FLUID IDENTITIES AND SOCIAL DISRUPTION: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF OTHERNESS IN THE ÍSLENDINGAÞÆTTIR

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Sammendrag
Denne artikkelen utforsker begrepet «Otherness» i to íslendingaþættir: Þórhalls þáttr knapps *og* Auðunar þáttr vestfirska*. Ved å analysere hovedpersonenes sosiale atferd og samhandling i en kontekst av samfunnsmessige og situasjonelle endringer, undersøker denne studien hvordan «Otherness» konstrueres, utfordres og reforhandles gjennom fortellingene. Med utgangspunkt i et rammeverk av flytende og positiv Otherness undersøkes det hvordan annerledeshetskvaliteter kan svekkes eller sementeres som et resultat av individuell atferd og samfunnsmessige reaksjoner. Denne tilnærmingen understreker viktigheten av å undersøke Otherness som et kontekstsensitivt begrep, som både en kilde til forstyrrelser og et mulig middel til sosial reintegrering.*

Nøkkelord
Annerledeshet, íslendingaþættir, norrøn litteratur, identitet.

Abstract
This article explores the concept of Otherness in two íslendingaþættir: Þórhalls þáttr knapps *and* Auðunar þáttr vestfirska*. By analysing the protagonists' social behaviour and interactions within the context of societal and situational shifts, this study examines how Otherness is constructed, challenged, and renegotiated throughout the narratives. Employing a framework of fluid and positive Otherness, this study examines how Othering qualities can be diminished or cemented as a result of individual behaviour and societal reactions. This approach underscores the importance of examining Otherness as a context-sensitive concept, being both a source of disruption and a potential means for social reintegration.*

Keywords
Otherness, íslendingaþættir, Old Norse literature, identity.

Introduction

In the middle of the collapse of the Icelandic free state in the early 13th century and the subsequent incorporation of Iceland into the Norwegian Realm with the adoption of the law code Jónsbók in 1281, Icelanders started to produce a unique literature distinct from continental Europe's medieval writing traditions (Sigurðsson 2004, 2). In contrast to most continental literature, which consisted of mostly religious texts and translated romances, Icelanders composed sagas about the kings of Scandinavia, the earls of Orkney, the settlement of Greenland and Iceland, Viking adventures before the settlement of Iceland, as well as about Norse mythology – all in their native language, Old West Norse (Sigurðsson 2004, 2–3). The sagas composed by Icelandic writers reflect a world view and lived reality different from the Mediterranean-influenced literatures of other parts of Europe from around this time, thus offering a unique insight into Icelanders' conception and (re-)construction of their pre-Christian history (Sigurðsson

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2004, 5; Bampi 2017, 4). Especially the *Íslendingasögur*, the sagas of Icelanders, which recount Iceland's history between the settlement around 870 AD until the adoption of Christianity around 1000, have attracted much scholarly interest for their insights into the medieval Icelandic self-image and the perception of the Other (Bampi 2017, 5).

A key debate concerns their origin: whether they stem from individual authors or oral traditions predating the manuscripts they are found in (Sigurðsson 2004, 17–21; Callow 2017). Most scholars now agree the truth lies between these views, with the ratio of oral elements to original creative writing varying by narrative (Callow 2017).

While the roughly 40 *Íslendingasögur* have been, and still are extensively researched, a number of shorter tales called *þættir,*[1] singular *þáttr,* have yet to receive the same attention. The *íslendingaþættir* are, as the *Íslendingasögur,* anonymously composed Old Norse literary sources dating from around the 13th century onwards. The term *þættir* has been used since the 14th century to describe shorter tales that are either independent or form part of the longer and more elaborate *Íslendingasögur* or *Konungasögur*, the sagas about Norwegian and Danish kings (Ashman Rowe 2017, 151–52). *Þættir* as a type of literature seems to also have undergone changes over time, with the earliest *þættir* being embedded in larger narratives as a sort of vignette, often detailing the life of one character in the longer saga or recounting an occurrence that did not fit the larger narrative (151). There are also changes taking place over time. Younger *þættir*, predominantly from the 14th century onward tend to be more independent narratives outside of saga narratives (151).

The somewhat arbitrary categorisation of what a *þáttr* is has led to debates over the exact number of narratives included in the category, ranging from around 40 to over a hundred (Lange 1958, 154). Some younger manuscripts use the term *þáttr* in the title, but more often than not, the identification of *þættir* is based on what a *þáttr* is, as interpreted by editors or scholars. Scholarly discussions about genre categorisation within the literary genre of *þættir* have famously been heated and fraught with exceptions, though literary analyses suggest that two types of narratives comprise actual genres within *þættir* literature, namely what Joseph C. Harris calls «king and Icelander» *þættir – íslendingaþættir* – and conversion *þættir* (Ashman Rowe 2017, 152; Harris 1989). The two *þættir* that are the material for this article belong to these two genres, with *Þórhalls þáttr knapps (The Tale of Thorhall Knapp)*, which I discuss only briefly below, being a conversion narrative, and *Auðunar þáttr vestfirska (The Tale of Audun from the West Fjords),* which I analyse in more detail, being a «king and Icelander» narrative.

My discussions focus on how Otherness is constructed and perceived in the texts. The terms Otherness and Other have been used liberally in Old Norse literary scholarship, most often simply denoting something or someone foreign, non-human or otherwise norm-breaking. John McKinnell (2005), for example, provides a reading of Old Norse mythological sources using Lacanian psychoanalytical theory focusing on the relationship between the Self, in this case, the Norse gods and humans, and the Other – giants, trolls, the dead and other monstrous beings – and the (human) desire to control and assimilate the Other. However, the mythological source

[1] Literally «strand [of rope]» (Ashman Rowe 2017, 151). Other terms found in manuscripts containing what we now would classify as *þættir* are «*saga*, *frásǫgn*, *sǫgn* (all: story, tale), *hlutr* (item), *capitulum* (chapter), […]» (Harris 1989, s. 1). *Þættir* are therefore simply put shorter prosaic narratives that can be loosely arranged in several groups of narrative types, e.g. Icelanders' travels to Norway, conversion narratives, feud narratives similar to the sagas of Icelanders, narratives around skaldic verses, dreams, as well as individual biographies (1989, 2–3).

materials that McKinnell uses present a radical Otherness that does not find an equivalent in other Old Norse literary sources, such as the *íslendingaþættir* or conversion *þættir*. Researchers from various disciplines, including anthropology and history, such as Aaron Gurevich (1969), Kirsten Hastrup (1985), and Sirpa Aalto (2004, 2010) have explored the intersections of Otherness, culture, and ethnicity, also highlighting internal societal structures that shape social hierarchies and influence the perception of Othering qualities. For this, they have drawn upon different anthropological theories and medieval Scandinavian legal texts to establish a social centre and a social periphery, which more often than not also coincides with a spatial difference: what and who is closer geographically, is also closer to the Self which conceptualises this world view.

Finally, Rebecca Merkelbach (2019), employing Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's monster theory, has focused on the negative societal impact of monstrous Others, such as the hybrid existences and contagious traits of berserkers, trolls, malevolent magic users, and revenants. In contrast to McKinnell's radical Otherness and Gurevich and Hastrup's spatial dichotomy, this approach tries to conceptualise Otherness as the dissolution of boundaries between the Self and the radical Other, focusing on the characters' hybridity and negative social impact.

These approaches have in common that they predominantly focus on negative Otherness: those who are Other because they diverge from the norm or the Self are read as negative images of what the Self, here the Icelandic writers, imagined themselves. This approach to Otherness has some potential pitfalls, though: characters that we as modern readers assume to be subject to Othering, such as individuals with magical abilities or norm-breaking characteristics, may be read more negatively than the source material intends. Additionally, characters that may be equally norm-breaking but are not described negatively are excluded entirely from the discourse about Otherness.

Instead of focusing on a negative and absolute reading of Otherness, I propose a reading that moves beyond a binary framework, such as strict dichotomies of good and evil, us and them, natural and paranormal, and that instead explores a fluid and constantly (re-)negotiable discourse, challenging the assumption that Otherness must always be negative. Drawing on the aforementioned studies and employing different perspectives on Otherness, I seek to apply the framework of Otherness on material not previously studied from this perspective and on narratives not typically chosen to study Otherness in Old Norse sources.

An earlier didactic reading of the short *Þórhalls þáttr knapps* exemplifies this aforementioned focus on a negative Other in the shape of characters with magical abilities and a pre-Christian belief system, despite the *þáttr* being vague on the matter. *Þórhalls þáttr knapps,* which is found in the manuscript *Flateyjarbók* (1387–1390) follows two characters introduced by name, the title character Þórhallr and his neighbour Þórhildr.[2] While most *Íslendingaþættirs'* narratives are set in regions of modern Norway, some notable exceptions, such as *Þórhalls þáttr knapps*, take place in Iceland (Ashman Rowe 2017, 152; Harris 1972, 7). However, like many other texts from the period, the *þáttr* engages with the Christening of Iceland. Þórhallr is described as virtuous and of a good family, but he is still a heathen, sacrificing to the pre-Christian gods when he falls ill with leprosy. One night, he is visited in his dreams by a well-clad man riding a white horse and carrying a golden spear. Fearing the man, Þórhallr tries to flee but is stopped

[2] For this article, I have used Bragi Halldórsson's Old Norse edition in *Íslendinga sögur og þættir 3,* and John Porter's English translation.

by the man who promises him health and happiness if he dismantles the heathen temple and uses the wood to build a house for the new God. Waking from his dream, Þórhallr gathers his workers and has them follow the instructions from the dream.

In the second part of the *þáttr,* Þórhildr is described as capable and possessing magical knowledge. On the same night that Þórhallr dreams of the man with the golden spear, Þórhildr wakes her men and tells them to round up all livestock that is still out in the pastures and to lock all animals up securely as the old gods have been driven from their temple by Þórhallr's actions and are destroying and killing everything in their path on their way to Siglunes. Later, one of Þórhildr's workhorses is found dead in the pasture, while Þórhallr's life improves significantly; when the Christian faith is officially introduced in Iceland at the next Alþingi, Þórhallr is baptised and wholly cured from his leprosy, cementing his new faith.

Joseph C. Harris has interpreted this narrative as a didactic tale contrasting good and evil, where the former is rewarded and the latter punished. Þórhallr, who believes in and obeys the new God, is ultimately rewarded for his faith with health and happiness, while Þórhildr, who uses magic to seek knowledge of the exodus of the heathen gods, is punished by losing a working horse (Harris 1975). Both characters display qualities that could be considered Othering and are either understood as norm-breaking or otherwise marginalising, establishing a difference to the majority society and to the Self the reader is encouraged to identify with. Þórhallr suffers from a debilitating and stigmatising illness and Þórhildr is skilled in magic, which typically carries negative connotations in Old Norse literature (Aalto 2010, 152; Korecká 2019, 18).

However, despite Þórhallr's illness and Þórhildr's skills in magic, they both remain active members of society of higher social standing, and their Othering qualities do not negatively impact their social esteem. While Harris emphasises the didactic nature of Þórhildr's punishment and Þórhallr's reward, her relatively mild punishment suggests that the narrative's moral focus may be on the danger and unreliability of the heathen gods, rather than on the Otherness and behaviour of the characters themselves. Thus, this *þáttr* exemplifies a particular form of Otherness: despite descriptors alluding to Othering qualities, their Otherness does not impact the characters' social standing in a direct sense and is addressed and mitigated within the narrative. Another facet of Otherness is the focus of the analysis of the second *þáttr* that I examine in the following chapter.

Auðunar þáttr vestfirska: From disruptive presence to reintegration

Since Otherness in its fundamental meaning does not have negative connotations, but simply denotes difference, it must be assumed that Otherness also can include positive characteristics and behaviours that are idealised and supposed to be emulated. I will demonstrate this with the example of *Auðunar þáttr vestfirska.* This *þáttr* is preserved in three manuscripts: *Morkinskinna*, from the last quarter of the 13th century, *Flateyjarbók*, from the late 14th century, and *Hulda*, from the last quarter of the 14th century. However, *Auðunar þáttr vestfirska* is thought to have been composed earlier, in the 1220s (Miller 2014, 3). The versions of the *þáttr* found in the three manuscripts differ slightly, with *Hulda*'s version slightly expanding on *Morkinskinna*'s narrative (3–4).[3]

[3] I have used Þórólfsson and Jónsson (1943), the most commonly used edition series of Íslendingasögur, and the translation by Anthony Maxwell that is based primarily on *Morkinskinna*'s version of the *þáttr.*

The *þáttr* follows the Icelander Auðunn, who travels first to Norway and then to Greenland where he purchases a bear that he intends to give to the Danish King Sveinn. On his way to King Sveinn, Auðunn navigates meetings with Scandinavian royalty, court politics, and financial difficulties before he can gift King Sveinn the bear and go on a pilgrimage to Rome. On his return from Rome, Auðunn again faces hardships but is also showered with gifts, making him return to Iceland as a wealthy man.

Auðunar þáttr vestfirska may not be the typical *þáttr* that comes to mind when examining Otherness, but when Otherness is assumed to include positive attributes that are to be emulated or at least admired, this «rags-to-riches story» as Miller terms it (1), offers a plethora of instances to examine, such as idealisation, social aspiration and emulation, but also instances that will not be the focus of the following analysis but that may offer other, additional insights, such as virtue in the context of Christianity, trade, as well as the social importance of gift giving. It should also be noted that the sober style of the narrative, the lack of inner monologue or otherwise expressed thoughts of the characters, and the compact storyline offer blank spaces for the reader to project ideas and importance. The reader is therefore free to imagine Auðunn's behaviour and subsequent success as a result of luck and diplomatic prowess, cunning, or, most plausible, his luck conducing a certain cunning.

At the very beginning of the tale, Auðunn is described as «félítill» (Þórólfsson & Jónsson 1943, 361), translated as having «little money» (Maxwell 1997, 369). However, he does have enough to provide for himself and his mother for three years of his absence from Iceland, as was required by law (Miller 2014, 15–16). While Auðunn is not as wealthy as protagonists tend to be, he is by no means destitute. His limited financial means do not affect his legal or social status to the extent of being seen as socially marginalized (see Bandlien, 2017). Thus, while not a conventional saga hero, he is not negatively Othered due to his financial or social position.

Instead, Auðunn's positive Otherness seems tied to two desirable characteristics that Miller argues actually also are underlying themes of the *þáttr* (Miller 2014). Auðunn benefits from his luck and skilfully – or cunningly – navigates interactions with high nobility. While luck today is not seen as an inherent trait, Miller suggests that «our luck is in part like a trait of character» (75). This seems true for Auðunn: although not initially deemed lucky in Iceland, he makes successful decisions given his circumstances. He fulfils his legal duty by supporting his mother and departs with just enough funds for a three-year journey. The *þáttr* does not explain Auðunn's reasoning for wanting to go abroad, and his unusual decision to buy a bear in Greenland for all the money he has left is not commented on by his travel companions or otherwise given narrative space. Nor is it clear why Auðunn insists on giving the bear to King Sveinn, despite meeting King Haraldr first, who offers to buy it. Questioned about his plans, Auðunn states that his fate would be in Haraldr's hands but that he ultimately would see his plans through and give the bear to King Sveinn: «My lord, that is in your power. But I will not agree to do anything other than what I have intended» (Maxwell 1997, 370).[4] Auðunn's forwardness, bordering on insolence, in combination with his luck, that King Haraldr himself comments on – «at þú sér gæfumaðr» (Þórólfsson & Jónsson 1943, 362), «you are a fortunate man» (Maxwell 1997, 370) –, allows him to navigate his interaction with Haraldr, who lets him leave with his

[4] «Herra, þat er á yðru valdi, en engu játu vér ǫðru en þessu, er vér hǫfum áðr ætlat» (Þórólfsson & Jónsson 1943, 362).

bear following the promise that Auðunn will return to tell him how King Sveinn had rewarded him for the gifted bear.

As Merkelbach points out, the saga literature does not only encompass monstrous characters that are socially disruptive, thus breaking norms and accepted etiquette, but also non-monstrous characters who «upset the social equilibrium» (Merkelbach 2019, 12), the so-called *ójafnaðarmenn*, individuals that are troublemakers, difficult, or whose behaviour is unjust or unfair (Shortt Butler 2016, 30). Judith Shortt Butler explores the concept of *ójafnaðarmenn*, arguing that the term tends «to be applied to individuals who usually act against the heroes or protagonists of the saga, and who disregard social conventions and laws» (30). While Auðunn cannot be accurately labelled an *ójafnaðarmaðr*, he still disrupts social norms by refusing the King, who holds far greater power. However, Auðunn's inherent luck appears to supersede his social disruptiveness, preventing him from being treated accordingly.

Auðunn's luck and ability to navigate situations also shape his interactions with King Sveinn and his retinue. On his journey to Denmark, Auðunn runs out of money and is forced to beg for food, leading to his encounter with King Sveinn's steward Áki, who offers provisions in exchange for half the bear, as the bear would otherwise die of hunger.[5] When they appear before King Sveinn, Auðunn recounts his deal with Áki, which King Sveinn deems inappropriate. The King banishes Áki from the country and invites Auðunn to stay at his court. Despite facing adversity, for example, Áki's manipulations, Auðunn can – nearly inadvertently – turn the events to his advantage. Herein lies the distinct Otherness of Auðunn in this *þáttr.* Áki's seeking for personal gain is made explicit in the narrative by his statement to Auðunn that the bear would die if Auðunn did not agree to the deal. Auðunn on the other hand does not seem to be attributed ulterior motives for giving King Sveinn all his savings in form of a bear, stating: «I wanted to give you this bear. I gave everything I owned for it, but I have made a blunder, for I now own only half the bear» (Maxwell 1997, 371).[6] His honesty pays out – intended or not – and Áki is banished from Denmark while Auðunn himself is rewarded by being allowed to stay at court and later being allotted funds for his pilgrimage to Rome. The lack of Auðunn's inner thoughts and the condensed style of narrative, skipping longer periods of time makes it impossible to say if Auðunn's success is due to genuine humility and luck or lucky cunning. Instead, the *þáttr* offers a blank space for the readers to construe Auðunn's intentions as honest and humble or cunning, though both are – based on Auðunn's apparent success – worth admiration or emulation.

The pilgrimage to Rome is uneventful, but the pattern of Auðunn's luck overcoming precarious situations continues as, on his way back, he falls ill and having spent all money given to him by the King, he has to resort to begging. Arriving in Denmark at Easter, Auðunn does not dare to approach King Sveinn due to his physical appearance. Despite initially going unrecognized, Auðunn's demeanour catches the King's attention, again highlighting the apparent inherent nature of Auðunn's luck. Once recognized, the King welcomes Auðunn back into his

[5] The *þáttr* states that Auðunn spends everything he owns on the bear, yet he is still able to rent lodging for the bear in Norway before meeting King Haraldr. Later, it is noted that he runs out of travel funds *en route* to Denmark. The text does not, however, clarify whether these travel funds came from a different source or how Auðunn acquired them.

[6] «ætlaðak at færa yðr bjarndýr þetta; keyptak þat með allri eigu minni, ok nú er þó á orðit mikit fyrir mér, ek á nú hálft eitt dýrit» (Þórólfsson & Jónsson 1943, 363).

retinue, defending Auðunn against his men who are mocking the Icelander's appearance.[7] After some time, Auðunn expresses his wish to return to Iceland to care for his mother. Despite repeated physical and financial hardships, Auðunn's luck and undemanding way of interacting with the Scandinavian royalty work to his advantage. A clear pattern emerges: Auðunn faces significant challenges, such as illness and poverty, to then meet individuals of higher status, disrupts the social circle or social norms surrounding these individuals, and ultimately improves his wealth and social standing.

When Auðunn finally decides to return to Iceland, King Sveinn gifts him a ship «ok launa bjarndýrit» (Þórólfsson & Jónsson 1943, 366), as «repayment for the bear» (Maxwell 1997, 372), indicating that even though, or perhaps because Auðunn had gifted the bear without expressed expectations of a reward, he is rewarded by the King for it. Sveinn also gifts Auðunn a pouch of silver and a golden armring, both times referencing the possibility of being «shipwrecked» (373), «brjótir skipit» (Þórólfsson & Jónsson 1943, 367), foreshadowing a potentially dangerous return journey. Instead of immediately returning home, Auðunn travels to Norway to honour his promise to King Haraldr. Haraldr admits that he would not have rewarded Auðunn as generously as King Sveinn had, suggesting that Auðunn's instinct to go to Denmark was correct. Haraldr accepts Auðunn's gift of the golden armring and gives him gifts in return, thus accepting Auðunn. Auðunn then returns to Iceland without issues, and the *þáttr* concludes by emphasizing his luck, stating «ok þótti vera inn mesti gæfumaðr» (Þórólfsson & Jónsson 1943, 368), that he «was considered an exceedingly fortunate man» (Maxwell 1997, 374). As Miller points out, Auðunn's luck does not mean he avoids hardships – he suffers illness, poverty, and opposition from higher-status individuals (Miller 2014, 76). Instead, luck and cunning enable him to navigate the challenges successfully, ultimately returning to Iceland with wealth, social esteem, and the support of two kings.

Auðunn's Otherness throughout the tale is tied to his exceptionalism. Despite starting with little wealth and no apparent luck, he gains the respect and favour of two kings and returns to Iceland as a wealthy man. Like Þórhallr in *Þórhalls þáttr knapps*, who improves his social and spiritual standing by choosing the guidance of the Christian faith via the apparition in his dream, Auðunn's guiding principle is his inherent luck. Throughout the narrative, Auðunn consistently follows through on his decisions, even when they lead to precarious situations. These circumstances allow him to meet individuals of higher social standing, and although he disrupts social norms and courtly etiquette, he is ultimately rewarded for his persistence.

This sets Auðunn apart from Merkelbach's social monsters or non-monstrous *ójafnaðarmenn*, who also disrupt the social order. Auðunn's inherent luck, resilience and perseverance enable him to benefit from these disruptions. Crucially, he knows not to tempt fate or to overexert his cunning to fully benefit from the wealth and social esteem acquired. Auðunn's Otherness is frequently remarked upon by other characters, suggesting an admiration or idealisation of his inherent characteristics and behaviour, indicating that his exceptional nature is something to be emulated or at least admired. The narrative emphasises the idea that Otherness when combined with exceptionalism, such as Auðunn's luck, can be positively reframed within society. Unlike characters whose disruptive behaviour leads to a permanent alienation that may require removal from society, Auðunn's Otherness is seen as somewhat admirable due to his ability to

[7] While the *þáttr* does not refer to the Christian God as a source of Auðunn's luck or infer divine intervention, the significance of Easter for Auðunn's return to Denmark is noteworthy due to the symbolic significance of Easter as the holiday celebrating the resurrection of Jesus.

balance his norm-breaking determination with humility and knowing when to stop pushing the boundaries of his inherent luck. This aspect of the narrative highlights that Otherness is not inherently negative but can be a source of transformation and, ultimately, social reintegration.

Conclusion: Different facets of Otherness

At the beginning of this article, I proposed a reading of Otherness that moves away from the notion of a binary, considering that if a subject's identity is allowed to change, then Otherness too must be fluid and re-negotiable. In the *þættir* narratives, the Othering qualities are constantly established and re-established with societal or situational changes, indicating that Otherness is neither static nor necessarily limited to negative qualities.

Both *Þórhalls þáttr knapps* and *Auðunar þáttr vestfirska* have been the subject of earlier scholarship, with Harris focusing on the didactic aspect of *Þórhalls þáttr knapps*' conversion narrative and Miller examining the role of luck in *Auðunar þáttr vestfirska*.

My reading of *Þórhalls þáttr knapps* and *Auðunar þáttr vestfirska* through the lens of Otherness instead shows protagonists who are confronted with situational changes and transformative experiences, such as travelling to Norway or converting to a new faith. Their behaviour disrupts the social equilibrium and has the potential to affect their social standing. Despite these similarities, their interactions with the surrounding social environment make their Otherness differ greatly.

Auðunn, from a humble background, travels to Scandinavia specifically to gift the polar bear to King Sveinn of Denmark. His Otherness stems from his Icelandic identity and lower social standing, shaping his relationship with the kings' men. His disruptiveness presents itself in his interactions with the nobility and kings, as Auðunn holds on to his plans and convictions, even when they break social norms. However, his disruptive behaviour is not negatively perceived due to his inherent luck, which leads to favourable outcomes for him and positively read interactions with the kings. His initial Otherness rooted in his low social standing and being Icelandic diminishes as he earns the respect of the kings. That is not to say that Auðunn is not Othered after gaining the kings' approval. His journey is fraught with challenges, such as poverty, sickness, and being Othered by King Sveinn's men. Nevertheless, the respect and support of both Scandinavian kings override the Othering Auðunn experiences from the kings' men. Auðunn's journey ultimately leads him to gain a social status that would have been unattainable for him had he stayed in Iceland. This social elevation allows him to reintegrate into Icelandic society financially and spiritually wealthy.

Þórhallr's Otherness is of a different kind, manifesting in his illness, which marginalises him despite not directly impacting his social status. However, his decision to trust the apparition in his dream leading him to convert to Christianity, directly impacts his marginalisation. His faith not only re-establishes the previous *status quo* of his life, but improves it drastically, bringing him peace, health, and happiness, reversing all his previous misfortunes.

Unlike Auðunn's Otherness, which is tied to worldly aspects, his social standing and his luck, Þórhallr's Otherness is deeply connected to spiritual aspects in the form of his heathen faith and his illness, which are arguably connected. Þórhallr's conversion to Christianity leads to him not being Othered anymore. His Otherness is temporary and conditional and is gradually eliminated once he follows the apparition's orders and completely resolved once he is baptised.

The two narratives highlight different facets of Otherness and reflect different ways to resolve Otherness depending on the root cause for this Otherness: Auðunn can, driven by his luck, diminish his Othering qualities through positive interactions with important persons, thus mitigating and resolving his worldly Otherness by the worldly, social choices. Þórhallr's conversion to Christianity cures him of both illness and heathenism, effectively resolving his Othering quality. Thus, his primarily spiritual Otherness is resolved through his choices regarding faith, guided by the orders of the dream apparition. To a certain degree, it is Auðunn's belief in himself and Þórhallr's faith in the Christian god that leads to them resolving their Othering qualities.

The examined narratives challenge the assumption that Otherness must be a source of permanent exclusion from society or permanent marginalisation. Instead, they present a more nuanced Otherness, which is shaped and reshaped by the characters' actions, their reactions to societal interventions, and transformative experiences. In the narratives, the protagonists' Otherness is (re-)negotiated multiple times, offering instances where it could either be eliminated or cemented. The individual outcomes, though, are shaped by their luck and faith. Ultimately, the *þættir* highlight the fluid and situational nature of Otherness, showcasing that Otherness can be negotiated in the narrative and has the potential to either be addressed and turned into positives or be cemented as negatives. These narratives illustrate the interplay of social standing and individual behaviour with the potential for resolving or perpetuating Otherness and emphasize the necessity of understanding Otherness in its specific context.

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