

## English summary

This dissertation focuses on depictions of monsters in medieval Icelandic literature, across genres and different periods of writing, in an attempt to reach an understanding of the meaning of the term *skrímsl* and other related concepts, such as *skrípi*, *blámaðr* and *tröll*, while using modern theories of marginalization and dehumanization to examine what ideas underlie their use in the literature. Each chapter is in effect an independent study of the semantic field of the texts under scrutiny, which taken together reveal that a unified understanding of monsters cannot be gleaned across the texts that a simple definition might be based on. There are, however, certain qualities to what was perceived as monstrous that seem to be present in the texts, as they are all to a greater or lesser degree influenced by the Christian ideology that permeated medieval learned writings. What follows is a summary of the primary findings of this study.

### What is a monster?

A simple definition of the word *skrímsl* is hard to find as its use and meaning depends on context, yet every instance provides with an independent fragment to the term's full meaning and should they be pieced together we might successfully approach it as an umbrella term for assorted monstrous characteristics. Such an approach would not suffice to explain every single instance of the word *skrímsl*, but it does provide a general understanding of the various layers of meaning of the word across different texts. The word rarely accompanies descriptions of monsters in the sources; it is far more common that words such as *tröll* are used, and it is clear from descriptions that *blámenn*, as an example, are both thought to be *skrímsl* and *tröll*. *Skrímsl* is semantically related to its Latin counterpart *monstrum*. *Skrímsl* is used for sea monsters and *margýgir*. More often it is used to refer to illusions or supernatural acts whether they are divine or diabolical; more often to the latter. Diabolical monsters can be idols, hybrid creatures and deformed people, sometimes

also *blámenn* or other demons. *Skrímsl* is a phenomenon that runs counter to civilization and true faith, laws of nature and true knowledge of the world. The meaning of the word may thus be summarized:

1. *Skrímsl* are our mirror image. The difference between *them* and *us* is emphasized with the ethical borderline which is independently defined by each society.
2. *Skrímsl* often are deformed human or humanoid creatures: Blemmyes, Finns, Bjarmar, *blámenn* et cetera. They are our oblique mirror images, monsters in human guise, and as such *skrímsl* always incite a feeling of uncanny unfamiliarity and fear.
3. *Skrímsl* is a rhetorical, religious, political means of progaganda employed to underline a *difference* between one kind of society and another one which is deemed to be inferior to the first.
4. *Skrímsl* are often defined on the basis of difference, be it sexual, religious, ideological, national, racial, skin-color, economic, kin or other social standing.
5. *Skrímsl* cannot be known. As soon as they are identified, they either show a new and unexpected side or they cease to be *skrímsl*.
6. *Skrímsl* often are hybrids of man and animal (e.g. cynocephali, manticores, *finngálkn*), woman and man (e.g. hermaphrodites), or by other means objectionable, e.g. due to diet, clothing, customs or other cultural property.

### Monsters in Old Norse learned literature

The ideological foundation of medieval Icelandic literature is Christian. Book-making arrived in Iceland with the advent of Christianity which had spread throughout Northern Europe due to Carolingian agency. In the literary tradition of the Carolingians, ecclesiastical power and monarchy combined in the idea of the king receiving his power from God; kings' sagas and hagiographies were written in equal measure, wherein a great interest in magnificent kings of old and Christian religiosity is exhibited. Icelanders received this tradition along with Christianity and began shortly thereafter to write their own stories of holy men, kings and ancient heroes whose roots lay in the glorious European past and were all descended from Troy. At

the same time stories of Icelanders were put together in very much the same fashion as well as annals which emphasized Iceland's context within European history.

The prerequisites for saga-writing thus rest on the same ideological foundations as the learned works that arrived in Iceland with Christianity and monastic culture, in which universal history, *aetates mundi* and astrology revealed the age of the world and provided means of time-reckoning, books on world geography were incorporated into the Biblical Genesis and the condemned peoples moved to the peripheries of the world, and the Bible itself was the foundation of all history. Icelandic sagas are written into this context, which goes a long way toward explaining their overall idealization of monarchy and Christian virtues. On the other hand, the cultural heritage that shapes their narrative material has its own roots which are older, and one must be mindful that the delineation between Christian tradition and Nordic oral tradition is in many cases unclear in the sources. The literature is itself hard to categorize as the learned tradition permeates them, as the sagas were considered to be history during the time of their writing.

Hence the approach taken in this study, to first consider monsters in Nordic, mainly Icelandic, learned works; then to analyze monsters of assorted sagas with an emphasis on those characteristics which may be said to be comparable to learned concepts of monsters and condemned peoples on the peripheries of the world. The monsters of learned literature are of a wide variety, ranging from hybrids out of Ancient Greek tradition to sea monsters and other strange beings, to monstrous nations each with a stranger deformity than the one before, e.g. headless people with faces in their chests, dog-headed people, people without mouths, people with ears big enough to cover themselves in, people with horse-hooves; there are also people with strange ways of sustenance, such as the fish-eaters, the snake-eaters, the grass-eaters. In learned Icelandic texts, very much like in their European counterparts, distant nations (from a European perspective) are described as if they actually have such appearances, and thus they are used as proof for how frightening the world is outside of its recognized center. Other modes of thought do pop up however, such as in the Norwegian *Konungs skuggsiá* where it is said that Europeans appear as exotic to others as others appear to Europeans.

These monstrous nations first appear in Ancient Greek literature and gradually amassed Christian meaning down the ages until they had become the very symbols of the Apocalypse, the grunts of the Antichrist who would break out from his enclosure on the world's edge and wage war on God and men. A growing tendency can be seen in the later Middle Ages to analyse every anomaly from the Christian standard and interpret it according to scripture. The impending end of the world according to Revelations in that regard is hand in hand with clerical time-reckoning, resulting in marginal monsters becoming a palpable threat in learned writ. Fear of Muslims resulted in them being lumped together with such peripheral people and thought to be in cahoots with the agents of evil. The condemned nations of Biblical narrative belong to the same set as *monstrum*: the monster that *reveals* and is a portent for the end of the world; the bestial human hybrid that eats human flesh and will fight with the Antichrist at the end of the world. *Skrímsl*, like *tröll*, is everything which is exotic and inhuman and in opposition to virtuous behavior and God. *Skrímsl* are thus not only marginalized humans but all humans that were thought to be in direct opposition to Christendom. Anxieties toward other peripheral peoples reflects this very fear among Icelanders: monsters had become a real threat to the Christian, Western-European social structure. It is in this light that monsters in medieval Icelandic literature has not been viewed before. The pre-Christian roots of Nordic legends are part of the picture but they do not suffice to explain all the facets of monstrosity apparent in the literature. Theories of social construction, marginalization and dehumanization show beyond doubt that medieval Icelandic literature reflects a discourse which aimed to distort, disfigure and other people from outside of Europe, one which was meant to strengthen the foundations of Christendom by marginalizing every other possible groups of people and turning them into monsters.

### Monsters in Icelandic sagas

The worldview of medieval clerics had its center in Jerusalem, where the weather

was the mildest and the people of outstanding moral fiber compared to others, and conversely there were marginal regions where living conditions were harsher and the rough weather and other factors were thought to produce monstrous people. This ethical centrism theory is reflected in Icelandic literature from its very beginning and its influence is also to be found in sagas where women and men seek virtue by travels to Rome and converting to monastic life within a European setting, while terrible monsters, *blámenn*, *tröll*, *skrælingjar*, *flugdrekar*, and *finngálkn* are in control over the domains beyond. It is clear from the sources that Icelanders realized their position with regard to such peripheral areas, which – however distant – were ever close. *Heimskringla* speaks of dragons and *blámenn* in Scythia, which lay east of Bjarmaland. The sagas of the people of Hrafnista place *tröll* on the boundaries of Norway. The *Vínland* sagas draw up a picture of *sciopodes* and black and malignant-looking *skrælingar* not far from Greenland, in a territory thought to be connected to the westcoast of Africa by landbridge. For this reason an approach based on geography was chosen and thus the sources to be analysed, so a geographical perspective on monstrosity is maintained throughout the study.

*Þorvalds þáttr víðförla*, *Eiríks saga víðförla* and *Yngvars saga víðförla* are all written on a Christian basis and they all tell a story of men who traveled east and came close to becoming holy men. The first text has no monsters, but then again *Þorvaldr* never travels far enough to encounter any, and his short saga is thematically and ideologically linked with the other two. In the *víðförlasögur* Scandinavia appears as an unchristianized peripheral territory and yet it has produced noble heathens, many of whom subscribe to some kind of Christian ethics; in between there are marginal figures such as *berserkir* but these are not prominent and seem powerless when confronted with true faith. In this manner these sagas serve along the way a similar purpose as the incipit of *Íslendingabók* which defines Iceland as *terra Christiana* even before its settlement. It is the kind of self-image that a nation on the margins must create to present to the Church, to show that ideologically it belongs to Europe rather than the periphery. For this purpose one might as an example manufacture texts that place the periphery even farther out on the map, such as is done in the *Vínland* sagas. One might also write

stories of great champions who patrol the outer borders of Scandinavia, such as in the sagas of the men of Hrafnista, or the inner borders between society and wilderness such as Grettir Ásmundarson does in Iceland.

The world of the *víðförlasögur* is in many, but not all, respects in keeping with learned descriptions of the world. Religious symbolism hangs in the air both blatantly and between the lines, dragons and marvelous peoples are incorporated from the writings of Isidore and others, and heathens are shown in a negative light. Siggeus and his daughters who have been eaten by dragons sounds like a Nordic legend, but in Yngvars saga it has religious connotations to boot, symbolizing the torments the damned have to suffer in Hell. The imagery of Yngvars saga strongly implies a latent interest in the Christian Apocalypse where the saved and the damned will be divided, unlike Eiríks saga which focuses on the eternal yet unattainable terrestrial Paradise and the pleasures that man has lost after his expulsion. Thus it becomes an imperative to Christianize Scandinavia so that this Paradise may be reclaimed as it is in Yngvars saga to convert in order to save one's soul. Condortantly monsters have a greater role in Yngvars saga.

Eiríks saga rauða and Grænlendinga saga also exhibit a thorough understanding of geography yet their religious threads are more to the side of the main narrative, which is characterized by excitement for newly discovered lands and the important curiosity that settlers must have. The Greenland Sea was famous for its sea monsters, attested to e.g. in Konungs skuggsiá and the longer redaction of Örvar-Odds saga, so it is important to note that it is the king who solicits the exploration. Knowledge of such things is necessary to kings if Konungs skuggsiá can be judged by. In the Vínland sagas the periphery is moved even farther out, and as Greenland is converted it is interesting to note that no sea monsters are to be found there. Such monsters cannot be found anywhere close to Christian territory. Farther to the south however are lands where unipeds live and a strange flock of people that is objectified and marginalized *pars pro toto*: They are called *skrælingar* after their appearance: they are black and malignant-looking, not only do they sail on *húðkeipar* but in some cases they are *húðkeipar* as the boat is not distinguished from the person. They furthermore live in huts underground like savages, they do

not understand trade, and they practice witchcraft and illusions. In many ways they resemble the monstrous peoples of the peripheries and it is to these people that the Nordic settlers finally have to yield. Such exotic locales will not be Christianized, though they do manage to kidnap two children and teach them the Norse language and customs. The final frontier of Christian society is thus in Greenland rather than in Iceland, and through this method the saga writers have succeeded in bringing Iceland closer to the center of Christian Europe by comparison. *Grænlendinga saga* ends with Guðríðr Þorbjarnardóttir's pilgrimage to Rome and her subsequent life as a nun; as Guðríðr is the most widely traveled woman of all medieval Icelandic texts, the contrast between Christian Europe and the hideous heathens of the world's margins is magnified, underlining the Icelanders' relationship with Christendom. The presence of unipeds in *Eiríks saga rauða* reveals that the scribe was very familiar with ideas of monsters on the earth's peripheries as well as the geographical placement of *Vínland* off the west coast of Africa.

In the southern continent and India there are also many kinds of monstrous peoples, many of which get lumped into one in Icelandic sources and called *blámenn*. *Blámenn* are directly linked with the demonic and often they are in fact demons. They are Muslims and as such, in concordance with the Christian understanding of world history, they belong to the hordes of the Antichrist who will wage war with him at the end of the world. *Blámenn* are *tröll* or they are *tröll*-like, *berserkir* or in cahoots with *berserkir*, *risar* or allied with *risar*; they are *illþjóðir*, hideous-looking, black and terrible, either *blemmyes* or allied with *blemmyes*. They are described like wild animals and they are kept at courts of kings like beasts to unleash upon heroes. In medieval narratives and folktales all the way to the 20th century alike, a motif recurs in which the hero has to wrestle with a *blámaðr*, is given special equipment or advice to be able to accomplish this task, and then breaks the *blámaðr*'s back on a stone. The *blámaðr*-rhetoric in the sources is indicative of pre-racial thought, where hooked noses, hanging lips, skin-color and inferior origins are emphasized in contrast to the light and courageous hero. Several peoples were marginalized and demonized based on these and other characteristics and united under the term *blámaðr*. Neutral descriptions of *blámenn* are few and only one

particularly positive description exists, but that description is of the German emperor Klárus in disguise as a prince from Bláland.

Ketils saga hængs and Gríms saga loðinkenna emphasize the tröll-slayings of heroes living under extreme conditions on the margins of the inhabitable northern Norway. The tröll seem to cause shortages on Hálogaland which are not resolved until they have been killed. The hero of Örvar-Odds saga, on the other hand, is on the run from the prophecy of his own death, and even though his adventures start close to home with his famous voyage to Bjarmaland the emphasis, especially in the longer redaction of the saga, remains on his travels to more distant places where he seeks his archnemesis Ögmundr Eybjófsbani. Áns saga bogsveigis is in many respects different from the other *Hrafnistumannasögur*, but in its conclusion it is mentioned that Án had, like his kinsmen, had to deal with tröll. In a sense the Hrafnistumenn are thus watchmen over the borders between Nordic civilization and trollish, magic-wielding, peripheral peoples who are in opposition with the values of their society. The tröll of the *Hrafnistumannasögur* are likely indicative of tensions between Norwegians and their darker neighbors, the Sami, who are reduced to trolls wearing only tattered skin through which their genitals are exposed, even their diets being cause for suspicion. The idea that a woman can birth a monster in the liking of something she has seen during her pregnancy occurs in Örvar-Odds saga, where Hrafnhildr sees one side of a furry Fin upon the moment of conception, and thus her son Grímr loðinkinni was born with one hairy cheek.

The fight of these forefathers of Icelandic settlers against monsters on the margins may perhaps be analyzed in light of Christian ideas about the end of the world and the condemned descendants of Cain and Ham. The powers of evil must always be kept at bay, and in that regard the tröll of the *Hrafnistumannasögur* are no different from the heathens of Yngvars saga, the *skrælingar* of the Vínland sagas, or the terrible *blámenn* who can be found all around outside of Christian Europe. All of these monsters and heathens can be directly linked with ideas of human nature and climate, center and periphery, the oppositional pair of good and evil. When Catholic ideology lost its grasp on Icelandic society with the Reformation, humanist scholars such as Arngrímur Jónsson lærði keep up the good fight, trying to move Iceland



from the periphery with their own ways, which shows that even in the 16th and 17th centuries ideas about marvellous nations on the peripheries were very much alive.

Grettir Ásmundarson is a troll-killer living in Iceland in the liminal period between Christianity and heathenism. He is a hero during times in which heroism is not required, yet the farmer's life does not suit him. Early in his career he faces his greatest trial when he fights a devil in human form who puts a curse on him. Grettir has been a troublemaker all his life, but following Glámr's curse it does not matter which heroic endeavour he pursues – he will be condemned and eventually he is shunned from society. The only job suited to his talents is fighting and killing monsters. There is a darkness in Grettir which is essential for a man fighting dark beings, and indeed he is considered to be better than anyone else in taking down trolls and the undead, just like his trollish ancestors the Hrafnistumenn. Glámr's curse brings Grettir ever farther from human values and society, until society does not see him as a person anymore but a tröll. In his exile Grettir succumbs to living on an island, a typical abode for trollish figures on the liminal space between the human world and the otherworld, where he lives out his remaining years until a man who considers himself a hero but is driven by evil ambitions kills Grettir and decapitates him. Grettir thus ends his life very much in the same way as the first evil being he fights, the *haugbúi Kárr*.

The sagas that have been analyzed here usually end with a voyage to the holiest of places and the hero, or the hero's replacement after his death, becoming somewhat akin to a holy man. Eiríkr víðförli finds Paradise and is finally raptured to God's side. Yngvar víðförli gets a church consecrated in his name even though he has not worked any miracles, so he very nearly becomes venerated as a saint. His son Sveinn sails in the end into the river that supposedly has its origins in the terrestrial Paradise. Grænlandinga saga ends with the pilgrimage of Guðríðr Þorbjarnardóttir, her life as a nun and a hermit. Grettis saga ends with the pilgrimage of Þorsteinn drómundr and Spes to Rome where they repent and divorce so that their relationship is only with God, after which they become hermits for the rest of their lives. There are exceptions to this: when Eiríks saga rauða ends, Þorfinnr karlsefni is still alive and Guðríðr has thus not yet traveled to Rome. The longer

redaction of *Örvar-Odds saga* follows *Ketils saga hængs* and *Gríms saga loðinkinna* in manuscripts so all of these may be seen as a single narrative that focuses on the dynasty of noble, pre-Christian troll-slayers to the point where Oddr bathes in the river Jordan, converts to Christianity and dies after a long and arduous life. *Áns saga bogsveigis* is the biggest exception among these sagas both with regard to form and plot, and no narrative exists of *Án* converting or embarking on any kind of pilgrimage.

These Christian strands of the sagas can without a doubt be explained in many ways, but one which has hitherto not been explored is their connection to medieval teratology. Iceland belonged to the margins as far as the Church's understanding of the world was concerned, and the margins belonged to monsters. All the heroes of these narratives have come into contact with monsters with the exception of *Þorsteinn drómundr*, who nonetheless avenges his brother *Grettir* in Constantinople and thus ends the agency of the demonic in the narrative, which start with the diabolical contamination that *Glámr* suffers at the hands of the mysterious monster of *Forsæludalur*, runs through the ill fortune and evil deeds of *Grettir* which become his downfall, and materialize in the possessed *Glaumr* and the black magic of *Þorbjörn öngull*. The confessions of *Drómundr* and *Spes* remove all doubt that the demonic has been purged from their lives as it is said that they had been "relieved of all charms as far as was possible, and kindly asked that they now took sensible care for their souls and lived in purity thenceforth having been absolved of all their troubles." Thus *Drómundr* finishes what *Grettir* could not exorcise himself, having been marked by evil and become the very thing he had sought to destroy. The other Christian strands must be viewed in context of the Christian worldview (cf. chapter 2). There it is apparent that ideas of monsters on the periphery of the inhabitable world goes hand in hand with apocalyptic expectations and the end of earthly existence. If travel narratives about Nordic peoples' voyages to the east and west serve, as I have attempted to show, among other things the purpose of re-placing Iceland in the world with regard to the Christian theory that Jerusalem was at the center of the earth and closest to God, then the monsters serve the purpose of defining the outer borders of the world in these narratives. If monsters on the

world's periphery symbolize the condemned nations, the forces of evil which will fight alongside the Antichrist during the Apocalypse, then the Christian strands of these sagas illustrate that no redemption may be found except through God. The Greenlanders of the *Vínland sagas* and the wide-traveled Eiríkr and Yngvar all come into contact with monsters and marvels, and the heroes of these sagas are all very concerned with converting themselves and others to Christianity. As far as the hermits Þorvaldr, Drómundr and Spes are concerned it is clear that all of these texts are meant to idealize Christian piety in opposition to heathendom and monsters. Prophecies of the Apocalypse are not explicitly alluded to in the sagas, but their connection to the narratives are apparent once the learned ideological foundations of saga writing have been taken into account. In such a context *blámenn* are the perfect monsters: black, demonic, tröll-like, hideous and deformed men from the southern continent, often lumped together or partners with *berserkir*, Muslims and other terrible heathens.

The dehumanization of the monstrous peoples is not by any means subtle in the sources. Learned texts speak of them by adhering to the Isidorian school of Plinian thought and emphasize their corporeal and social characteristics: headless men with faces in their chest, ears in the shoulders, head of a dog, feet turned backwards, mixture of man and donkey, living in caves, give away their wives, eat fish, eat snakes, hide in their own ears, one-legged, one-eyed, black and scorched by the sun, et cetera. The objective is to illustrate an easily recognizable difference between exotic people and the audience of the descriptions. The lack of civilization becomes a focus point as well. Each and every monster has its designated place on the world map, and each and every monster becomes a synecdoche for a particular deformity which underlines their difference and dehumanizes all the inhabitants of that particular region of the world. The characteristics of difference appear in the sagas: black and evil-looking *skrælingar* and their *húðkeipar* and subterranean huts, *tröll* in Greenland, disgusting and sexually deviant *skinnkyrtlur* in northern Norway, terrible pitch-black *blámenn* from the south with gaping maws show up in Europe, terrifying mute *tröllkonur* and *jötnar* living in the Icelandic wilderness break into farms to snatch people. Physical difference between *us* and *them* is emphasized in

Icelandic sagas; often such difference seems sufficient to define the *other* as a monster. *Skrímsl* belong to the Devil, as demonic human-like figures are re-animated in their mounds and a mysterious monster of unknown origin in Forsæludalur can contaminate humans with its evil seed. The monstrous can thus be transmitted from monster to man and women can give birth to monsters simply by having seen a monster.

It must be kept in mind that this does not only concern literature, but a very *real rhetoric* employed by learned men in the Middle Ages to dehumanize exotic outside groups which in all likelihood reached the general public to some extent. Monsters are put into context with the rise of Islam in the Middle East and thus the rhetoric concerning them often reflects political tensions between Christians and Muslims which must be viewed in line with the Crusades. The purpose of Augustine and Isidore was to explain the place of monsters within Creation, but late medieval discourse, even while it is based on their work, rather reflects fear of the monsters that eventually will clash with men during the end of days. In this fashion non-Europeans were made suspicious; they represented other values, other religions, other customs – the harsh climates they had to endure in their home regions deformed them and their deformities reflected the content of their character; sea monsters and other such creatures similarly reflect the nature of these areas of the world. This is not simply literature, but reality as clerics saw it. The literature reflects this reality and the discourse of both is a clear historical example of dehumanization based in pre-racial thought.

This does not necessarily mean that medieval Icelandic literature as a whole took part in contemporary dehumanization discourse. In a world where monstrous people are thought to inhabit exotic places it is quite normal that the literature reflects that socially constructed reality. To this it should be added that stories of trolls and monsters are no more inherently Christian than stories of heroes and villains. Monsters are part of countless narrative structures all over the world. On the other hand, Christian ideology will not be separated from Old Norse literature; they mix together monster narratives that do not necessarily have a basis in Christianity with Christian learning, thus creating the literature analyzed here. The heritage that

the literature springs from is one thing, but late medieval ideology and discourse is another and yet it is unavoidable to interpret the former in terms of the latter – in light of the contemporary culture that the manuscripts were written in dialogue with. It has been shown in this study that Old Norse literature was not in any way isolated from contemporary European thought. What lies ahead at this point is a more detailed study of continental influence in the Nordic countries.

A few questions must be asked to conclude this study:

1. *Are descriptions and narratives of monsters different between genres or countries?*

Monsters in Old Norse literature seem to share similar characteristics regardless of genre, though their descriptions tend to be more detailed in *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur* than in *Íslendingasögur*. Glámr is described quite extensively but he is a unique figure in the texts that have been considered here. In other cases descriptions are quite alike, such as the comparison between the different bear's-son-motif narratives illustrates. Descriptions of *blámen*n are very attuned with continental pre-racial discourse, where a grotesque difference is emphasized. Descriptions of *skrælingar* follow the same pattern, though they are quite tame in comparison. The ideas about marginal peoples, trolls and monsters promulgated in medieval Icelandic literature are not peculiar to Iceland, but they are not strictly continental either. Rather, the learned and lay concepts concerning such creatures are so intertwined that their strands will hardly ever be separated in a satisfying manner. Old Norse monster narratives doubtlessly have roots in Nordic legends and popular tradition, but they also exhibit very clearly the same ideas as may be found in the most prominent works of European clerics concerning monsters on the margins, which also have an inextricable relationship to clerical notions of the condemned, the Antichrist and the Apocalypse. Most of the sources that have been considered here are extant in manuscripts from the 14th and 15th centuries in their oldest form. The question remains which of their monstrous descriptions are products of that time, and which may be older.

## **2. *How can a unified monster theory of Old Norse literature be approached?***

The conclusions discussed here concern the *general* monster theory of the sagas analyzed here, but more specific interpretations are to be found in each chapter of each respective saga. It is fairly likely that monstrous conceptions of Old Norse literature is on the whole more complex than these findings indicate. There will always be unique examples that provide a different picture than a wide range of other sources. Such a finding had been anticipated (cf. chapter 1). This study has focused on ideas about peripheral monsters as they appear in a handful of sagas and these have then been compared to Christian monster theory. The conclusions speak for themselves, yet at the same time it is clear that a different approach and a different selection of sources another conclusion might have been reached. Thus the only way to approach a unified monster theory of Old Norse literature, if it is at all possible, to analyze all the literature at once and compare and cross-reference. Such a study would be of an immense size and it is uncertain that any unified picture would emerge from such a comparison. The conclusion of this study is that Christian ideology, not least Christian conceptions of monsters, permeate the sources that have been considered here, yet in such varying ways that they have hitherto not been thought to be connected in any way. I would argue that a unified monster theory is unattainable; that it is more viable to view each case separately. It would be fruitful to employ a variety of methodologies in this endeavor, but the one I have put to work here I believe provides with the best understanding of the monstrous terminology itself.

## **3. *How does this monster theory fit with the general European monster theory?***

The sources that have been taken into consideration here have all been analyzed in light of recent theories of monsters in medieval European literature. The analysis reveals that the figure of the monster in Old Norse literature is not unlike that of e.g. Britain, where we have examples such as the poem *Beowulf* and more learned texts such as the *Wonders of the East* and Alexander the Great's letter to Aristotle, all of them extant in the same manuscript, as well as other texts such as *Liber monstrorum* and *Topographia Hibernica*. The unified foundation of both Nordic and British

medieval literature is the Christian absolutism that appears in learned continental writings about monsters. The present study having been concluded it will not be said that the medieval Icelandic monster is any different from the European monster. Surely there may be texts that do not conform to this model, and such will be the task of future scholarship to analyze those further.