and voracious boars eagerly rush on and snatch away from me the turnips which I want from the turf.”’)

The severity of winter remains a theme for much of Merlin’s life in the forest, as he repeatedly mourns the absence of plant foods in winter. He sees value in each of the four Julian seasons except winter, though spring receives the largest share of praise:

146 O qui cuncta regis, quid est cur contigit ut non  
tempora sint eadem numeris distincta quaternis?  
Nunc ver jure suo flores frondesque ministrat,  
149 dat fruges estas, autumpnus micia poma.  
Consequitur glacialis yemps et cetera queque  
devorat et vastat pluviasque nivesque reportat.  
152 Singula queque suis arcet leditque procellis  
nec permittit humum varios producere flores  
aut quercus glandes aut malos punica mala.  
155 O utinam non esset hiems aut cana pruina!  
Ver foret aut estas, cuculusque canendo rediret  
Et Philomela pio que tristia pectora cantu  
158 mitigat et turtur conservans federa casta  
frondibus inque novis concordi voce volucres  
cantarent alie que me modulando foverent,  
161 dum nova flore novo tellus spiraret odorem  
gramine sub viridi levi; quoque murmure fontes  
diffluerent juxtaque daret sub fronde columba  
164 sompniferos gemitus irritaretque soporem.<sup>94</sup>

(‘O you who govern all, why does it happen that the seasons are not the same, distinct only in their fourfold number? As it is, spring by its law provides flowers and leaves, summer gives crops, autumn ripe fruits. The icy winter follows and devours each of the others and lays them waste

<sup>94</sup> For more references to and complaints of winter severity, see lines 416–18, 424–8, 535–73.

and brings rains and snows. Each of them it encloses and injures with its storms, and it does not permit the earth to produce its various flowers or the oak to produce acorns or the apple tree to produce red apples. O would that there were no winter or white hoarfrost! That it were spring or summer, and the cuckoo would return with its singing, and the nightingale who softens sad hearts with her devout song, and the turtle-dove keeping her chaste vows, and that other birds who soothe me with their song would sing among the new foliage with a harmonious sound, while the earth would breathe the fragrance of a new flower below new grass, green and smooth; also that the waters would flow off with a murmur and that near at hand a dove would produce sleep-inducing sighs below the foliage and incite a slumber!')

Eventually, he asks his sister to provide a large forest mansion with food servants and scribes for the winters only. He makes clear that this is not because he cannot bear the cold; instead, the arrangements are meant only to prevent his running out of provisions (542–73).<sup>95</sup>

A madness of a subtly different sort is that inspired by love and curable by its attainment. In *Sir Orfeo*,<sup>96</sup> the forest serves not only as a portal to the fairy world, but also as the locale for Orfeo's self-imposed exile upon the abduction of his queen. The poet's discussion of the seasons is strongly reminiscent of that in the *Vita Merlini*, but his or her juxtaposition of court and forest is more marked:

243 Now on hard heþe he liþ,  
 Wiþ leues & gresse he him wriþ.  
 He þat hadde had castels & tours,  
 246 Riuer, forest, friþ wiþ flours;  
 Now, þei it commenci to snewe & frese,  
 Pis king mot make his bed in mese.  
 249 He þat had y-had kniztes of priis  
 Bifor him kneland, & leuedis,  
 Now seþ he no-þing þat him likeþ,  
 252 Bot wilde wormes bi him strikeþ.  
 He þat had y-had plenté  
 Of mete & drink, of ich deynté,  
 255 Now may he al-day digge & wrote  
 Er he finde his fille of rote.  
 In somer he liueþ bi wild frut,  
 258 & berien bot gode lite;  
 In winter may he no-þing finde  
 Bot rote, grases, & þe rinde.

Noteworthy is the contrast between Orfeo's pre-exilic ownership of forests, which are mentioned among other landscapes of aristocratic entertainment, and his present condition, having made the

<sup>95</sup> Clarke 1973: 80–2.

<sup>96</sup> Ed. by Bliss 1960.

forest his home, so that its delights are immediately lost among its discomforts. Although his exile is disagreeable around the year, winter is adduced as a time of particular hardship, both for its weather and because it withholds the fruits of the earth. Here as in the *Vita Merlini*, then, winter has associations of exilic deprivation comparable to those of Old English lyric, although both of the later texts take a more practical view to the season's effects on the exile in addition to its purely associative value.

Occasionally, exile is depicted as a circumstance preferable to life in society inasmuch as it permits situations not possible in the human domain. This is an integral argument of the *Tristan* romances, in which the young lovers can be together only in the forest. Owing to this desirable aspect of their exile, their forest habitat frequently displays limited *loci amoeni* reflecting their love, even if the landscape as a whole remains a hostile territory.<sup>97</sup> Accordingly, summer landscapes make brief, repeated occurrences. The Middle English reworking of this originally Anglo-Norman tradition is *Sir Tristrem*,<sup>98</sup> a verse romance uniquely contained in the fourteenth-century Auchinleck manuscript. The seasons are first evoked in its introduction, which describes how the beauty of the world and the best of its inhabitants must all give way to what comes after, just as the summer and its foliage turn grey in winter:

12 This semly somers day,  
 In winter it is nought sen;  
 This greues wexen al gray,  
 15 That in her time were grene.  
 So dos this world, y say,  
 Y wis and nought at wene,  
 18 The gode ben al oway  
 That our elders haue bene,  
 To abide.  
 21 Of a knight is that y mene,  
 His name, it sprong wel wide.

The obvious implication is that *Tristrem* is one such shining example of the great men and women of a glorious past. In the process, however, the entire narrative is couched in a frame of figurative

<sup>97</sup> Saunders 1993: 81–94, esp. 90–4; cf. Schmid-Cadalbert 1989: 24, 39.

<sup>98</sup> Ed. by Crépin and Dauby 2002.

summer, in which all that is glorious exceeds the audience's standards of beauty, suspending realism for characters and narrative environment alike.

Since Ysonde is married to King Mark and the love between her and Tristrem is thus forbidden, the two can only give expression to it in private. Mostly, they seem to settle simply for Ysonde's bedroom, but they also exploit the outdoors, as in their orchard encounters (2058–61) and when they spend a week in a forest hideout (1915–22). The real *locus amoenus* is to be found in their extended forest habitation, however, after King Mark expels them from his kingdom on account of the apparent love that is between them (2438–569). The forest is replete with their love:

2454 A forest fled thai tille,  
 Tristrem and Ysonde the schene.  
 No hadde thai no won to wille  
 2457 Bot the wode so grene.  
 Bi holtes and bi hille  
 Fore Tristrem and the quene.  
 2460 Ysonde of ioie hath her fille  
 And Tristrem, withouten wene,  
 As thare:  
 2463 So blithe al bidene  
 Nar thai neuer are.

They occupy a cave, whose comforts are such as to invert the conventional qualities of the seasons:

2487 In winter it was hate;  
 In somer it was cold.  
 Thai hadden a dern gat  
 2490 That thai no man told.  
 No hadde thai no wines wat,  
 No ale that was old,  
 2493 No no gode mete thai at.  
 Thai hadden al that thai wold  
 With wille.  
 2496 For loue ich other bihalt,  
 Her non might of other fille.

This stanza expresses at once the comforts of the couple's living situation and the absence of other material comforts, namely their customary standards of food and drink. Thus the forest's association with deprivation as encountered in the *Vita Merlini* and *Sir Orfeo* recurs here in a less acute form and is immediately outweighed by the lovers' joy: although water, wild meat, and grass is all their

food and drink, ‘swiche joie hadde thai never yete’ (2500–8). That the seasons are not remarked on in any further detail is primarily a function of the forest’s role as the setting in which the lovers may fulfil their desires. The simple fare at their disposal serves as a reminder that the poet saw enough potential here to describe their exile as a miserable one if he or she so chose. Instead, however, the description of the seasons of cave life with their inverse polarity represents a deliberate choice to draw attention away from the more obvious seasons of life in the forest, whose afflictions in the narrative are eclipsed by the joy of the lovers’ union.

The most detailed of the Norse accounts of this episode occurs in the thirteenth-century<sup>99</sup> *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*. This version is a close match to the English translation based on the same source, but subtle differences exist. Both texts point out the lovers’ complete satisfaction with their fate, but whereas the English poem makes some mention of the poverty of their fare, the Icelandic prose text has them reject labour-based economics altogether, as they rely on God to provide sustenance:

Ok íhuguðu þau þá lítt, hverr þeim skyldi fá vín ok vistir, þvíat Guð mun vilja gefa þeim nokkura næring, hvar sem þau váru. (ch. 64)<sup>100</sup>

(‘And they gave little thought to where they should obtain wine and food, because God would give them some sustenance wherever they were.’)

Along with the couple’s perfect satisfaction with their life together, this seemingly effortless access to food and drink with God’s help is suggestive of prelapsarian life in Eden, where another couple was likewise in a position to eat ‘ex omni ligno’ (‘of every tree’, Gn 2.16; see section 1.4.1 above). Indeed, next to the cave of the Icelandic text is ‘ein uppsprettandi á með heilsömu vatni, en umhverfis ána váru vaxin hin sætustu grös með fögru blómi, er maðr vildi kjósa’,<sup>101</sup> again recalling Eden. The difference is that the medieval lovers really live ‘í mikla eyðimörk’ (‘in a great wilderness’), a landscape associated with the postlapsarian world as opposed to the safe garden of paradise, and therefore normally with the toil of agriculture (Gn 3.17–18). The narrative world of Tristram and Ísönd is sus-

<sup>99</sup> Jorgensen 1999: 25.

<sup>100</sup> Jorgensen 1999: 160.

<sup>101</sup> ‘a river welling up from the earth with wholesome water, and in the vicinity of the river grew the sweetest grasses with flowers as beautiful as one could want.’

pendent from this reality by virtue of their love.

A second aspect in which the Icelandic account differs from the English text is that it presents the seasonality of the episode in a more realistic light. Rather than describe the indoor pseudoseasons, it refers to the cold and the rain of the world outside, remarking that Tristram and Ísönd take shelter in their cave whenever such weather patterns occur. By contrast, good weather draws them out to the joys of forest and spring.<sup>102</sup>

The English and Icelandic retellings of the popular romance of Tristan and Iseult both derive from the Old French text by Thomas of Britain,<sup>103</sup> so that both contrast with Bérout's version of the story.<sup>104</sup> A significant difference between Thomas and Bérout is that the former has the enchantment that brings the lovers together last forever, while Bérout has it end after a period of three years. In Bérout, the end of this period coincides with the couple's exile in the forest, yielding a powerful contrast in the lovers' perception of their surroundings before and after the potion expires: the forest idyll becomes a hateful exile (*Tristan* 2147–2204). By comparison, the Thomas-derived versions place less emphasis on the subjective changeability of the forest habitat. Since Bérout does not have his lovers lament the season, however, his interest is in space and lifestyle only.

#### 4.3.5 Winter Romance: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

If summer landscapes play a central role in chivalric adventures, that is not to say that the romance genre has no use for winter settings. It was seen above that winter remained a valuable motif by which to express the hardships of exile; it will now be demonstrated that even otherworldly adventure itself may occur outside its usual chronotope of the summer forest.

The most striking negation of the paradigm of summer adventure established above would be a connection between midwinter and the supernatural, such as was found especially in the Icelandic sagas.<sup>105</sup> This type of connection does indeed exist in the late fourteenth-century<sup>106</sup> *Sir Gawain and*

<sup>102</sup> Jorgensen 1999: 160.

<sup>103</sup> Ed. by Bonath 1985. For the textual relations see Crepin and Dauby 2002: 3; Kalinke 1999: 1, vii.

<sup>104</sup> Ed. by Lacy 1989.

<sup>105</sup> See above, sections 1.4.2 and 2.6.

<sup>106</sup> Tolkien and Gordon 1967: xxv–xxvi.

*the Green Knight*, the only Middle English romance adventure whose action is strongly concentrated around Christmastide. In Arthur's court, this festival is celebrated with fifteen days of merriment. On New Year's Day, the narrator explains, the king will not begin his meal before hearing of some adventure or marvel, or witnessing a jousting-challenge. This is not a custom exclusive to New Year's Day, but rather one Arthur observes at every grand feast (85–106). Nevertheless, the poet has situated the episode on New Year's Day, and Arthur is to be treated to an adventure centrally pivoted on the Christmas season. The strange knight who rides into his court is all dressed in green, a colour reminiscent of the forest, though especially so in other seasons, and the holly branch he holds is 'grattest in grene when greuez are bare' (207), again a reminder of floral beauty in the season of its absence. The knight's request, that Arthur should join him in an exchange of axe-blows, is introduced as 'a Crystemas gomen' and explained by the fact that 'hit is 3ol and Nwe 3er, and here ar 3ep mony' (283–4). It may be, as Phelan suggests, that the axe which the Green Knight offers as a prize should be understood in the context of the New Year's gifts introduced in lines 66–70, likewise presented as a game, with mention of winning and losing.<sup>107</sup> In any case, the rules of the knight's game, which stipulate that the second player gets his turn only after a full year has passed (285–300), root the game even more firmly in the Christmas season. Indeed, the consequence of this rule is that Gawain, who accepts the challenge in Arthur's stead, spends a full year in the knowledge that he is to be decapitated on New Year's Day, thus giving the season a permanent place in his mind, as well as an ominous quality.<sup>108</sup>

Although the motif of an exchange of blows has been found elsewhere, two key temporal aspects to this sequence of events, the Christmas setting and the year's delay, are not found in conjunction in any of the analogues that have been proposed as sources. Three key texts may be distinguished for comparison with the beheading episode. A distant parallel is the ninth-century Old Irish *Fled Bricrend*,<sup>109</sup> which represents a tradition that may have influenced the Old French *Carados*, a section

<sup>107</sup> Phelan 1992 *passim*. Emerson has proposed that the last two lines of the gift-giving scene concern the giving of kisses, which is a game strongly analogous to that proposed by the Green Knight, not to mention the exchange of winnings at Hautdesert (Emerson 1922: 364–5; Tolkien and Gordon 1967: 74, n. to line 67; Wilson 1976: 118–19).

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Schmidt 1987: 151–4.

<sup>109</sup> Ed. by Henderson 1899; for the dating, see xlvii–lxvii.

from the first continuation to Chrétien's *Parceval*.<sup>110</sup> That text in turn influenced *Gawain* directly,<sup>111</sup> while a further French text known as *La mule sans frein* has likewise been identified as a source.<sup>112</sup> For present purposes, the key difference between the four texts is temporal-structural. In this respect, *Fled Bricrend* stands out for not mentioning the time of year at all, while the return match in this text is to take place the next day, not after a year as in *Gawain*. *Carados* does specify a year's delay, but it situates each turn in the exchange of blows at Pentecost rather than on New Year's Day (7003–17, 7137–241). Pentecost is also the setting of *La mule sans frein*, though here the return blow again takes place the next morning (20, 559–633). As Benson notes, the *Gawain*-poet's aim in moving the action from Pentecost to New Year's Day may lie in an association between that festival and the Round Table in Middle English romance.<sup>113</sup> If so, the unlooked-for consequence is that in terms of seasonality *Gawain* has more in common with the dragon-episode in *Hrólf's saga kraka* than with any of its models for the exchange of blows. Specifically, the sadness that comes over Arthur's court at the start of winter is reminiscent of the gloom at Hrólf's court in *Hrólf's saga* as *jól* approaches with its threat of a dragon attack (*Hrólf* ch. 35).<sup>114</sup> By sharing this detail, the two texts attain a strongly convergent mood in which the Christmas season is dreaded for an associated superhuman threat.

What makes *Gawain* a forest romance is the fact that the remainder of the narrative is set outside Camelot, and therefore largely in the woods. After Gawain decapitates the Green Knight, who turns out to be resistant to such injuries, his opponent charges him to seek him out at the Green Chapel in a year's time for the second leg of the game (448–56). Although no further directions follow, it soon becomes clear that the chapel is to be reached through almost two months' journey on horseback from the mythical realm of Logres through North Wales and from there to the Wirral, finally to end in an unidentified forest environment that may be part of the Wirral but which, on account of its lack of specification, is best thought of as a return back into a literary landscape with limited relation to the

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<sup>110</sup> Ed. by Roach and Ivy 1949.

<sup>111</sup> Benson 1961.

<sup>112</sup> Ed. by Johnston and Owen 1972, where the points of contact with *Gawain* are also set out. For discussions of the various sources and analogues to the *Gawain* episode, see Kittredge 1916: 9–76; Benson 1965: 11–37. For translations of the relevant passages, see Brewer 1992: 18–60.

<sup>113</sup> Benson 1965: 26 and n. 28 on p. 266.

<sup>114</sup> Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44: II, 59–60.

real world (536–762).<sup>115</sup> The larger part of the poem takes place near the end of this journey, at and around the castle of Hautdesert, identified as a castle of adventure by its forest location and further connected with woodlands by the extensive hunting episodes in this section (763–2159). Finally, the poem's climax is set in a wild natural landscape turned pagan cultural landscape through the presence of a burial mound (2160–478). Thus the spatial setting of the poem is entirely in keeping with romance tradition, even if its seasonal aspect is unconventional.

The winter setting in *Gawain* serves to create a starker contrast between safe and unsafe both spatially (indoor versus outdoor) and in temporal terms (summer versus winter). Ultimately, this opposition turns out to have been false, as it is in Hautdesert, an indoor setting and therefore perceived as safe, that the greatest danger lies.

A preference for summer over winter is first established in the poem's most extensive seasonal description, found in lines 500–35. Although the depiction or introduction of a single season is certainly conventional in Middle English poetry, this passage covers the full cycle of the year and is therefore likewise reminiscent of calendar illustrations of the medieval period,<sup>116</sup> and of calendar poems such as the Old English *Menologium*. The description stretches across the larger part of two stanzas, the first of which describes the movement from winter to summer while the second covers the opposite progression:

500 Forþi þis 3ol ouerzedde, and þe 3ere after,  
 And vche sesoun serlepes sued after oþer:  
 After Crystenmasse com þe crabbed lentoun,  
 503 Þat fraystez flesch wyth þe fysche and fode more symple;  
 Bot þenne þe weder of þe worlde wyth wynter hit þrepez,  
 Colde clengez adoun, cloudez vplyften,  
 506 Schyre schedez þe rayn in schowrez ful warme,  
 Fallez vpon fayre flat, flowrez þere schewen,  
 Boþe groundez and þe greuez grene ar her wedez,  
 509 Bryddez busken to bylde, and bremlych syngen  
 For solace of þe softe somer þat sues þerafter  
 bi bonk;  
 512 And blossomez bolne to blowe

<sup>115</sup> For discussions of the topography of Gawain's journey, see Dodgson 1963; Heyworth 1972; Davenport 1978: 147–51; Eadie 1983; Elliott 1997. For the imprecise landscape description at the beginning and end of Gawain's journey, cf. esp. Dodgson 1963: 19–20; Elliott 1997.

<sup>116</sup> On calendar illustrations, see Frandon 1993; Henisch 1999.

Bi rawez rych and ronk,  
 Pen notez noble innoze  
 515 Ar herde in wod so wlonk.

After þe sesoun of somer wyth þe soft wyndez  
 Quen Zeferus syflez hymself on sedez and erbez,  
 518 Wela wynne is þe wort þat waxes þeroute,  
 When þe donkande dewe dropez of þe leuez,  
 To bide a blysfyl blusch of þe bryzt sunne.  
 521 Bot þen hyzes heruest, and hardenes hym sone,  
 Warnez hym for þe wynter to wax ful rype;  
 He dryues wyth drozt þe dust for to ryse,  
 524 Fro þe face of þe folde to flyze ful hyze;  
 Wroþe wynde of þe welkyn wrastelez with þe sunne,  
 Þe leuez lancen fro þe lynde and lyzten on þe grounde,  
 527 And al grayes þe gres þat grene watz ere;  
 Penne al rypez and rotez þat ros vpon fyrst,  
 And þus zirnez þe zere in zisterdayez mony,  
 530 And wynter wyndez azayn, as þe worlde askez,  
     no fage,  
     Til Mezelmas mone  
 533 Watz cumen wyth wynter wage;  
 Pen þenkkez Gawan ful sone  
 Of his anious uyage.

When this passage is compared to the *Menologium*, two differences stand out. Firstly, the passage in *Gawain* is less concerned with accurate dating, concentrating instead on the perceptible progression of the year, with only the occasional nod at mankind's observance of the seasons. Secondly, the Middle English passage is more consistent in evaluating the seasons in subjective experiential terms. Lent, towards the end of the cold season, is *crabbed* ('harsh, unpleasant'), but when summer sets in it inspires *solace* in birds, whose *notez noble* are *bremtych* ('gloriously') executed in *wlonk* ('lovely') forests. A similar series of appreciative adjectives describes the summer harvest, but the coming of autumn is announced with words of hardening (*hardenen*), decaying (*roten*), and turning grey (*greien*). The full year's progression thus sets up a cycle between the two legs of the Christmas game in which the vivification of the natural world implies that Gawain is for a time able to forget about his supposed rendezvous with death. Once autumn comes on, however, there is a gradual fade back into a harsher reality. By Michaelmas, the dreaded mission has returned to the forefront of Gawain's mind (532–5); on All Saints' Day (coinciding with Samhain, a time of increased contact with the

otherworld in Celtic tradition),<sup>117</sup> he announces he is to depart the next morning (536–49). Thus the seasonal progression is charged with an experiential evaluation triggering a pleasant forgetfulness in the summer, after which the protagonist wakes up to the threat of winter.<sup>118</sup>

After Gawain sets out to find the Green Knight, the hostility of the winter season is further brought out when the dangers of the road are described. In lines 713–39, we learn that Gawain encounters an enemy at virtually every ford, while superhuman creatures of various ilk must likewise be overcome as part of the journey. Having depicted this aspect of the quest, which seems as much as any hero could take, the poet then makes clear that all these martial challenges are less daunting than the torments of winter:

726 For werre wrathed hym not so much þat wynter nas wors,  
 When þe colde cler water fro þe cloudez schadde,  
 And fres er hit falle myȝt to the fæle erþe;  
 729 Ner slayn wyth þe slete he sleped in his yrnes  
 Mo nyȝtez þen innoghe in naked rokkez,  
 Þer as claterande fro þe crest þe colde borne rennez,  
 732 And henged heȝe ouer his hede in hard iisse-ikkles.

The passage not only makes use of the romance category of the forest as a hostile environment, but also appeals to the exilic association of winter. Rather than simply combine the two to increase the burden placed upon the hero, however, the poet introduces a hierarchy in which even dragons, bears, and trolls do not trouble Gawain as much as the winter season. Since this assessment of the winter experience contrasts greatly with the festivities taking place at Camelot in the same season, it serves to emphasise the difference between inside and outside especially at this time of year. Inside the castle, and in the social sphere, winter is the time of greatest festivity; however, it is the harshest time of year for camping out or travelling by oneself. It is in winter that inside and outside form the starkest contrast. On Christmas Eve, therefore, Gawain prays to Mary that he may find ‘sum wone’ (733–9). When he comes upon Hautdesert, his escape from the elements adds to his illusion that the castle represents an inside and thus safety. In the hierarchy of dangers in his path, it turns out, winter is more daunting than knights and superhuman enemies, but moral lapse is the greatest danger of

<sup>117</sup> Gantz 1983: 12–13; Hutton 1996: 361–2.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Putter 1995: 12.

all.

Once characters are based inside, as at Hautdesert, the winter forest becomes an adventure to be sought out in the daytime through the pastime of the hunt.<sup>119</sup> The vivid and extensive hunting-descriptions in *Gawain* bring out the excitement of the sport and make clear that this is considered an excellent way for active men to prove their worth. It is therefore surprising at a first reading that Gawain does not join his host Bertilak on his hunt. Indeed, the exchange of winnings to which Gawain is challenged would have led the reader to assume that both will hunt, were it not that this challenge immediately follows Bertilak's directions that Gawain is to stay in bed and dine with his hostess while he himself hunts (1096–1109). Thus Gawain spends seven days apparently without leaving the castle or undertaking anything at all, calling to mind the warning expressed in *The Alliterative Morte Arthure* that a knight who goes too long without adventure sacrifices his worldly esteem (247–58) and the medieval notion that the hunt keeps men from sin.<sup>120</sup> If inactivity may be permissible during Christmastide, the three days of hunting certainly appear to compare the protagonist unfavourably with Bertilak<sup>121</sup> until it becomes clear, at the Green Chapel, that Gawain's confrontations with Lady Bertilak had been his real test, and the traditional boundary between inside and outside, safe and unsafe, does not apply at Hautdesert (2331–68). *Gawain* is thus not simply a chance exception to conventions of space and season, but rather its plot structure relies on the inversion of those expectations.

As Gawain gears up for the final stage of his journey, the harshness of winter weather is once more played up:

1998 Now negez þe Nw 3ere, and þe nyzt passez,  
 Þe day dryuez to þe derk, as Dryȝtyn biddez;  
 Bot wylde wederez of þe worlde wakned þeroute,  
 2001 Clowdes kesten kenly þe colde to þe erþe,  
 Wyth nyȝe innoghe of þe norþe, þe naked to tene;  
 Þe snawe snitered ful snart, þat snayped þe wylde;  
 2004 Þe werbelande wynde wapped fro þe hyȝe,  
 And drof vche dale ful of dryftes ful grete.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Putter 1995: 12–13.

<sup>120</sup> Thiébaux 1974: 77–81.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. Davenport 1978: 139; Rooney 1997: 157–8.

Pe leude lystend ful wel þat leȝ in his bedde,  
 2007 Þaȝ he lowkez his liddez, ful lyttel he slepes;  
 Bi vch kok þat crue he knwe wel þe steuen.

The passage highlights the boundary between inside and out by describing the weather from an indoor perspective. Apart from looking out, the description also looks ahead in time, as Gawain knows he will have to venture into the unforgiving outdoors. To him, and to a first-time audience, the transition is one from a safe indoors into an unsafe winter forest.<sup>122</sup> Only hindsight makes clear that Gawain's test is already over by this point, and that the snowy forest is a familiar space compared to the guest room at Hautdesert.

Indeed, winter imagery plays a decidedly smaller role in the remainder of Gawain's journey. Once at the Green Chapel, the snow on the ground (found in lines 2234 and 2315) is only one of the descriptors of the location, which is characterised by a brook and a crag in addition to the mound that represents the landscape's focal point. Tension is allowed to build up through cultural elements, or elements perceived as cultural, rather than the natural environment. Initially it is the interior of the mound, judged by Gawain to be a 'cortedest kyrk', that instils a sense of terror (2175–96); then it is the sound of an axe being ground out of sight that further leads up towards the poem's climax (2199–2206, 2219–2200). The snow has a final function to fulfil when the decisive axe-blow falls, and Gawain sees his blood drip onto the snow:

2313 Þe scharp schrank to þe flesche þurȝ þe scyre grece,  
 Þat þe schene blod ouer his schulderes schot to þe erþe;  
 And quen þe burne sez þe blode blenk on þe snawe,  
 2316 He sprit forth spenne-fote more þen an spere lenþe.

As seeing the blood indicates to Gawain that he has survived the blow, he realises that he has fulfilled the agreement and is not bound to submit himself to any further violence. At the same time, the image of blood on snow, red on white, has powerful resonances in more than one tradition.

The image of blood dripping onto snow is a common folk-motif surfacing in both Irish and Continental texts. Relevant in the light of Celtic elements in *Gawain* is a passage in the Middle Irish

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<sup>122</sup> Cf. Putter 1995: 13.

*Longes Mac nUislenn*<sup>123</sup> in which Derdriu observes a raven drinking calf blood from the snow on a winter's day, prompting a longing for a man with snow-white skin, pitch-black hair, and blood-red cheeks.<sup>124</sup> The variant that has received the bulk of scholarly attention, however, occurs in Chrétien de Troyes's twelfth-century *Conte du graal*,<sup>125</sup> in which Perceval witnesses a raven attacking a goose and is sent into a day-long transfixation by the mingling of three drops of goose blood with the snow, which reminds him of the complexion of his beloved Blancheflor (4162–293). As in *Gawain*, the setting in this text is atypical: the forest setting is appropriate for any encounter whose significance the poet wishes to emphasise, but the frost and snow are unusual both in romance settings of wonder and in early summer, the chronological setting of the episode.<sup>126</sup> The sight of the blood on the snow sends Perceval into a contemplative mode that has been the subject of extensive critical discussion, not in the last place because the moment constitutes a structural marker in the narrative.<sup>127</sup> Freudian analysis has been a common denominator in the criticism, which asserts not only that the red-and-white contrast evokes thoughts of Blancheflor, as indeed the text makes clear it does, but specifically that the blood is suggestive of sexual intercourse, either in general or in the act of deflowering.<sup>128</sup> This reading is particularly central to Gallais's understanding of the passage, which proposes that the folk-motif in which the image is rooted is typically aimed at ensuring the future of the dynasty through the engendering of an heir, to which the finding of a spouse (with skin white as snow and cheeks, or lips, red as blood, as prompted by the image) is the first step.<sup>129</sup> Although deflowering is not itself of relevance to the Middle English narrative, Gawain's guilt certainly has a

<sup>123</sup> The work in its surviving form has been dated to about the year 1000, though a hypothesised earlier version has been attributed to the eighth or ninth century (Hull 1949: 29–32).

<sup>124</sup> §7 (Hull 1949: 43; translation on pp. 62–3).

<sup>125</sup> Ed. by Roach 1959.

<sup>126</sup> The central study of narrative time in *Perceval* is Weigand 1969, in which the time of the snowfall is calculated on the basis of internal chronology to take place a little over a month after Pentecost, and thus between mid-June and mid-July (Weigand 1969: 26–31). In Wolfram's Middle High German reworking of the romance, the event is moved to a time between mid-September and mid-October (Weigand 1969: 58–9; Groos 1995: 130–2).

<sup>127</sup> See Ehlert and Meissburger 1975; Gallais 1978; Jeay 1998; Meyer 2006: 410–16; and the literature cited especially in the first three of these items. For a discussion of the motif in the Middle High German *Perzival*, see Bumke 2001, esp. 1–14, 56–64, and the index of scholarship in n. 1 on pp. 1–2.

<sup>128</sup> Gallais 1978; Jeay 1998: 140–4.

<sup>129</sup> Gallais 1978.

sexual component to it,<sup>130</sup> so one need not commit to Freudian psychoanalytics to see a connection between the blood of Gawain's punishment and the carnal temptation which it repays. Indeed, another direct source of the poem, the Old French *Chevalier à l'épée*,<sup>131</sup> which recounts a version of the narrative lacking an exchange of blows, has Gawain wounded by an enchanted sword specifically because he tries to take a girl's virginity (514–673). There is thus considerable support for the idea that the image of the blood on the snow is one part sexual.

However, an associative set of blood and snow that was at least as prominent in medieval culture, but sustained by a different institution, consists in the religious connotations of these elements. Blood and snow are common as separate images both in the Bible and in patristic writings. Snow is most commonly used to signal purity and innocence.<sup>132</sup> While blood signals martyrdom from Cain to the medieval martyrologies, it is also used to express guilt and sin.<sup>133</sup> In this usage, blood, or the colour red, is contrasted with the innocence of snow, or the colour white, as in Isaiah 1.18: 'si fuerint peccata vestra ut coccinum, quasi nix dealbabuntur.'<sup>134</sup> Thus if Gawain's blood reminds the reader of the sexual context of his transgression, a stronger implication is the ethical view that his customary virtue is stained by the sin of his dealings at Hautdesert. Indeed, the poet seems to be playing on the latter association when he describes how 'þe schene blod ouer his schulderes schot to þe erþe' (2314),

<sup>130</sup> While Bertilak categorically dismisses any guilt on Gawain's part in this respect (2360–8), Gawain treads a thin line in his bedroom encounters with Lady Bertilak and is certainly guilty of indulging in the sexual subtext of their interactions, as is demonstrated in De Roo 1993 (cf. Gilbert 1997: 62–9). Although on unidentified grounds Gawain holds that he may be excused for being deceived by a woman, his catalogue of Old Testament men ruined through their various interactions with women suggests that in all these cases, it is man's inability to 'luf hom [i.e. women] wel and leue hem not' that led to their downfall — and his own (*Gawain* 2414–28).

<sup>131</sup> Ed. by Johnston and Owen 1972.

<sup>132</sup> Job 9.30; Ps 50.9; Lam 4.7. Patristic authors widely pick up on the gospel observation that Christ's clothes are made white as snow ('alba sicut nix', Mt 17.2) when he meets Moses and Elijah on the mountain. Ambrose, for instance, observes that this indicates 'quod peccatum non cognoverit' ('that he did not know sin', *Apologia prophetae David*, PL 14, col. 876a). Since the Apocalypse furthermore indicates that virtuous people will walk with Christ in white robes (Apc 3.4–5; see also Apc 4.4), Lactantius (and others) reasoned that 'transformabit Deus homines in similitudinem angelorum, et erunt candidi sicut nix' ('God will transform men into the likeness of angels, and they will be white as snow', *De vita beata*, PL 6, col. 814b).

<sup>133</sup> For the biblical motif, see Gn 4.10; Ps 5.7; 25.9–10; 54.24; 58.3; 138.19; Sap 14.25; Sir 34.25; Is 1.15; 4.4; 59.3; Ez 7.23; 9.9; 22.2–5; 24.6–14; Mi 3.10; Na 3.1; Hab 2.12; Hbr 12.4. It should be noted that the comparatively straightforward imagery of the Old Testament undergoes an inversion in the New, where the blood of Christ is frequently said to wash away sins (e.g. 1 Io 1.7; Apc 1.5; 7.14, 22.14). This latter image is surely the most popular among patristic authors, but the Old Testament usage continues to be discussed and repeated (e.g. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (Dekkers and Fraipont 1956: 23); Pseudo-Augustine, *Sermones ad fratres in eremo commorantes*, PL 40, col. 1258).

<sup>134</sup> 'If your sins were like scarlet, they will be whitened like snow.'

*schulder* ('shoulder') evoking *schulde* ('guilt'). Whether in the sexual or the ethical reading, however, the snow has none of the foreignness and hostility associated with winter in the remainder of the poem. Instead, the pure white of the snow is without fault; it is only the human element of blood that gives the image its overtones of guilt and desire. Two traditions are merged in this poem; one employs winter imagery for its hostile qualities, while the other uses the abstract colour symbolism of snow to evoke associations almost diametrically opposed to those found in Old English and Old Norse literature. When Gawain leaves Hautdesert, the snow is his enemy; when the final axe-stroke falls, it pleads on his behalf.

It is clear from this discussion that *Gawain* stands out in its genre for its strongly divergent seasonal settings and imagery. However, it is equally remarkable how strongly convergent its employment of the seasons is with both Old English and Old Norse traditions. The poem shares its concentration of superhuman threats in the Christmas season with a range of Scandinavian texts and folktales, while its description of Gawain's travels recalls the hardship of exile as described in Anglo-Saxon sources. Although it is not inconceivable in view of the poem's northern English origins that it has incorporated motifs from both Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian traditions, it is worth observing that the poem does not need such models to arrive at winter as a time of hardship and trials. After all, the conceptual boundary between society and the world outside becomes more pronounced in winter regardless of literary convention. It is therefore not surprising if an author turns to the dark and the cold to express superlative personal challenges. If anything, the mystery of Middle English romance is that this is not done more often.

#### 4.4 Conclusions

If the seasonal interests of Middle English poetry as a whole show a striking inversion of Anglo-Saxon poetic preoccupations, this inversion is especially prominent in the extrasocietal functions of seasonality studied here. The hoarfrost and the cold that characterise Old English expeditions of various kinds are in the Middle English poetic corpus largely limited to descriptions of exile. Mean-

while, Middle English poetry celebrates the summer halfyear, and particularly the month of May, not just as a framework for expressions of love but also as a context for fairy encounters, adventurous expeditions, debates, and dream-visions. In all of these, the central spatial setting is the outdoors, usually in the guise of the forest. The summer forest is thus the central chronotope of Middle English poetic expeditions.

Just as striking as the great number of references to summer expeditions in this corpus is the consistency of the convention. The reliability with which fairies are found near forests on sunny days towards noon, for instance, suggests above all a high level of intertextuality. That this subtype of the convention is less consistent in the French models than in their Middle English derivatives furthermore suggests that there was a strong English component to this intertextuality.

The association of the supernatural with summer forests contrasts with the monster habitats of *Beowulf*, but it has its strongest counterpart in the Old Norse sagas, which show the same level of consistency in restricting hauntings to winter. This difference demonstrates that multiple configurations of seasonal motifs are possible and none is either universal or fully determined by external circumstances. At the same time, Iceland's greater seasonal variations in daylight and its absence of forests will certainly have played a role in making the dark of winter the most prominent unfamiliar setting, and therefore perceived as the most susceptible to supernatural threats. In England, similar considerations may be adduced to explain winter imagery in such poems as *Andreas* and *Beowulf*, while later romances show that the Celtic othering of forest landscapes was similarly potent in medieval English culture. Some basic tools and limitations may thus be provided by a society's physical surroundings, but the literary imagination has free rein to shape conventions within those broad boundaries.

This point is made more palpable by *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the one major exception to the Middle English romance chronotope of the summer forest. Here, woodlands are still the central landscape of adventure, but the action now takes place almost exclusively at Christmastide. At least two factors may have contributed to this shift, of which the first is traditional in nature, while the other is proper to the aim of this poem. *Gawain* leans heavily on Celtic traditions, among other

things for its exchange-of-blows challenge. Although the known analogues to this motif either make no reference to the time of year or situate it at Pentecost, the Celtic supernatural does have a connection with the Celtic New Year (Samhain), so it is not inconceivable that the season was likewise derived from Celtic tradition. At the same time, winter is the time of greatest contrast between inside and outside, a contrast at the heart of the deception recounted in *Gawain*. Christmas also provides an explanation for the amount of leisure enjoyed at Hautdesert, again crucial for plot development because it facilitates the meetings between Gawain and Lady Bertilak. These are thus creative considerations which the poet may have consulted in planning his work, while the original seasonality of some of his borrowed motifs may likewise have determined his choice of season.

One seasonal function retaining a high level of uniformity between Old and Middle English literature is that of exile, which maintains a strong connection with the winter season on account of its deprivation. If Old English poetry has a higher proportion of seasonally flavoured exile passages than Middle English verse, this has to be attributed to literary fashion: the observation that Anglo-Saxon poets display a greater interest in the subject of exile is neither new nor controversial. The Middle English instances of this motif, as well as later Latin texts such as the *Vita Merlini*, demonstrate only that winter hardship has an appeal extending well beyond the Anglo-Saxon horizon. Indeed, the discomforts of extreme heat and cold are surely universal literary topoi, and they have received due attention in visions of hell across the Christian world. As such, it bears emphasising that the Anglo-Saxon predilection for winter suffering is a quantitatively remarkable application of a qualitatively universal motif.

The existence of another universal is suggested by the seasonal setting of *Als I lay in a winteris nyt*. This soul-and-body debate employs the connotations of the dark winter night to reinforce the mood of horror expressed at the soul's impending doom. This combination of setting and sentiment may fruitfully be compared with those of Old English elegy and Old Norse winter hauntings. There is nevertheless some affinity with the summer landscape of romance inasmuch as both concern confrontations with alien and dangerous forces. What sets the soul-and-body debate apart is its intensity and its direct implications for the audience. That the winter setting is generally avoided in

Middle English narrative poetry thus may signal a preference among these poets, and presumably their audiences, for adventures that could be enjoyed without the disturbing immediacy of horror.

In view of the various seasonal functions available to medieval authors, one thing that becomes clear from the differences between Anglo-Saxon and later literary traditions is how strong a tradition of its own each of the corpora has, even within a conceptual field as narrowly defined as the seasons. Once again, the relative uniformity among members of each of these traditions speaks to the strength of each, and consequently to the high level of intertextuality practised within each of these cultural spaces. While linguistic criteria alone rarely form the outer limits of a cultural tradition, this suggests that there is some validity in the degree to which some of these vernaculars tend to be studied in isolation from their neighbours. Nevertheless, it is in comparison with those neighbours, as undertaken in the present study, that a tradition's characteristics may be defined in contrast with others. It is in this process that a literary tradition may be most fully delineated.

# Conclusions

A society's social and cultural life is given to seasonal patterns representing a complex interplay between economic demands and traditional (e.g. religious) influences. Where such seasonality is found in literature, its representation is further shaped by the author's conscious aims and interests as well as his or her sensitivity to the powerful but typically implicit dynamic between self and environment. In the study of any one text, the analysis of this dynamic and its seasonal implications may be an effective guide to the psychological assumptions on which the plot is built. When applied to a genre or cultural corpus as a whole, however, connotations of space and season provide information about the intersubjective map shared by the culture in which these texts have their origin. Although the world represented in narrative literature should not be understood to correspond without qualification to reality as its authors and audience saw it, that literary world nevertheless stems from the society's mental map of the world and demands to be explained by it. The combined set of seasonal chronotopes employed in the literary output of a given society is in large part an exaggeration of the psychological associations of landscapes and seasons that had currency in that society, thus aiding the construction of a psychological anthropology.

Sedentary societies are naturally given to some degree of core-and-periphery thinking: regardless of its spatial configuration, an inhabited area will be more familiar to its residents than the world beyond it. That extrasocietal spaces are associated with threats, monsters, and the supernatural is therefore not surprising. However, the narrative and psychological functions of these spaces may be better understood once it is recognised that they are not all equal. Instead, they are subject to various evaluations and literary functions depending on the landscape category and the season rep-

resented. By studying the narrative functions of specific landscapes and seasons, we can attain a more detailed understanding of literary genre while contributing a literary body of evidence for the study of a culture's psychological reflexes to season and environment.

The vernacular traditions of medieval northern Europe demand to be singled out for their use of seasonal categories in view of their reliance on the bipartite year. The long-standing latinate popularity of such learned categories as the humours or the four ages of man makes clear that the four seasons of the Julian year have progression and moderation as their primary figurative uses, following the calendrical progression between extremes via intermediary seasons. In medieval England and Iceland, however, the system with which poets and storytellers were most familiar was that containing winter and summer only, a stark binary whose natural figurative extension is one of contrast.

The spatial application of this function is especially widespread in Old English poetry, where winter environments are commonly invoked to contrast with the human dimension, but typically without reference to the succession of the seasons and often without mentioning the narrative time of year at all. Instead, the mention of cold or hoarfrost alone conjures up an environment suitable for exile, heroic expeditions, or monsters. All these motifs characterise the winter landscape as a hostile inversion of the human domain.

An unfavourable characterisation of winter landscapes is also found in Old Norse narratives, which associate social categories perceived as hostile and supernatural, namely giants and Sami, with high altitudes and latitudes. In addition, however, the sagas provide a temporal form of seasonal othering not found in Old English poetry, identifying winter as the season for hauntings and divination. There is a real spatial dimension to these phenomena as well that is typical of winter, as this season reduces the human domain to the farmstead, while the dark valley outside is given over to revenants or the unknown, much as in Bede's parable of the sparrow. In the case of prophecy, the supernatural even makes its way into the farmstead itself, providing people inside with a way to contact the realm of the supernatural. However, the strong concentration of these phenomena in the winter months means that this season is associated with outside threats to the human domain more emphatically than in Old English poetry, where the connection relies largely on subtle references to

winter precipitation and winter landscapes.

The tendency of Old English and Old Norse literature to associate the extrasocietal experience with winter is thrown into proper relief when compared with other traditions. In Middle English literature, this connection is rarely employed; instead, adventures, visions, and the supernatural in this corpus are all associated with flourishing outdoor landscapes, and above all with Maytime woodlands. Where winter does surface, it becomes clear that its connotations are no different from those in the neighbouring corpora. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* employs both the temporal concentration of the supernatural found in the sagas and the hostile, exilic functions of winter landscapes found in Old English poetry, and the latter element recurs in various other texts from post-Conquest Britain. Moreover, the soul-and-body debate *Als I lay in a winteris nyt* makes clear that the horror associated with winter and nighttime in nineteenth-century literature was likewise recognised in thirteenth-century England, suggesting that the reason why it is so rarely found in medieval romance is that a high degree of immediacy in the reader's experience is not normally an authorial aim in the genre. Instead, much of Middle English verse seeks to engage its audience through wonder and excitement of a more reassuring sort, for which the alien but inviting quality of the summer forest rendered it the appropriate setting.

If the connection between winter and horror in *Als I lay* is symptomatic of the seasonal chronotopcity of Middle English verse, then winter is chosen as a setting when the author aims for a higher degree of extradiegetic psychogeographical reception. This may be defined as a universal property of narrative winter settings within certain geographical and cultural bounds, applying at least to Old and Middle English as well as Old Norse, but equally valid in more recent English and Germanic literature. Shakespeare knew to set the apparition of Hamlet's father and the exile of King Lear on cold nights, contrasting with the carefree green summer forest of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Similarly, the Romantic predilection for hauntings, horror, and the sublime had authors like Poe and Dickens turn to this season more than any other.<sup>135</sup> The season's functions in these texts are not so different from those found in Icelandic tales of hauntings or Old English verse studies in exile. Dif-

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<sup>135</sup> Cf. Gopnik 2011: 1–50.

ferences in seasonal distribution between the corpora are qualitative first and foremost and result from a complex interplay between circumstance and cultural fancy which can sometimes be explained, but rarely predicted. If the Anglo-Saxon preoccupation with exile and its winter landscapes may find an explanation in political circumstance whether current or remembered, the arrival in fourteenth-century England of the Black Death and climatic fluctuation did not therefore prompt a similar response. Instead, the dominant popular genres of the later fourteenth century built on twelfth-century models by celebrating the adventurous potential of summer landscapes, confirming the mid-twentieth century conviction that convention plays a prominent role in the literary depiction of landscape.

That conventions are not immutable is apparent in the fact that English literature is in some respects more concerned with the seasons than its Continental sources. This is true of Anglo-Saxon literature, which embraces the notion of a paradise without either summer or winter more fully than Continental tradition; it is also true of Middle English romance, which asserts the motif of the hot summer's day even where its sources do not, as in *Sir Launfal*. However, Old English poetry is rarely interested in determining the narrative time of year, so that its chronotopes are primarily landscape settings with seasonal overtones. Middle English literature specifies the time of year where specific seasonal conventions are called, in addition to more general time markers such as royal and ecclesiastical feasts or the season of warfare. Old Norse is the most persistent in its seasonal references, making use of annual events and seasonal identities to structure its narratives, which often run from winter nights to Christmas to general assembly (in the case of the sagas of Icelanders) or from raiding season to raiding season (in the case of the legendary sagas and the more adventurous episodes in the sagas of Icelanders). Here the geographical differences between England and Iceland may certainly play a role: summer and winter are more distinct in Iceland not only in terms of temperature and darkness, but especially in their social implications, which include limits to travel (particularly overseas) in winter and advantages to holding political events in the time of least darkness. Accordingly, the seasonal chronotope of the sagas of Icelanders and of the contemporary sagas is the closest in all the genres here discussed to being a 'historical' chronotope of the sort Bakhtin sought to es-

tablish. With such a distinct social seasonality in place, these texts also permit a close study of the relationship between historical and narrative seasonality. The latter includes the supernatural elements of monsters and prophecy as well as the spring miracles in the bishops' sagas, many of which may be traced back to real concerns such as winter burial and the availability of spring grazing.

Where the narrative time of year plays no important role, mention of seasonal elements, such as hoarfrost, ice, or cold, should be recognised to have heightened connotative value, since — with the notable exception of metrical considerations — the author has no circumstantial reasons to introduce them. Accordingly, winter landscapes and cold landscapes in *Beowulf*, *Andreas*, and other texts should not be brushed off as incidental: the poet is using them to craft a highly connotative setting. In the sagas, conversely, where the seasonality of the action is regularly noted for structural or pragmatic purposes (such as setting off at the start of the sailing season, or seeking accommodation at its end), no conclusions can be drawn from a single seasonal connection: here strength lies in numbers, as conventions across texts help determine the conventional value of individual occurrences. In some cases, of course, the seasonal emphasis of a single text is so apparent that the connection need not be questioned. *Grettis saga* is not the only example of strong seasonal bias, but it is the text pursuing one particular set of seasonal conventions with the greatest persistence, containing such a large number of hauntings and hostile encounters set at Christmas that the seasonal associations in this text are not only unmistakable, but unmistakably conscious. The existence of multiple Icelandic analogues to the pattern of hauntings found in this text confirms that the motif transcended the interests of a single author and was indeed a literary commonplace.

The grouping of seasonal elements with affectively charged categories of a different class likewise helps identify a season's connotations. The grouping of hostile categories (landscapes, seasons, and the supernatural) is especially useful as an anthropological artefact where an author uses it to explain or supplement natural phenomena. This is seen in the association of the close season of sailing with the time when *Finnar* are held to be especially dangerous, and it appears to underlie the popularity of revenant hauntings in Iceland, which may have an explanation in the difficulty of complying with Christian burial rites in winter. Connections of this type exploit a literary playground

for the exploration of questions answering to a greater or lesser degree to real concerns involving perceived outside threats to society and its members. Such connections should, however, only be admitted where the texts themselves present sufficient evidence. Reading all the monsters of (say) *Beowulf* as personifications of seasonal threats is not warranted, though it is reasonable to extrapolate from the totality of seasonal and thermal references in the poem and conclude that the domain of winter contributes to the hostile associations of its monsters.

The comparison of Icelandic texts with analogues from the British Isles has long served to establish whether or not such texts share a common origin, and if so, what the nature of the relationship is. When the same texts are studied for thematic trends, however, it is sometimes possible to discern differences between the narrative interests current in the respective traditions. In this context, the fact that several Icelandic texts situate hauntings around Christmas where their foreign analogues consistently resist seasonal placement demonstrates not only the strength of the Icelandic connection between hauntings and winter, but also the extent to which the sagas of Icelanders rely on seasonal markers for their structure. Conversely, it accentuates the lack of interest in narrative seasonality in the corresponding Anglo-Saxon and Irish traditions. The overall effect of such recognitions is to help delineate the literary traditions of the various North Atlantic vernaculars and shed light on the cultures that produced them. If in addition the comparison helps identify lines of transmission between the various witnesses to a motif, this demonstrates the value of an integrated and comparative approach to literature.

Today, in a world whose climate has embarked on a destabilisation unprecedented in terms of its causes and of unmatched scope in historical times, the reality of the seasons is shifting while cultures clutch at their memory of them. In higher-latitude cultures, summer and winter have firm conceptual identities reinforced by annual family traditions and greeting cards depicting sunny beaches and snowy home environments. Although it has been claimed that there has always been a degree of mythification in such characterisations,<sup>136</sup> their physical basis is set to grow even less certain in future. As in Bede's parable of the sparrow, we do not know what will follow, but we can be sure it

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<sup>136</sup> Lamb 1995: 249.

will not have the comfort and familiarity of the world we have only just entered.

In this time of growing awareness that the ecosystem we inhabit is not static but dynamic, and that it exists not independently of but in symbiosis with our species, it may be fruitful to look back and learn how our place in the world was understood in past centuries. Such an undertaking should be a multidisciplinary effort, studying archaeological and documentary evidence of economic development but also literary reflections on space and season. As this dissertation has shown, literary settings of summer and winter have at different times represented different faces of the same inscrutable forces that encompass us. Like all artefacts, these literary representations arose in a material as well as a cultural context, both of which may be expected to have left their mark on narrative conventions. By mapping out the literary functions of environmental settings, we may be able to some degree to reverse-engineer the processes by which these conventions arose and identify some of the social, economic, and cultural concerns that inform them. After two centuries of rapid advances in our understanding of the world around us, this approach may help us understand how we respond to that world.

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