

# The Representation of Outlaws in Post-Classical Icelandic Sagas

*A Comparative Approach to Grettis saga  
Ásmundarsonar and Króka-Refs saga*

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Master of Philosophy Thesis  
Viking and Medieval Norse Studies

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UNIVERSITETET I OSLO

Faculty of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies  
HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS  
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## Summary

This thesis is a comparative study of *Grettis saga* and *Króka-Refs saga*, two Icelandic Sagas from the 14th century. The aim of this study is to present these sagas in the context of historical, legal and cultural influences, and to discuss similarities and differences between them. *Króka-Refs saga* has been compared with other texts because of a great number of familiar patterns from other sagas. The thesis will present an argument, based on the idea of Martin Arnold, who suggested that the constant marginal position of Refr has similarities to the life of an outlaw. My argument will suggest similar possibilities in order to explain the possible purpose of the creation of such text. The aim of this thesis is to define the place of *Króka-Refs saga* in the Icelandic literary corpus, and to understand why Refr is similar and at the same time different to the famous outlaw-heroes.

Key-words: *Króka-Refs saga*, *Grettis saga*, outlawry, vargr, trickster

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Outlaws in Iceland – Legal Realm and Fiction

”Mildir, fræknir  
menn bazt lifa,  
sjaldan sút ala.  
en ósnjallur maðr  
uggir hotvetna,  
sýtir æ glöggr við gjöfum.”  
(Eddukvæði 2014, 331)

What could be worse than death? Perhaps this was the idea behind outlawry at some point in the history of mankind. To exclude a human being from society and to isolate him from any kind of help was the tragic reality that an outlaw had to face in Germanic society. Still, this undesirable state of a man captured the fantasy of writers in the medieval times. The outlaws became an interesting topic of medieval Icelandic literature, more specifically the *Íslendingasögur*. There are three sagas which can be separated from other texts: *Gisla saga Súrssonar*, *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* and *Harðar saga og Hólmverja*. The main protagonists of these sagas became outlaws and were killed after years of exile. Scholars have revisited these stories by trying to define these outlaws as part of Icelandic society, but yet outsiders from it. One of the recent summaries of these texts is the work of Joonas Ahola (2014). He discusses among other points the position of an outlaw within his family, in society and the narrative character of an outlaw. Ahola classifies those sagas dealing with outlaws: apart from the above mentioned, classical outlaw sagas he lists fortunate outlaws and pioneer outlaws (Ahola 2014, 105–18, 119–28, 129–31).

Inspired by Ahola’s research, this Master thesis will discuss sagas that in different ways deal with outlawry. Two of these were selected for a comparative study: *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* and *Króka-Refs saga*, primarily because of the life of the main protagonist. My aim is to put these sagas in the context of historical, legal and cultural influences, and to discuss similarities and differences between these two sagas. *Króka-Refs saga* has been compared with other texts because of a great number of familiar patterns from other sagas. Martin Arnold argued that the constant marginal position of Refr has similarities to outlawry. My argument will suggest similar possibilities in order to explain the possible purpose of the creation of such text. My aim is define the place of *Króka-Refs saga* in the Icelandic literary corpus, and to understand why Refr is similar and at the same time different as the famous outlaw-heroes.

Outlawry was a common punishment in Scandinavia, and the crime could have been almost anything. Reading through the rich corpus of legal texts from medieval Scandinavia one will realise this great variety of crimes that could lead to this type of punishment. To understand outlawry in literature we have to go back to the legal material of medieval Iceland. The oldest law code that is preserved is *Grágás*, which was valid in the Commonwealth period of Iceland. The oldest full manuscripts are GKS 1157 fol. *Konungsbók* and AM 334 fol. *Staðarhólsbók*, dated 1240-1260 and 1260-1281. From these texts, the definition of outlawry can be understood. This punishment was the harshest in the Commonwealth Period of Iceland, since the death penalty was introduced with *Jónsbók* in 1281. Lesser outlawry (*ffjörbaugsgarðr*) demanded a three-year exile, and the convict had to leave the country. After the three years passed, he could come back (Grágás 1974, 88–89). Full outlawry (*skóggangr*) is different. The convict was judged by the *férans dómr*, the court of execution. His property could have been confiscated, and no-one was allowed to help him to escape or give support (Grágás 1974, 87–88). In an honour-based society like that of Scandinavia, losing of alliances was worse than death. Loss of wealth could mean loss of reputation.

*Jónsbók* has to be mentioned as well as an Icelandic legal source. This younger legal code was given to the Icelanders by Magnús Hákonsson lagabætur (1263-1280). After Iceland had become a part of the Norwegian realm, Magnús decided to reform the legal texts of Norway, initiating a new law code for Iceland. The first lawbook sent to Iceland was *Jarnsíða* in 1271. It is preserved in *Staðarhólsbók*. The next law code was *Jónsbók* in 1280 (Jørgensen 2013, 282). This means that *Jónsbók* was in use when most of the sagas of the Icelanders were produced. However, we also have to keep in mind that the sagas are taking us back to around 950-1050. It is hard to define what the author's source for scenes or stories connected to legal material was, if they used any.

Outlawry and outlaws are frequent themes in the Sagas of the Icelanders. We do not know how much knowledge the saga writer had about legal matters, but the large amount of evidence suggests that the interest was high. The oldest manuscript containing all three outlaw sagas is AM 556 a 4to is dated to 1475-1499. The production of sagas has been divided into three parts: old sagas, classical sagas, and young sagas. The latter group was produced between 1300 and 1450 in the so-called post-classical saga period. *Króka-Refs saga* and *Grettis saga* were both produced in this period of time. *Harðar saga* is also one of the younger sagas, while *Gísla saga* is a classical saga, produced between 1240-1310 (Ólason 1993, 2:42). These texts have a focus on the life of outlaws: their different status, how they were treated by society, how they survived



the exile through many years, and how they died. There are some differences between the characters. Gísli seems to be a noble avenger who is willing to kill his sister's husband to revenge his brother-in-law, who was also his sworn brother. Honour seems to be the most important for him. Hǫrðr has never really experiences the loneliness of outlawry as he becomes the leader of a group of men. Grettir is a typical viking in Iceland, born into is a society of farmers already, making him a person who was already an outsider before becoming an outlaw. Grettir was definitely born in the wrong age, and perhaps in the wrong place as well.

## 1.2. Króka-Refs Saga – the Text and State of the Art

*Króka-Refs saga* is one of the younger sagas of Icelanders. The oldest manuscripts, AM 586 4to and AM 471 4to, are both dated to c. 1450-1500 (*Króka-Refs saga* 1959, 14:XXXVIII). Its protagonist, Refr is an unpromising young man. He is not a historical character, even though there is one man called Refr, mentioned in *Landnámabók* (*Íslendingabók* 1969, 173–74).<sup>1</sup> This fictional saga hero gets into trouble after killing a man called Þorbjörn. Refr is sent to his uncle by his mother. It turns out that he has a talent to construct ships, and earns the respect of Gestr. Unfortunately, he gets into trouble again by killing Gellir. Following his uncle's advice, he leaves Iceland and starts a new life in Greenland. He marries Helga, the love of Þengill. The rejected man and his family starts to gird on Refr because of his putative homosexual behaviour. The quiet Icelander finally takes revenge and goes to the forest. Gunnarr, Þengill's brother-in-law tries to find him, without success. He receives help from Bárðr, who is the retainer of the Norwegian king, Haraldr Sigurðarson hardráði (1046-1066). They manage to find Refr's strange fortress, which is made of one piece of wood. However, it is impossible to burn it down because of a sprinkler system in the wall. Bárðr goes back to Norway, where the king tells him how to siege the fortress and destroy the pipes for the sprinkler system. During the second siege the wall of the fortress opens up, and Refr with his followers comes out on a ship on wheels. After killing several members of the enemy force, he sails away to Norway. He goes to the Assembly incognito, but once again, kills a man called Gellir, who wanted to kidnap Helga. After confessing his act in a verse, he leaves to Denmark. He becomes the friend of the Danish king, while the Norwegian king punishes him with outlawry. Finally, Refr dies as an old man, after having made a pilgrimage to Rome.

*Króka-Refs saga* has been revisited only by a handful of scholars in the last decades. The structure of the saga was examined by Frederic Amory in his article *Pseudoarchaism and*

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<sup>1</sup> In the H101 section we can read about the Oddleifson clan, which had a member called Refr.

*Fiction in Króka-Refs Saga*. Kendra Willson touched on the saga in two short essays, *Króka-Refs Saga as Science Fiction: Technology, Magic, and a Materialist Hero*, and *Parody and Genre in Sagas of the Icelanders*. In his book, *The Post-Classical Icelandic Family Saga*, Martin Arnold dedicated one chapter to Króka-Refs saga. His approach also contains the idea of comparison, and suggested similarities between *Grettis saga* and *Króka-Refs saga*. And finally, in her article *The Later Sagas: Literature of Transition*, Patricia M. Wolfe compared *Króka-Refs saga* mostly to *Njáls saga* and *Egils saga*. All of these scholars suggested that *Króka-Refs saga* is different from the earlier Sagas of Icelanders, and also that it is satiric or parodic.

### 1.3. The Post-classical Saga Period and Authorship:

As discussed before, *Króka-Refs saga* and *Grettis saga* were both produced in the post-classical saga period, between 1300 and 1450. (Ólason 1993, 2:42). These texts were influenced by other genres and texts. Margaret Clunies Ross describes the Legendary Sagas as the following:

The themes, characters and the whole world of the *fornaldarsaga* lend themselves to interpretation, not as realistic narratives, but rather as subjects dealing with deep and disturbing issues that cannot be approached from the perspective of the mundane world but must rather be enacted in a literary world in which often taboo subjects can be raised and aired, though not necessarily resolved. They may also be treated in a comic or parodic vein (Clunies Ross 2010, 80).

If we want to define *Króka-Refs saga* more accurately, we could use the word *skemmtisaga*, an amusing story. In his comparison Frederic Amory calls the saga an imitation (1988, 16), while Martin Arnold argues that it is a classical parody (2003, 183). *Króka-Refs saga* was influenced by many other sagas and by the stories of *Morkinskinna* as well. The author of *Króka-Refs saga* put the story into a certain historical context by having Haraldr Sigurðarson hardráði (1046-1066) as a key character. The challenge or conflict between Icelanders and the Norwegian kings are frequent patterns of sagas. The background for this pattern is possibly the state of Iceland, which has already fallen under the rule of the Norwegian kings.

The author of *Króka-Refs saga* refers to the saga-writing. In Chapter 6, Gestr says to Refr: “Ef þér verðr eigi útkvámu auðit, þá vil ég, at þú látir skrifa frásögn um ferð þína, því at hún mun nökkurum merkilig þykkja, því at ég hygg, at þú sér annarr sprekingr mestr í várri ætt.” (Króka-

Refs saga 1959, 14:131). The author of *Bósa saga ok Herrauds* reflected similarly on the saga tradition. Busla, the fostermother of Bósi and Herraud offers that she will teach them magic:

Búsla hét kerling; hún hafði verit frilla Þvara karls; hún fósttraði sonu karls, því at hún kunni mart í töfrum. (...) Hún bauð Bósa at kenna honum galdra, enn Bósi kveðst ekki vilja, at þat væri skrifat i **sögu sinni**, at hann ynni nokkurn hlut sleitum, þat sem honum skyldi með karlmensku telja (Bósa saga ok Herrauds 1889, 3:245)<sup>2</sup>.

Bósi's rejection is connected with the sense that someone will write a saga about his deeds. As it was discussed by Jon Gunnar Jørgensen, the author wanted to keep a distance from saga literature in an ironic way. These authors knew how classic sagas were written, but they wanted to add a satiric reference. The approach to these stories were different: the authors wanted to write a story that is closer to a historical record, rather than literature. This approach is the feature of renaissance writing (Jørgensen 1997, 103). *Króka-Refs saga* was written in this period of time, and it was recognized as a satiric saga by Kendra Willson (Willson 2009, Vol. 1:1040). I will use this argument as a base for my central argument when I will compare the saga to other medieval Icelandic texts.

#### **1.4. The Comparative Approach**

The above mentioned scholars tried to find equivalent stories and listed a great number of motifs with *Króka-Refs saga*. The similarities suggesting that the author most probably has used other sagas as a material for this story. These patterns and characteristics will be discussed throughout the thesis with a special focus on one other text: *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*. Exile and similar punishment to outlawry is mentioned directly only twice in *Króka-Refs saga*. First when Þorbjörn tells Barði that he may become an *útilegumaðr* (banished man, highwayman, pirate). Second when King Haraldr sentences Refr with outlawry (*útlægr*). Martin Arnold, who examined *Króka-Refs saga* in his book *The Post-Classical Icelandic saga*, points out an interesting scene. Refr, after killing Þorgils and his sons, goes to the forest and leaves society behind. I will discuss the legal background of outlawry and present the similarities between

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<sup>2</sup> “There was an old woman called Busla, who had been Thvari's concubine, and fostered his sons for him. Busla was highly skilled in magic. (...) She offered to tutor Bosi as well, but he said he didn't want it written in his saga that he carried anything through by trickery instead of relying on his own manhood” (Bosi and Herraud 1985, 200)

Refr's act and full outlawry. *Grettis saga* is a biography of the protagonist, and deals with all the details of an outlaw. The life of these characters present similarities, but also differences.

## 1.5. Discussion

This thesis will discuss different questions regarding *Króka-Refs saga* in order to put it in the context of cultural and historical influences. Is it possible, that the author of *Króka-Refs saga* got his influence from outlaw sagas? If yes, he may have wanted to create a satiric approach to the topic of outlawry. In what sense is Refr a different type of hero, apart from typical saga characters? Why is he still similar to Grettir? To understand these two heroes I will consider whether their behaviour is anti-heroic, or just something that society could not understand. I will compare these two characters as well to understand the similarities and differences. None of these heroes fits into the society where they live, because of their behaviour. Grettir is the archetype of the classic viking, while Refr stands out because of his talent as a sort of engineer. Both authors present a hero who is not fitting into his community.

I will also present what cultural impact the legal tradition could have on *Króka-Refs saga* could have. As mentioned before the saga seldom refers to outlawry, but some acts of the protagonist show similarities with outlaws. Many terms were used in legal texts and literature for outlaws. One of these is *vargr*, wolf. Grettir after arriving to Drangey, was described as a wolf in Chapter 71: “Sögðu þeir heraðsmönnum, hverr vargr kominn var í eyna.” (*Grettis saga* 1936, 7:229). Refr was also described as an animal, but as a fox. In Chapter 12 Bárðr asks for help from king Haraldr: “Hann vill hafa vinfengi yðart ok vitrligt ráð till þess at vinna einn ref, þann er þeim Grænlandingum hefir unnit mikinn skaða.” (*Króka-Refs saga* 1959, 14:143). This abstract depiction of the saga heroes will present the main difference between them: the violent Grettir and the cunning Refr. Their different nature and approach towards conflict will be the key element to understand their different lives and deaths. Outlaws were also called *vargr* in legal texts and literature as well. The development of this term from laws to literature will be presented.

My analysis will conclude with the “untold outlawry” of Refr and argue the possibility of *Króka-Refs saga* being a satirical version of an outlaw saga. This would lead us to a better understanding of the idea behind having a happy end instead of a tragic one in *Króka-Refs saga*. Since Refr appears to be the opponent of King Haraldr, the discussion will also include another type of outlawry that is connected to the king. I will argue that the author's point was to present outlawry in a different way than *Grettis saga* or the other sagas do.

## Chapter 2. Outlawry in Text and Context

How should we treat the Icelandic family sagas? This is a crucial question when a researcher approaches these texts. Let us begin with the context. These sagas were preserved in manuscripts not containing an exact date of production. The scribes are unknown to us, just as their sources, knowledge and social status. This information would have been helpful to understand why texts were produced with a protagonist who is practically a criminal.

One of the crucial questions of the field is from the beginning of the 20th century, how we could use the Sagas of the Icelanders as sources if they were written down from the 13th century? One of the approaches was presented by William Ian Miller who is mostly interested in legal matters. In his book *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking* he defines the models of feud and vengeance. By applying ideas from anthropology he argues that the definition of feud has emerged from literature (Miller 1990, 179). Sagas show us the picture of an ultra-violent society, where feud, but also settlement of conflict is a part of everyday life. This picture is not complete, but still scribes of a more peaceful era wanted to emphasise these features of the previous centuries. The idea of a violent society is supported by the fact that *Grágás* is an extensive corpus of laws with punishments and possibilities to settle conflicts in different cases.

### 2. 1. Norwegian and Icelandic Legal Tradition:

Many scholars in the 20th century were arguing for and against the sagas and law codes being developed from oral tradition in the first centuries of the Commonwealth Period.<sup>3</sup> Still, Gísli Sigurðsson warns to keep in mind that there should be some kind of reason why these texts were written down, for instance to support the legitimacy of a family, One should also understand, that stories were preserved on the basis of their importance, how much they meant for the society (Sigurðsson 2013, 408–9). The origin of the Icelandic laws was described by Ari Þorgilsson in *Íslendingabók*. According to his record, a certain man called Úlfljótr went to Norway to study law. When he returned to Iceland, he brought an (oral) law code, \**Úlfljótslög*, and established the first *þing* (assembly) in Kjalarnes (Íslendingabók 1969, 4). At this time Norway did not have one general assembly, only regional assemblies. According to this record,

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<sup>3</sup> See for example: Gísli Sigurðsson. *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition: a Discourse on Method*. (Cambridge, Mass: Milman Parry Collection 2004) or Tommy Danielsson “On the possibility of an oral background for Gísla saga Súrssonar” in *Oral art forms and their passage into writing* (2008) 29-42.

and the beginning lines of *Þorsteins þáttur uxafóts*,<sup>4</sup> the earliest Icelandic laws were influenced by the laws of *Gulaping*. This regional assembly was located on the west coast of Norway. Our discussion will not go into the question of similarity between Norwegian and Icelandic legal material. However, in the following discussion some similarities will be pointed out.

Let us see examples connected to crimes and outlawry. The separation of serious and less serious crimes are present in both legal traditions. As Torstein Jørgensen summarised: “The more serious felony (of the ‘murder’ kind) was, in Norwegian texts, often referred to as *niðingsdrápa*, which indicates that the killing was considered a disgraceful act of shame and dishonor. Examples of *niðingsdráp* are each ‘murder’ in the sense of a premeditated act: a killing of close relatives; a killing in a place of peace, protection or safe conduct; or a killing by setting fire to a locked house” (Jørgensen 2014, 68).

These above mentioned actions were called *úbótamál* and the murderer was called *úbótamaðr*. Less serious acts were categorised as *bótamál*. The idea of the punishment has similarities with the Icelandic one: if negotiation is possible in this lesser case, then other solutions, for example compensatory payment can solve the case (Jørgensen 2014, 68). *Baugatal* (The Wergild Ring List) is the section in *Grágás* which deals with compensation in detail (Grágás - Konungsbók 1974, 193–207).

*Vígslóði* (Treatment of Homicide section) in *Grágás* contains detailed description of crimes connected with wounding. Chapter 88 *Um morð* (On murder) presents a clear picture on the distinction between murdering (*morð*) and killing (*víg*). “Þat er mælt, ef maðr myrþir man oc varðar þat scog gang. en þa er morð ef maðr leynir eða hylr hræ eða gengr eigi i gegn” (Grágás - Konungsbók 1974, 154).<sup>5</sup> Hiding the act of killing falls into the category of murdering and leads to full outlawry (*skóggangr*), which is the more serious type of such punishment. A compound of two nouns were used for a man punished by full outlawry: *skóggangsmaðr* or *skógarmaðr*. As presented earlier, the property of a *skógarmaðr* could have been confiscated, and no-one was allowed to help him to escape (Grágás - Konungsbók 1974, 87–88). Lesser

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<sup>4</sup> “Úlfjótr was the son of Thora, Ketil Horda-Kari’s daughter. (...) When Úlfjótr was almost sixty years old, he went to Norway and was there for three years. Then he and his cousin, Þorleifr the Wise, established the law code which was later called Úlfjótr’s Law. And when he came back to Iceland, the Alþing was established and from that time on all the people of the country were governed by the same law” (Þorsteins þáttur uxafóts 1997c, 4:340–41) (I changed the English spelling to Old Norse).

<sup>5</sup> “It is prescribed that if a man murders a man, the penalty is outlawry. And it is murder if a man hides it or conceals the corpse or does not admit it” (Laws of Early Iceland 1980, 146).

outlawry (*fjörbaugsgarðr*) is the punishment in most cases of wounding as it is listed in Chapter 88 of *Grágás*. The *fjörbaugsmaðr*, had to leave the country for three years, but afterwards, he could come back to Iceland (Grágás - Konungsbók 1974, 88–89.; Miller 1990, 224). *Gulatingslög* used different nouns as well for killing or homicide (*víg*) and murder (*morð*). If the perpetrator kept his act in secret, the case became one of murder (Jørgensen 2014, 69).

However, there are some differences as well in the cases of murdering and killing. *Grágás* treats murdering (*morð*) with full outlawry as it was discussed above. But killing (*víg*) is treated in the same way: “Ef maðr vegr man. oc varðar þat scog gang.” (Grágás - Konungsbók 1974, 145).<sup>6</sup> The *Gulatingslög* also describes the situation, when someone does not hide the crime: “If someone kills another, then that person is the slayer who publicly declares himself responsible for the killing. But the killing shall be announced on the same day within the county...”(Jørgensen 2011, 69). The Old Norse term for revealing the act is *víglýsing*, and usually happened in the nearest farm (Jørgensen 2011, 69). This can also be found in *Grágás*: “Þat er mælt ef maðr verðr vegin oc se þar sacar aðili. þar scal hann lysa vigi oc hafa lyst fyrir .iii. sól” (Grágás - Konungsbók 1974, 152).<sup>7</sup>

Outlawry in *Grettis saga* is the key element when it comes to the life the protagonist. Grettir was sentenced to become an outlaw twice. Refr also became outlaw when he killed King Haraldr’s retainer in Norway. In his analysis on *Króka-Refs saga*, Martin Arnold suggested that Refr was an outlaw after his first killing (Arnold 2003, 184). To support this theory, I will discuss how outlawry is presented in these two sagas.

## **2. 2. Lesser Outlawry in *Grettis Saga* and *Króka-Refs Saga*:**

On his way to the *þing* (assembly), Grettir loses his bag of food, similarly to one of his companions, Skeggi in Chapter 16. They go together to look after their bags, and they find only one. Each men claim that the bag belongs to him, and their arguing ends up with a fight. Grettir kills Skeggi, and goes back to Þorkell and his men. When he is asked what happened, Grettir is not telling his act in a direct way, only in a verse. He blames a troll as the killer of Skeggi. Still it is evident for Þorkell that Grettir is the killer, and he tries to save him by offering atonement in the assembly. Therefore, Grettir is sentenced only with lesser outlawry and he leaves the country for three years. “Var þetta mál kært (á þingi) af erfingjum ins vegna; gekk Þorkell til

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<sup>6</sup> “If a man kills someone, the penalty is outlawry” (Laws of Early Iceland 1980, 146).

<sup>7</sup> “It is prescribed that if a man is killed and the principal in the case is at hand, then he is to publish the killing and must have done so before the third sunrise” (Laws of Early Iceland 1980, 144).

handsala ok helt upp fébótum, en Grettir skyldi vera sekr ok vera útan þrjá vetr” (Grettis saga 1936, 7:48).<sup>8</sup>

We see a similar conflict in *Króka-Refs saga* in Chapter 5. Refr meets with the troublemaker Gellir, and refuses his offer to play or wrestle. Gellir’s provocative behaviour causes them to start to fight, but Refr defeats his opponent. Gellir throws a spear at Refr who luckily receives no wound. This time Gellir goes away, but claims that Refr would not take revenge. But in the next chapter, when Gellir travels alone, Refr goes after him, and kills him. Similarly to Grettir, he also speaks of his deeds in a verse to his uncle Gestr (*Króka-Refs saga* 1959, 14:130–31; *The saga of Ref the Sly* 1997, 3:403–4).

The case of Refr is not brought to the *Alþingi*. There is no doubt that he could have been sentenced to outlawry. Refr decides to go abroad with the ship that he built. In this case it was Refr who sentenced himself to become a *ffjörbaugsmaðr*. Martin Arnold’s theory that Refr was practically an outlaw when he killed Þórbjörn is not exactly accurate (Arnold 2003, 184). Refr accepts the suggestion of his mother and goes away from their farm to his uncle. Apart from the fact that the killing was not brought to the Assembly, Refr lives his life in a normal way and still as part of the society. However, after killing Gellir, he decides to go to Greenland: “Ék ætla at halda skipi mínu til Grænlands.” (*Króka-Refs saga* 1959, 14:131). This is the point when Refr goes away from society, to the periphery.

Lesser outlawry appears in sagas as a kind of rite of passage. The hero can go abroad to earn respect and wealth in another country. This pattern shows similarities not just with *Íslendingasögur*, but also with *fornaldasögur*, where the main protagonist often leaves his country to fight, or to search for something. Grettir goes to Norway and spends the three years there. He finally arrives to an environment that fits him: he has the opportunity to fight a supernatural beast and berserks. Refr chooses another direction and goes to Greenland. The reason for this choice is that Gellir was well-known in Norway, and that could have caused problems for Refr. A major difference can be recognised between the heroes at this point: Grettir seeks adventure and finds it in Norway. Refr however not just punishes himself, but also runs away from further conflicts both in Iceland, Greenland and Norway.

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<sup>8</sup> “The case was brought by the slain man’s heirs. Thorkell undertook to pay compensation, but Grettir was sentenced to lesser outlawry and was banished from Iceland for three years” (*The saga of Grettir the Strong* 1997, 70).



### 2. 3. Full Outlawry in *Grettis Saga* and *Króka-Refs Saga*:

A number of episodes lead Grettir to full outlawry in Iceland, while he is still in Norway. Grettir decides to go back to earn the respect of the new king, Óláfr Haraldsson, who defeated Earl Sveinn. But the trip ends up badly: on the ship Grettir kills Þorbjörn ferðalangr, and later he is present when a house sets on fire with Þorgeirr and Skeggi, the sons of the powerful Icelander, Þórir. He does not cause the fire, but everybody thinks he did. This latter incident ends with Grettir's decision to meet with King Óláfr. The meeting will be discussed in the next chapter. As a result, Grettir has to leave Norway and go back to Iceland. Meanwhile in Iceland Grettir's father, Ásmundr dies, and his brother Atli takes over their farm. As a powerful and popular man, Atli gets into conflict with other high-ranking man. After some encounters Atli is killed by his fierce enemy, Þorbjörn øxnamengin in Chapter 45. Meanwhile Þórir decides to take revenge on Grettir in the Assembly at Gásam:

Þórir var maðr heraðsríkr ok höfdingi mikill, en vinsæll af mǫrgu stórmenni; gekk hann at svá fast, at engu kom við um sykn Grettis. Gerði Þórir Gretti þá sekjan um allt landit ok var honum síðan þyngstr allra sinna mótstöðumanna, sem opt bar raun á. Hann lagði þá fé til höfuds honum sem ǫðrum skógarmönnum ok reið við þat heim (Grettis saga 1936, 7:147).<sup>9</sup>

Despite of the concerns of Skapti the law speaker, Grettir is sentenced to full outlawry in Iceland – without even being present.

Grettir returns to Iceland and learns that both his father and brother are dead. He takes revenge on Þorbjörn øxnamegin and his son, and kills them both in Chapter 48. The case of these killings are brought to the General Assembly in Chapter 51. Skapti the law speaker finds out, that Grettir was sentenced to outlawry a week before Atli was killed. Compensation for Atli's death is payed, but the case of Þorbjörn øxnamegin is different, since Grettir is an outlaw.<sup>10</sup> Þórir reacts negatively to the idea, and puts an even higher price on Grettir's head than before. Grettir

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<sup>9</sup> “Thorir was a powerful figure in his district, a great chieftain and popular among many great men. He persued the matter so hard that there was no chance for Grettir to be cleared. Thorir then declared Grettir an outlaw throughout Iceland and proved to be his fiercest enemy, as it was shown afterwards. He pu an outlaw's price on Grettir's head, then rode home.” (The Saga of Grettir the Strong 1997a, 2:119)

<sup>10</sup> Therefore his kinsmen are responsible to pay compensation, but they refuse to do so. Snorri goði advices to equal the compensation for Atli with the outlawry of Grettir – in this case no-one will pay for Atli, and Grettir is not an outlaw anymore, so he can pay compensation for Þorbjörn øxnamegin.

remains an outlaw for the next 20 years, despite of the warning of Snorri goði, that he might cause more trouble than before. (Grettis saga 1936, 7:154–55, 165, 164).

As an outlaw, Grettir is referred to as a *skógarmaðr*. *Skógarmaðr* and *skóggangr* appears in many cases in *Grettis saga* in Chapters 46, 51, 55, 56, 59, 68, 82 and 84 (Grettis saga 1936, 7:147, 165, 179–80, 181, 183, 188–90, 220, 261, 268). On the contrary, *Króka-Refs saga* never mentions *skógarmaðr* or *skóggangr*. At least the reader can learn that Greenland, Refr's new home, has forests (*skógi var vaxit*) (*Króka-Refs saga* 1959, 14:132). After being mocked by Þorgils and his sons, Refr kills the male members of the family in Chapter 8. He leaves his farm immediately, and hides in the forest. Gunnar, the son-in-law of Þorgils tries to find Refr and sends out men to the wilderness (*óbyggðir*). This seem to be another stage for Refr to "set him(self) outside the security and limitations of ordinary human society" (Arnold 2003, 184).

#### **2. 4. Outlawry in Norway:**

A distinctive feature of Iceland during the Commonwealth period is that the country was not ruled by kings, up until the 1260's. The connection between Iceland and Norway was still strong, and kings had influence on the island. This connection is present in Icelandic literature, especially in *Morkinskinna*. These shorter stories are called *þættir*. In most cases, Icelanders meet with high ranked rulers when they travel to Norway. However, this meeting is not a speciality of *Morkinskinna*, since *konungasögur*, *fornaldasögur* and *Íslendingasögur* also contain these episodes. In some of the Sagas of the Icelanders, like *Egils saga*, King Eiríkr is a powerful ruler, but Egill is depicted as a strong opponent. This fight between the king and the Icelander is not a challenge of physical strength, but of their intellect (Ármann Jakobsson 1999, 51). Icelanders and the kings usually meet in Norway, which means that the heroes travel away from their home.

There were different reasons as to why Icelanders went to abroad. Some of them were seeking adventures and possibilities to fight, while other were punished with lesser outlawry. The case of Grettir was the latter. During his stay in Norway, Grettir kills three brothers. Earl Sveinn gets angry at Grettir, who is on the edge of becoming an outlaw in Chapter 24. But some of Grettir's powerful friends pay compensation and ask the Earl to let him go. Grettir has to leave Norway immediately. His second journey ends up similarly. In Chapter 39 Grettir decides to meet the king after the killing of Þórir's sons. Finally, Grettir receives his punishment later in Iceland. (Grettis saga 1936, 7:85, 133–134).

Refr also went to Norway, after defeating his enemies in Greenland. He arrives to Niðarós, to the King's Assembly. One of the Haraldr's retainers Grani tries to kidnap Refr's wife – the incident ends with the killing of Grani. Refr is incognito, and calls himself Narfi. He reports his act in a riddle, and sails away to Denmark. Haraldr soon finds out about Narfi's identity and reacts:

Nú þó at hann sé mikill fyrir sér, þá verðum vér þó at geyma várrar tignar, at leiða öðrum at drepa niðr hirð vára, ok af því gerum vér hér í dag þenna mann útlægan fyrir endilagan Nóreg ok svá vítt sem vart ríki stendr (Króka-Refs saga 1959, 14:157).<sup>11</sup>

Both Grettir and Refr are intelligent, but this ability is more important with the latter. With a hero such as Refr, only the King can compete, therefore he is the only one who understands how the sprinkle system of Ref's fortress works in Chapter 12. Harald also understands Ref's / Narfi's riddle and sentences him to become an outlaw. However, Refr is never caught and killed by the King's man, since he receives the help and patronage of the Danish king. This episode shows a somewhat different turn in the life of an outlaw, who should be technically excluded from the society. The possibility to serve a king meant to belong to his court, which comes with the friendship and protection of the ruler (Amory 1992, 203). Grettir is not able to earn to such protection from any jarl or king, while Refr does. This patronage protects him from being assassinated.

## 2. 5. Conclusion:

One more detail needs to be mentioned regarding with *Króka-Refs saga*: the lack of references to Assemblies, arbitration and *goðar*. Usually these scenes are frequent in sagas, but in this text the only evidence is the one in Niðarós (Wolfe 1973, 6). I think one cannot imagine, that the author lacked of a basic knowledge how these institutions worked, even though significant changes were made by the time when he was writing the saga. Since Refr decides to leave Iceland and his farm in Greenland himself, it seems that there is no need for such scenes as the discussion of a case of any of his killings. And as it happened in Norway, the criminal does not have to present during such a discussion. It seems that Refr is depicted as a self-conscious or even sensible character in these cases: he knows the consequence of killing and decides to

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<sup>11</sup> “Now even though he is a powerful and strong man, we must preserve our dignity and make others fear to slay our followers, and therefore we here today make this man an outlaw the length and breadth of Norway and as far as our realm extends” (The saga of Ref the Sly 1997, 3:419).

punish himself. But just like someone, who was sentenced to outlawry by and assembly, Refr also has connection with the society and cannot hide for the rest of his life.

On the contrary of this social place of the outlaw, there is a different one. As it will be discussed in Chapter 4, outlaws are often depicted as wild animals, or they have the name of a certain type of animal. This tradition has its roots both in legal texts and literature, and underlines the loneliness and excluded position of the outlaws.

### Chapter 3. A Comparison of Two Saga-heroes: Grettir and Refr

Refr's journeys show similarities with Grettir's. But is Refr similar to Grettir as a saga character? *Grettis saga* gives a most detailed description of its main character, while *Króka-Refs saga* is less detailed. However, in both sagas we follow the heroes from birth to death. In this chapter I will analyze the characteristics of Grettir and Refr and discover the similarities and differences between them.

#### 3. 1. Kolbíttr, the Unpromising Child

The character of Grettir is introduced in the saga in Chapter 14. He is the second son of Ásmundr and Ásdís. The saga gives a unique and detailed description of a problem-child, a rarely discussed stage of life in the *Íslendingasögur*. In the case of Refr the description is brief, but an investigation into the descriptions can reveal similarities between the two characters.

Grettir	Refr
<i>mjök ódæll í uppvexti sínum</i> – not easy to deal with while he was growing up	<i>ódælligr</i> - he was hard to deal with
<i>ekki bráðgörr, meðan hann var á barnsaldri</i> – not matured in his childhood, <i>óþýðr</i> – unpleasant person	<i>fífl</i> – fool,
<i>eigi vissu menn gørla afl hans, því at hann var óglíminn</i> – no-one knew how strong he was because he was not a wrestler	<i>engi maðr vissi afl hans</i> - no-one knew his physical strength
<i>bellin bæði í orðum ok tiltekðum</i> – tricky in both words and deeds	<i>vænn</i> – promising
<i>eigi lagðisk hann í eldaskála</i> – did not lounge around the fire-house	<i>eldsettinn</i> - someone who sits next to the fire
<i>rauðhærð ok næsta freknótr</i> – red-haired and rather freckled, <i>skammleitr</i> – shortfaced, <i>breiðleitr</i> - broadfaced, <i>fríðr maðr synum</i> – handsome.	<i>mikill vexti á unga aldri</i> – grew tall at a young age

<i>fátalaðr</i> – sparing of words	
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*Table 1. Words describing the personality of Grettir and Refr (similarities in the first lines)*  
(Grettis saga 1936, 7:36, 42; Króka-Refs saga 1959, 14:119).

Both heroes are described as problematic kids. In addition, Grettir was disliked by his father Ásmundr (Grettis saga 1936, 7:36), which often happens with unpromising saga-characters. Martin Arnold described Refr as *kolbíttr* 'coal biter', which is an interesting analogue for *eldsettinn* (Arnold 2003, 195). It was never said directly that Grettir is a fool (he is not someone who sits next to the fire), but Kirsten Hastrup argues that, because of his acts as a youngster, he is one. Grettir is an imperfect man, just as the other male members of his family. The tasks that he gets from his father as a youngster causes him to feel that he can't grow as a man, because they are for women or thralls (Hastrup 1990, 164). I would not categorize either of the two heroes as a fool – even if they were called so. This is the first clear sign that they have different “values”, therefore it will be difficult to fit into society. Grettir is violent from the very beginning and he goes against his father in Chapter 14. Refr avenges Barði in Chapter 3 (Grettis saga 1936, 7:37–42; Króka-Refs saga 1959, 14:125).

### 3. 2. The Place of Grettir and Refr in Society

Antisocial behaviour was connected to the noun *níðingr* by Bernt Ø. Thorvaldsen. It translates as 'villain' or 'a person without honour', which also means 'an unlucky person'. He sets up two types of models. In the first the *níðingr* disrupts the social order with verbal assaults – mostly with mockeries and lampoons. This act provokes the community or the gods, and leads to misfortune. The second is when the victim is defined as *níðingr*, and divine wrath will smite them with misfortune (Thorvaldsen 2011, 171–72, 182, 183). Thorvaldsen discusses various compounds including the component *níð*. This word and its compounds are present in *Grettis saga*, but not in *Króka-Refs saga*. The *níð*-words found in *Grettis saga* are: *níðskædinn*, *níðvísa*, *níð* and *níðsverk* (Grettis saga 1936, 7:42, 52, 53, 232, 263, 265, 269).

The first three words appear in Chapter 14 and 17. The young Grettir is a libellous poet, and uses this on the ship's crew that took him to Norway after being sentenced to lesser outlawry. Hafliði, the captain, asks him to compose about him, not about the crew, as they are quick to anger. However, Grettir later helps when the ship starts to sink, so he avoids the physical conflict. This episode fits to the first model presented by Thorvaldsen, but with a “happy

ending”. The word *níðsverk* appears in Chapters 82-84, when witchcraft is used on Grettir to weaken him. He is killed by Þorbjörn who escapes to Norway and later to Constantinople to avoid outlawry. This episode can be explained by the second model presented by Thorvaldsen. This model explains the faith of Grettir: as an unruly person who occasionally looks for trouble.

The word *níðingr* is absent in *Króka-Refs saga*. However, Thorvaldsen’s above mentioned models can be found in saga. This could be a third type of model for such analysis, or a variant of the second: wherein the hero is mocked by someone. This is evident, happening over and over again with Refr. Because of his silent nature his enemies are not really expecting him to step up. Verbal aggression is present in the conflict with Gellir and Þorgils and his sons. The target is Refr’s unmanliness: his unwillingness to fight with Gellir, or a polar bear in Greenland. Finally, Þorgils tells his sons about Refr’s putative homosexuality and that he is shapeshift, becoming a woman every ninth day, and calls him *Refr inn ragi* (*Króka-Refs saga* 1959, 130, 133-134). These kinds of insults were punished with outlawry, according to *Gulapingslög* in §138 (Ef maðr niðr annan / If a man insults another):

Engi maðr skal gera tungu nið um annan. ne trenið. En ef hann verðr at því kunnr oc sannr. at hann gerir þat. þa liggr hanom utlegð við. syni með settar eiði. fellr til utlegðar ef fellr. Engi skal gera yki um annan. æda fiolmæle. þat heiter yki ef maðr mælir um annan þat er eigi maðr væra. ne verða oc eigi hever verit. kveðr hann væra kono niundu nott hveria. oc hever barn boret. oc kallar gylvin. þa er hann utlagr. ef hann verðr at því sannr. syni með settar eiði. fellr til utlegðar ef fellr (Norges Gamle Love 1846, 1:57).<sup>12</sup>

This suggests that the author might have related to legal material for *Króka-Refs saga*. It is curious that this similarity leads to Norwegian laws. *Grágás* has no such detailed description, and it is also missing in the younger law-code *Jónsbók*. The latter was introduced in 1281. Under the rule of Magnús lagabætir (1238-1280), Norway got a new and uniform law-code, just like Iceland. However, the Norwegian Landslov does not contain the above mentioned

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<sup>12</sup> “No man shall utter tongue slander or carve wood slander about another. And if he is accused and convicted of doing this, the penalty shall be outlawry. Let him deny the charge with sixfold oath, and if the oath fails, [the failure] leads to outlawry. No one shall circulate loose talk or impossible tales about another. That is called an impossible tale which a man tells about another, but which is not, or cannot be, or never has been true; as if he says that the other man is a woman every ninth night and that he has borne a child, or if he calls him a werewolf. If he convicted of this, he shall be outlawed”

detail. But all law-codes are similar: slanders that cannot be proven, should be punished (Jónsbók 2004, 8:118; Magnus Lagabøters landslov 1962, 67–68). It seems that the author was familiar with earlier Norwegian legal material.

Homosexuality was considered as deviant behaviour both in the pre-Christian and Christian period. Christianity does not distinguish between the roles in such relationships, while in pre-Christian times the passive role was tolerated even less (Riisøy 2010, 2170:24). This understanding is reflected in *Króka-Refs saga*, and can be connected with *níðingr*. This type of unmanly behaviour is not present in *Grettis saga*. However, Grettir was mocked by a servant woman in Chapter 75 because of his visible masculine features. He took revenge by raping the woman (Grettis saga 1936, 7:239-240). These episodes appearing as a kind of last chance to mock a person whose qualities can hardly be questioned. In the case of Refr it is his respected place in the community and the fact that he earned the love of Helga, who used to be the love of Þengils. In the case of Grettir it is his strength and invincibility which are the most important features of a man at this age.

Both Grettir and Refr are from Iceland, but travelled to different countries, and lived as members of different societies. Neither Grettir nor Refr fit into Icelandic society as adults. Both authors wanted to put the sagas into a historical context by having kings as characters. *Grettis saga* begins with the presence of Haraldr hárfagri (872–930), who is connected with the reason why Norwegians settled down in Iceland. During Grettir’s lesser outlawry the ruler of Norway is Hákon Eiríksson (1012-1015) with Sveinn Hákonarson jarl (1000-1015) as regent. Grettir meets the latter and also another king, Óláfr Haraldsson (1015 – 1028). Refr’s father Steinn arrives to Iceland during the reign of Hákon góði or Aðalsteinsfóstri (934-961). Refr meets the Norwegian king, Haraldr harðráði (1046-1066), and the Danish king, Sveinn Úlfsson (1047-1076).<sup>13</sup> This is a chronological mistake, because it is not very likely that only two generations lived between the reign of Hákon and Haraldr (Wolfe 1973, 7). By all means both heroes live in a Christian society. This society seems less violent in *Grettis saga*. One can see Auðunn as a contrast of Grettir. In Chapter 28 Grettir decides to take revenge on him because of a ball game. Grettir goes there in his finest clothes and takes his best weapons – grotesque preparation for a childhood injury. He hides and trips up Auðunn, who falls holding his skyr. When he

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<sup>13</sup> An interesting addition to the historical context: the two kings fought a long war against each other. Haraldr attacked Denmark in 1050, but fled after Sveinn attacked his fleet. Two other battles took place between them in 1062: the battle of Niså and the battle at Elv. Haraldr finally gave up to conquer Denmark in 1064, and came to a consensus with Sveinn.



learns why Grettir came, he tells him that he wants to deal with his household duties. Finally they start to wrestle until Barði arrives (Grettis saga 1936, 7:96–98). The peaceful present is disrupted by the violent past. Instead of a heroic fight between two Viking warriors, the reader gets a less epic wrestling on the floor.

The society in Refr's age also seems to be a peaceful one, but conflicts are present. Refr's behaviour is the opposite of Grettir's. He never tries to set up conflicts and if he gets into trouble he tries to avoid it. One could argue that Refr is violent, since he kills several men during his life. Still, this is just a reaction. He protects his honour, or his family's. Grettir also protects his values, but at the same time he is also a troublemaker.

One of the roles of the female characters in *Íslendingasögur* is to help the heroes – and in the case of outlaws, at least one of these figures are always present. Both Gísli and Hǫrðr were supported by their wives. A figure of the helping mother appears not just in *Íslendingasögur* and *Fornaldasögur*. Ásdís, the mother of Grettir is one of these helping characters. She gives a sword to her son who has to leave to Norway because he became an outlaw. His father only calls him *óeirðarmaðr* 'troublemaker', and gives him no help. (Grettis saga 1936, 7:49, 48). While, on the other hand, we have the mother, who helps her son when she sends him away. Leaving home in any way is the beginning of the journey wherein the hero can emerge (Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2005, 88).

As it was presented by Marion Poilvez, lesser outlawry could be understood as a possibility to fight abroad, go to the court of a jarl or a king and earn their respect, or improve trade routes and gain wealth (Poilvez 2017). Indeed, for Grettir the lesser outlawry was a chance to emerge as a hero. He can fight against enemies, or he can learn a special skill. In his case, moving away from home as an outlaw was the beginning of the adventures: he has to fight with a mound-dweller in Chapter 18, the twelve berserkers in Chapter 19, and a bear in Chapter 21 (Grettis saga 1936, 7:58–59, 63–71, 76–77). Gestr is also very optimistic when Refr decides to leave: "Mun ok nokkut gott af þér verða" (Króka-Refs saga 1959, 14:131).<sup>14</sup> He is also an important mentor of Refr, therefore he has an Odinic name (Willson 2006, 1065). Refr finally settles down in Greenland similarly to those in Iceland earlier. In only a few years he gets married and has two sons. He continues ship-building and becomes a wealthy man. (Króka-Refs saga 1959, 14:405).

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<sup>14</sup> "And surely you are destined for great achievements" (The Saga of Ref the Sly 1997, 3:404).

### 3. 3. Hero or Anti-hero?

Heroes have special values that are separating them from other characters. In *Njáls saga* for example two different heroes are described. Gunnarr is a handsome warrior with exceptional physical strength. Njáll is a wise man and a counselor, who is skilled in legal matters. Both of these characters have a great impact on the saga, but can they be considered as heroes?

Both Grettir and Refr started their lives in an anti-heroic way: as lazy and restless kids. But later on, according to Kendra Willson, Refr emerges as a trickster and anti-hero, who mastered his technical skills, while Grettir as a classic hero born in an unheroic age (Willson 2006, 1064). One can also discuss whether Grettir acts heroic, especially in Iceland. When he leaves to Norway, he finds the heroic setting that he was looking for. Therefore his actions become more positive – however his tragic fate catches up with him (Hume 1974, 471).

At the beginning of the saga Refr was called *frændaskömm* ‘disgrace of the family’ by his mother. By killing Þorbjörn, Refr shows his strength and courage to fight. Refr finally appears as a man and earns his mother’s respect. Martin Arnold thinks that this is the first event, when Refr protects his and his family’s honour (Arnold 2003, 189–90). I would not understand this act as anti-heroic. The role of the females is mostly passive in the sagas, but they do affect events with verbal tools. One of these examples was already mentioned: the figure of the mother, who sends her son away from the house. This is a kind of mockery or egging on towards the passive son. This motif is well known from poetry and many sagas: mothers, wives, female relatives are using speech to provoke actions from men, and their argument is often the protection of honour. In the *Poetic Edda* in *Guðrunarhvöt*, Guðrún is egging on her sons, who are not taking revenge. (Eddukvæði 2014, 402-406). A similar conversation can be found in *Brennu-Njáls saga*. Hildigunnr urges Flosi Þorðarson to take revenge on the sons of Njáll because of her husband, Höskuldr. Flosi is angered by this request, but later on he takes revenge on Njáll and his sons (*Njáls saga* 1955, 290-292). Protection of honour and values are always present in sagas, and understood as necessary actions. Egging does not mean, that a mother dislikes her son or sons.

I would argue against the anti-heroic concept regarding Refr. The description of Kathryn Hume of Grettir is more likely depicting such an anti-hero. The reason why he can’t fit into the society is not simply because he is an “ugly-minded bully”, but because he seeks challenges. It was possible to find these in Norway, while the Icelandic society’s reaction is repulsion (Hume 1974, 472). Refr, on the contrary doesn’t want to have such a challenging life. He tries to avoid

conflicts. He kills for the first time because his mother incites him by calling him a disgrace to the family. Later he kills Gellir because he claims that Refr would never avenge the blows that he gave to him. Þorgils and his sons were mocking Refr, saying that he turns into a woman. He kills Gunnarr and Bárðr when they are threatening his life. And finally, he kills Haraldr's retainer because of his wife, Helga. These evidences led Willson to present Refr as an anti-hero (Willson 2006, 1068). My reading is somewhat different: not facing danger against all odds is not a sign of fear. Refr always thinks before he acts, and waits for the perfect moment. Grettir's killings and fights have a different background and vary on a wide range. It can be a minor reason, like an argument over a lost food-bag, or the protection of a farm from twelve berserkers. No matter the reason, it is seldom that he does not go into the conflict. Refr is different: first he asks for compensation for Barði, the shepherd. He only kills Þorbjörn when his life is threatened by the old man. Refr avoids killing Eiríkr, who wanted to avenge his brother. Refr gives a ship to Eiríkr and asks him to tell king Haraldr the truth as to why Grani had to die. (Króka-Refs saga 1959, 14:124–25, 159). This sensible deed cannot be understood as anti-heroic again. I would suggest that this episode is the introduction of Refr's last years which are pious. He decides to go on a pilgrimage to Rome, and dies on his way in France (Króka-Refs saga 1959, 14:160).

### **3. 4. The Role of Supernatural and Unusual:**

Supernatural elements are present in most of the sagas, regardless from genre. *Grettis saga* is rich with such episodes. Some of his opponents are supernatural creatures, for example the Swedish shepherd Glámr. In Chapter 32 Þorhall's farm has been run down by mysterious creatures. No-one wants to look after his sheep, apart from the strange Glámr. He is not the most popular person around, and does not want to participate on the Christmas feast. After he dies mysteriously, his body disappears when a priest comes. It turns out that he joins the evil creatures and comes back to terrorize the locals. In Chapter 35 Grettir decides to fight against Glámr. Even though he wins, he gets cursed: he cannot become any stronger, and will be afraid of the dark. Glámr also predicts his outlawry because of committing killing, and his bad luck (*ógæfu ok hamingjuleysis*). He has to live on his own outside, and will see Glámr's eyes (Grettis saga 1936, 7:121). This event is a possible turning point of his life, since he should fight on his own with a promise: that he will not be able to defeat everybody. Another supernatural scene is in Chapter 61, when the outlaw Grettir arrives to Þórisdalr, a magical valley that has all the natural goods that one might need. However in this perfectly peaceful and ideal setting Grettir becomes bored quickly at this dull place (*dauflikt*), no matter how much he is enthralled (Grettis

saga 1936, 7:199–201). This setting is not ideal for a hero like him, he has no challenges to face.

Supernatural motifs are not found in *Króka-Refs saga*, but the hero has a special talent. When he leaves his home he starts to work for his uncle, Gestr, he expresses this promising future in Chapter 4: “Ek sé á þér, at þú ert inn mesti íþróttamaður at nokkurum hlut, en þat mun ek sjá bratt, hvat þat er” (*Króka-Refs saga* 1959, 14:127).<sup>15</sup> Refr is able to build a vessel to the surprise of his uncle. This talent is the key to survival and earning respect in Greenland. Refr’s fortress in Greenland is described very precisely in the saga:

Þeir geta brátt at líta, hvar virki stóð nær á framanverðum sævarbakkanum. Þeir gengu þangat til ok umhverfis ok hyggja at því vandliga ok þykkjast eigi sét hafa jafnfagr smíði. Þat var mikit ok rammgert, óbrætt ok með fjórum hornum. Hvergi sjá þeir á því fellingar; var þat at sjá sem ein fjöl (*Króka-Refs saga* 1959, 14:141).<sup>16</sup>

This detailed description serves a goal: to underline Refr’s talent. His enemy, Gunnarr also admits: “Hann var inn mesti þjóðsmíður” (*Króka-Refs saga* 1959, 14:140).<sup>17</sup> While Grettir is different from any other men because of his physical strength, Refr is more intelligent than anybody else, other than king Haraldr.

The role of these unusual objects and events is closely connected with the idea of creating a different type of hero than Grettir or the other outlaw heroes. Refr has a strategy to survive all the attacks from his enemies. When his fortress is under the second siege, and the sprinkler system is destroyed, the reader would expect that Refr will die. But this is just a play with the reader’s expectations.

Ok því heyra þeir brókun mikla í virkit, ok er minnst varði, fellr sá virkishluttrinn, er fram horfði at sjónum. Þar var svá gegnt til ætlat, at virkit fell í skurðinn á framanverðan sævarbakkan; þat var svá slétt sem ein fjöll. En í því er virkit fell,

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<sup>15</sup> “I can see that you are potentially a master of something and I’ll soon see what it is” (*The Saga of Ref the Sly*, 3:402)

<sup>16</sup> “Soon they were able to see where a fortification stood near the edge of the shore. They went up to it and around it and considered it carefully and they thought that they had never seen such a beautiful building. It was large and strongly built, untarred, and with four corners. They did not see one board overlapping another anywhere; it seemed to be made all of one plank” (*The Saga of Ref the Sly* 1997, 3:409–10).

<sup>17</sup> “He was a master craftsman” (*The Saga of Ref the Sly* 1997, 3:409).

rann þar eptir fram skip á hvélum ok þegar fram á sjóinn (Króka-Refs saga 1959, 14:148).<sup>18</sup>

It is very likely that the author expects the reader to be familiar with saga literature, and its features. One of these is that an outlaw hero will survive for years and will be able to hide, but his enemies will eventually find a way to ambush him. In *Grettis saga* this last fight only happens after Þorbjörn cursed him with the help of a witch. Therefore, Grettir cannot fight with his full strength, since he is not able to stand on his leg. An interesting contrast to this episode is the death of Gísli Súrsson, who dies in a fierce combat against preponderance (*Gísla saga* 1943, 111-115). Instead of a tragic ending the reader gets something unexpected in *Króka-Refs saga*: an impossible escape. Refr's technical ability this time is used to trick the audience's expectations.

### 3. 5. The Outlaw as a Trickster:

The territory where an outlaw lives is the margin, and there are a plenty of examples of that in both *Grettis saga* and *Króka-Refs saga*. Iceland counts as a central place, but as a full outlaw outside of society meant being on the margin, as Frederic Amory wrote: “at the edges of society, hiding out in ‘safe houses’ of sympathetic strangers or ‘lying out’ in lava caves, outside society, like an animal (Amory 1992, 202). Going away from Iceland is a move to the margin. *Króka-Refs saga* is a constant move between centers and margins. Refr travels to Greenland and to the forest which are both marginal spaces. Travelling to Norway is similar, except if the hero goes to the court of the king or a jarl or to an assembly. These places are the centers of power and legislation.<sup>19</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 1, the life of an outlaw was in constant danger since anybody could kill him. However one part of the regulation, that no-one was allowed to help them was working differently – at least in the sagas. These helpers also destroy the “legend” of the complete isolation. An outlaw had control over his life and he had social connections. Depending on the

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<sup>18</sup> “In that instant, they heard a great crash in the fortification and quite unexpectedly the part of the wall facing the water fell into the ditch. It was aimed so straight that the wall fell into the ditch running on the shore. The wall was as smooth as a single plank. And just when the wall fell, a ship on wheels ran along it and down to the water” (The Saga of Ref the Sly 1997b, 3:414).

<sup>19</sup> See more about trickster theories in Anita Sauckel, “Brennu-Njáls saga: An Old Icelandic Trickster (Discourse)?” in *Bad Boys and Wicked Women. Antagonists and Troublemakers in Old Norse Literature*, eds. Daniela Hahn and Andreas Schmidt, (München: Münchner Nordistische Studien 27, 2016), 94–115.

crime and the role in society, it is very likely that an outlaw could live a normal life, as a shepherd in Chapter 68 of *Grettis saga*: “Þá bjó á Breiðabólstað í Sökkólfsdal ekkja sú, er Geirlaug hét; hon hélt smalamann þann, sem sekr var orðinn um áverkamál; hann var frumvaxta piltungr“ (Grettis saga 1936, 7:220).<sup>20</sup>

Both Grettir and Refr went to an Assembly, but they do so incognito. In Chapter 72 Grettir decides to visit the Hagraessþing. He introduces himself as Gestr, which translates as ‘guest’. He is urged to join the wrestling competition, but he refuses to do so, saying that he is worried for his security. This is when Hafr recites his long speech and grants the safety of all strangers. When Grettir reveals himself, Hafr understands his mistake, but it is too late. Some of those who are present want to let him go, but some of his enemies attack him. Grettir is able to defeat them, and leaves (Grettis saga 1936, 7:229–36). Grettir tricked the locals in the Assembly twice: with his disguise, and by gaining protection for himself. However he does not want to avoid trouble, and reveals himself. However when Refr goes to Niðarós, he never reveals his true identity. Kendra Willson understands in this scene that Refr does not want to face trouble, therefore his behaviour is anti-heroic (Willson 2006, 1068). I agree with the fact that Refr does not want to face with trouble – this pattern is actually present when he leaves Iceland, or when he goes to the forest in Greenland. Anti-heroism however also suggests that Refr is unmanly. Again, I suggest that Refr tries to find the most sensible solution, but he never wants to risk his, or his family’s lives. In these above listed situations both Grettir and Refr had the chance to avoid risk – but Refr is the only one who does it.

### 3. 6. Poetry as a Rhetoric Tool:

Poetry is present in both *Grettis saga* and *Króka-Refs saga*. Grettir’s poetry has been discussed already in connection with *níðingr*. Calling Refr a skald or a poet might be a bit questionable, since only three stanzas were said by him throughout the saga. Two after killing Þorbjörn and Gestr, and one during the second siege of the fortress (Króka-Refs saga 1959, 14:125–26, 130–31, 147–48). This is similar to the stanza that was said by Grettir after his first killing for a food bag. Another parallel skaldic confession of killing is the one in *Gísla saga Súrssonar* (Willson 2006, 1068). There are some differences as well: Refr did not want to hide his killings, and they were validated by his mother and his uncle as a well-done act (*seg þú manna heilastr / manna*

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<sup>20</sup> “There was a widow called Geirlaug who lived at Breidarbolstad in Sökkolfsdal. She was harbouring a young man who had been outlawed for wounding someone, and had him working as her shepherd” (The Saga of Ref the Sly 1997, 2:156)

*heilastr*) (Króka-Refs saga 1959, 14:126, 130). Another confession can be found in the saga in connection with the killing of Grani. This riddle speech in front of the king is convoluted, but later on Haraldr finds out the solution, as well as Narfi's identity (Króka-Refs saga 1959, 14:153, 154–55). According to Amory, this act stresses the trickster nature of Refr. Referring to the medieval Hamlet, as a parallel, telling and hiding the killing at the same time is the behaviour of the fox (Amory 1992, 18).

In her analysis, Patricia M. Wolfe used a comparative method but chose *Egils saga Skallagrímsonar*. Her argument is based on similarities like mine: “Króka-Ref is always successful, becomes rich, and dies in bed. He is a skald (though his ability is limited by the ability of creator), a man of many talents, strong and cunning” (Patricia M. Wolfe 1973, 9). It is true, that many similarities can be found between these two heroes, but I disagree that Refr had a bad relationship with king Haraldr. Egill can be understood as an opposition to Eiríkr blóðøx, and has been argued as a sort of freedom-fighter against the Norwegian king. Both heroes use poetry, or poetic language when they talk to the king. The difference is that Egill has to show his talent to save his head, while Refr (once again) uses it in a tricky way, to admit that he killed someone. This speech from Refr is not a sign of anger, and not even of disrespect. Respect is present from both sides, as it is Haraldr who calls him ‘Króka-Refr’ for the first time. However, the king has to outlaw him because of the killing. Also the fact that Refr is being chased by Eiríkr cannot be connected to the King. When he is finally captured by Refr, he has to go back to Norway and explain what happened and why his brother was killed.

### **3.7. Conclusion:**

This part of the analysis revealed many similarities and differences between the characteristics of the two saga-heroes, Grettir and Refr. The first is a hero, who mostly relies on his physical strength, and acts violently in most situations. He lives in a society which does not understand his values and behaviour. Every time he goes back to Iceland, the society will somehow exclude him, until he dies. It is not possible to escape from his tragic end. Refr is also alien in his society, but he is able to fight back – mostly with his technical abilities. The contrast here is the outstanding talent. Refr also finds himself on the margin of the society, but he finds a way to survive his tragic end.

## Chapter 4. Outlaws as Animals – An Abstract Depiction

### 4. 1. Vargr and Refr

In Norse Literature there is a pattern of behaviour (...): when committing a secretive killing, hiding as an outlaw entering a foreign hall as a stranger, or scouting in enemy territory, the fugitive assumes an animal name (Úlfr, Björn, Hjörtr, Hrafn, Örn) to avoid detection (Breen 1999, 31).

This summary from Gerard Breen introduces a pattern when characters in a marginal situation are depicted as animals. He connects bird names with exile, hound names with avengers, and wolf names with assassins. As he points out, legal and poetic terminologies are meeting in the case of *vargr*. (Breen 1999, 32-33). This word has different meanings: 1. wolf, as an animal, 2. thief, robber, miscreant, 3. outlaw.

In *Grettis saga* the word *vargr* appears twice. Grettir lived in various places during his years of outlawry. When he settled down in Drangey, the locals were unhappy, especially because he kept the sheep of the sheep herds. The negotiation between the two parties were unprofitable, and the shepherds reported Grettir's presence to the locals: "Sögdu þeir um heraðsmönnum, hverr **vargr** kominn var í eyna" (*Grettis saga* 1936, 7:228–29).<sup>21</sup> In addition we can find *vargr* in Chapter 72 where Hafr opens up the wrestling game with his speech: "Sé sá griðníðingr, er griðin rýfr eða tryggðum spillir, rækr ok rekinn frá guði ok góðum mönnum, ór himinríki ok frá öllum helgum mönnum, ok hvergi hæfr manna í milli ok svá frá öllum út flæmðr sem víðast varga reka eða krisnir menn kirkjur sækja..." (*Grettis saga* 1936, 7:232).<sup>22</sup>

Gerard Breen thinks that the literary construction of naming a character after an animal or refer on them in similar way automatically indicates the role of the person. However, he also points out that a fugitive doesn't necessary have to be specially one type of animal, since both Old Norse and Old English literature has examples when the character is simply called "animal" (Old Norse 'dýr', Old English 'deor'). Breen connects Sigurðr's meeting with Fafnir in *Fáfnismál* as he is depicted as an assassin. Sigurðr also calls himself *dyr* in *Völsunga saga*. He

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<sup>21</sup> "They told the people of the district who this scavenger was who had gone to the island" (The Saga of Grettir the Strong 1997, 2:160).

<sup>22</sup> "Any man shall be a truce-breaker who breaks his truce or violates his pledge, banished and cast out from God and good men, from heaven and from all holy men, unfit for the company of men, and in all places driven out like an outlaw wherever trucebreakers drift or Christian men attend church..." (The Saga of Grettir the Strong 1997, 2:162).



does it because a killer usually provides animal name in an enigmatic reply, and because exile is like being a wild animal (Breen 1999, 36, 34–35).

My argument will support the idea that a certain type of animal name will determine the faith of the characters. As it was presented above, Grettir as an outlaw was presented as a wolf. Refr's name translates to 'fox', so in his case the reference to an animal is clear. Aside from this, he was also compared to an animal. Bárðr, the retainer of king Haraldr returns to the Norwegian court in Chapter 12. He brings the gifts of Gunnarr, the brother-in-law of the Þorgil's sons to the king and asks for help: "Hann vill hafa vinfengi yðart ok vitrligt ráð til þess at vinna einn **ref**, þann er þeim Grænlendingum hefir unnit mikinn skaða (Króka-Refs saga 1959, 14:143).<sup>23</sup> Haraldr hardráði has a significant role in Króka-Refs saga. He tells how to destroy the sprinkle system of the fortress that Refr built. He knows exactly how the sprinkle system is filled up with water from a glacier, and how the water is transferred to the fortress with the help of wooden pipes.<sup>24</sup> He does this even without being there. However, he admits that Refr is smart: "Mun ek lengja nafn hans ok kalla hann Króka-Ref" (Króka-Refs saga 1959, 14:157).

#### 4. 2. The Legal Background Behind Literature:

Outlawry is one of the strictest punishments in medieval Scandinavia, and it can be found in many articles in Norwegian and Icelandic law books. In *Grágás* the *Vígslóði* (Treatment of Homicide) section, §102 describes the prices on the heads of outlaws:

Ef maðr **verðr sekr** um víg þat er hann veqr á Alþingi þá er sá maðr gilldr þremr morkum loğaura. Sá maðr er ok annarr svá gilldr er hann brennir menn inni. En inn þriðja þræll sá er veqr at dróttni sínum eða at dróttningu eða bõrn þeirra eða fõstr. IV er **morðvargr**. Enn aðrir **skógarmenn** allir þá eru gilldir átta aurum. Þar er menn verða sekir um víg þá skal sækjandi kjósa mann til veganda at domi eða at sótt fyrir sattar mõnnum. Þann er hann vill þeirra manna er at vígi váru ok skal hann í þess átt telja til sakbóta ok svá a hann við þann mann hruðningar. Enn

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<sup>23</sup> "He wishes to have your friendship and your wise counsel in taking a fox who has done the people of Greenland great harm" (The Saga of Ref the Sly 1997b, 3:411).

<sup>24</sup> According to the introduction to *Króka-Refs saga*, such wooden pipes under the ground have been found by archeologists in Greenland (Króka-Refs saga 1959, 14:XXXVI–XXXVII)

ef hann gjör eigi kjósa ok of telrat hann til sakbóta þá ne til hruðninga (Grágás - Konungsbók 1974, 178).<sup>25</sup>

In *Gulapingslög* in the *Víglysing* paragraph (§156) give a specific description how a killer should give his proper name when he declares killing: "... oc lysa þar viki hvatke monnum sem inni ero. Callasc hvarke **ulfr**. ne biorn nema sva heiti hann" (Norges Gamle Love 1846, 1:61).<sup>26</sup> This is the way how killers were forced to take full responsibility for their crime (Breen 1999, 38).

The above cited part of *Grágás* shows how many terms were used in connection to outlawry and for outlaws. The adjective *sekr* is the most common word, just as the noun *sekt* or *sekð*. *Sekr* has different meanings, beginning with (1) guilty, guilty of...; (2) convicted, outlawed, condemned to outlawry, convicted outlaw; (3) sentenced to pay; (4) forfeited. It appears in compounds, like *heraðssekr*, expelled from an Icelandic district, or *alsekr* who could litigate of full outlawry (Turville-Petre 1977, 769).

In addition to animal names, *skóggangr* and *skógarmaðr* are the words that are referring to outlawry as being in the wilderness. The meaning of these terms was discussed before in Chapter 1, but we should look at its background, using the argument between Elisabeth van Houts and Anne Irene Riisøy. Van Houts' idea is that "the word outlawry as is well known, is a Scandinavian loanword deriving from *utlaga*, meaning 'outside the law'." Based on a latter work by Dorothy Whitelock, van Houts points on the so called *Treaty of Edward and Guthorm* which was dated to the mid-10th century. The word *utlah* appeared here first and became a frequently used word from 970, when it entered into the written language. Van Houts emphasized strongly that the word *laga* is a Scandinavian loanword, and hence so are *utlah*, *utlagu* and *utlaga* (Van Houts 2004, 13–15). After the introduction of various examples of texts she concludes her thoughts: "It seems to me beyond doubt that the introduction of the *laga/utlaga* terminology was in some ways connected with the regulations of the cohabitation of English and Danes in England" (Van Houts 2004, 18). Riisøy also starts her argument by pointing out the great variety of possibilities and drives the attention to their different semantic

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<sup>25</sup> "If a man is outlawed for killing at the General Assembly, the price on his head is a three marks in legal tender. The second with the same price on his head is the man who burns people inside a house. The third is the slave who kills his master or his mistress or their children or foster-kin. Fourth is the murderer. But all other outlaws have a price of eight ounce-units" (Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás 1980, 164).

<sup>26</sup> "Let him not give his name as Ulf or Björn, unless that be his name" (The Earliest Norwegian Laws 2008, 130).

meaning. She puts a strong emphasis on the influence of poetry on language of legislation, but when she argues for the uniqueness of the term *skóggangr*, she turns to archaeology. By arguing the statement of van Houts that *skóggangr* replaced *útlægð* because it “reflected the specific Icelandic circumstances better” (Van Houts, 22). Her conclusion is that because “the forests were cleared from prime coastal land before AD 920, thereafter forests were found only in the highland margins” (Riisøy 2014, 105) It is important to use several scientific fields. The argument of Riisøy seems sensible enough because there are no forests in Iceland. She sticks to written texts in the rest of the article, but there is a lack of examples in Norwegian legislation that she presents.

Riisøy also explores the possible literary origin of the term. First is the term *skógarkaup* which can be found in both *Gulatingslovi* and *Frostatingslovi*. This is a “compensation for the victim plus a fine for the king” (Riisøy 2014, 106). The meaning of *útleigð* is fined, or under penalty, but as Riisøy pointed out, it has shifted towards the meaning ‘outlawry’. While *Grágás* mentions this term less, the *Íslendingasögur* have a great number of examples which were collected by Andreas Heusler (Riisøy 2014, 111–12).<sup>27</sup>

In connection with *skógr* ‘forest’, *vargr* ‘wolf’ comes up. Both of these words can be connected to outlaws, since the forest is a good hiding place. Riisøy finally summarizes her thoughts that the terms *skógr*, *vargr*, and *sekr* “are old, common Scandinavian legal notions, which date prior to the settlement of Iceland.” On the other hand there is the strong influence by poetry which was influence by Norwegians first, and only later by Icelandic skalds. Finally the fact that there are no wolves in Iceland also points to the common Scandinavian origin (Riisøy 2014, 110-111).

*Vargr* can be connected with *níðingsverk* and it was connected with serious offences and killings in most cases. According to the Christian law section different type of criminal should not be buried in the churchyard. For example: murderers (*morðvarga*), arsonists (*brennu vargar*) and violent housebreakers (*heimsoknar vargar*). The term *brennuvargr* is absent in *Grágás* (Riisøy 2010, 2170:21, 22).

#### 4. 3. Nomen est Omen:

The previous analysis showed any action connected with *níðingr* or *varg* are “morally depraved”, therefore they should suffer the worst punishment: exile from society. Anne Irene

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<sup>27</sup> See more in Andreas Heusler, “Das Strafrecht der Isländersagas” (Liepzig: Duncker & Humbolt, 1911). 128.

Riisøy points out that *vargr* became anachronistic in Norwegian legislation by the 13th century. Also it is not possible to find *vargr* in *Sturlunga saga*, which is contemporary Icelandic saga, composed during the 12th-13th centuries (Riisøy 2010, 2170:24). However, we should not think that these old terms connected with moral principles absolutely faded away from written texts. I believe that those sagas that has been analysed so far, are the best examples for that.

In her recent study Marion Poilvez pointed out that sagas use the word *útlagi/útleğð* for outlaws in Norway, and *sekr*, *fjorbaugsgarðr* and *skóggangr* in Iceland (Poilvez 2017). As previously discussed, when it comes to outlawry, the vocabulary used by *Grettis saga* and *Kóka-Refs saga* are: *skógarmaðr* and *útlægan*. *Vargr* has been mentioned only in *Grettis saga*. By that time Grettir is an outlaw, and has almost no connection with society. His arrival to the island of Drangey is a great misfortune for the locals, as he keeps the sheep. This behaviour is similar to a wild wolf, who threatens men. Of course one can be sure that the author knew that there are no wolves in Iceland. I do think that this episode presents the author's knowledge of legal material of the older centuries, just as well as his knowledge in Scandinavian mythology.

These cross references can be seen for example when Þorgeirr and Skeggi dies in Chapter 38 (*Grettis saga* 1936, 7:131). Grettir is responsible for their death, but the whole incident starts because of him. He decides to swim to the shore from the boat, and breaks into the house violently, and committing the crime of "*heimsoknar vargr*". But since every merchant thinks that he caused the fire as well, he also becomes a *brennuvargr*. Both crimes are punished with outlawry.

As with mythology, the wolf has special place: "lupus in fabula". It is a moral and religious taboo, and it is connected to Fenrir, the wolf who cause the death of the old Scandinavian gods. (Jacoby 1974, 112). This creature is a fierce enemy, and a constant danger to society, as Grettir is, on the island of Drangey, for the locals.

It seems that the fate of an outlaw is necessarily death in the Outlaw sagas. But there are other examples like Hrafnkell goði, who not just survives, but takes back his property and position. He waits until he can take revenge on his enemies. Refr shows similarities with to this type of hero, smarter and less violent. His name means fox, an animal which is always smart character in fairytales. Foxes actually live in Iceland. Refr is a self-conscious character from the beginning of the saga. This feature separates him from such outlaw-characters as Grettir. Heroes like him, and Gísli Súrsson are doomed to have a tragic fate and be killed by their enemies. Refr is using his chances to survive, based on his intelligence.

The name that Refr receives from the Danish king is Sigtrygg. This name is a compound from the noun *sigr* ‘victory’ and the adjective *tryggr* ‘true, faithful’ (Zoëga 2004). This name-giving anticipates his fate: he will be the forefather of many important man, and he will die as a respectable man. In the end, he never lost against his enemies, and he always stood up for his values.

#### **4. 4. Conclusion:**

In this chapter I wanted to discuss how the authors hint at the futures of their heroes by using animal names. Both sagas were written in the 14th century, when the term *vargr* was already anachronistic, but not forgotten. The author of *Grettis saga* built up a storyline that will necessary end with the tragic death of the hero. His last hint is the depiction as an animal, underlining the inhuman and marginal status of Grettir. Refr however will be a survivor since he has the wits to sustaine himself. These animals are different in nature: a wolf is more strong, but also violent, while the fox is smarter but not as strong.

## Chapter 5. The Place of *Króka-Refs Saga* in the Icelandic Literary Corpus:

As discussed before, scholars who have analysed *Króka-Refs saga* have come to different conclusions when it comes to the question of sub-genre. Before I present my conclusion about this question, I would like to summarize and discuss some patterns that are present or show similarities with other sagas than *Grettis saga*. This part of analysis is important, since *Króka-Refs saga* was presented by Frederic Amory as a saga-imitation. Another detailed analysis of the saga has been done by Patricia M. Wolfe, who argues that *Króka-Refs saga* is mostly based on *Egils saga*. Martin Arnold's analysis contains the structural features of the saga, but also, similarly to the other two scholars, he presents similar patterns and figures as a comparison to *Króka-Refs saga*.

### 5. 1. Similar Characters and Patterns in Other Sagas:

*Króka-Refs saga* has been considered as an imitation of a family saga, a parody, or a satire. Since my own approach is also based on the idea, that this saga has similarities with *Grettis saga*, I should analyse other similar patterns as well.

As discussed before, *Króka-Refs saga* has similar patterns that can be found in *fornaldasögur* and *riddarasögur*. One Refr's master-pieces, the ship on wheels has a parallel in one of the *fornaldasögur* called *Þjalar-Jóns saga*. In this story, the protagonist Jón builds a ship inside a mountain with twelve other smiths (Sagan af Þjalar-Jóni 1857, 39–40). In the commentary of his translation Philip Lavender argues that the dating of these two sagas suggests that this ship motif is a borrowing from *Króka-Refs saga* (*Þjalar-Jóns saga: A Translation and Introduction* 2017, 78).

Several similar points can be found with *þættir*, which are preserved in *Morkinskinna*. These are *Þorleifs þátr jarlsskálds*, *Hreiðars þátr heimska* and *Auðunar þátr vestfirzka* (Arnold 2003, 192). There are common characters in these texts: the king, the king's retainer, and the outsider, who is Icelandic (Jakobsson 2014, 22:13). King Haraldr appears in the latter two *þættir* and in *Króka-Refs saga* as well. The narrative of these *þættir* can be argued as the voices of the independent Icelanders. I would rather assume that these narrations wanted to depict Icelanders and the Norwegian kings as equals. For example Auðunn and Hreiðarr speaks without fear with the king (*Morkinskinna* 2011, 1:155–61, 219–21). On the contrary, Refr gets in touch with the king through his retainer first. Bárðr cannot find out how to besiege the fortress successfully, and asks for advice from King Haraldr (*Króka-Refs saga* 1959, 14:144–45) It seems that only the king, who has the highest rank, can be the opponent of Refr (Arnold 2003, 194).

Not just the Norwegian king Haraldr, but the Danish king Sveinn appears in *Króka-Refs saga*, and becomes Refr's supporter. This is a kind of shelter for him, since the Norwegians want to capture him. Christianity also appears in the saga, since Refr, similarly to Auðunn, ends up as a pious pilgrim visiting Rome (*Króka-Refs saga* 1959, 14:156–57, 160). This scene is a contrary to Kendra Willson's argument, who considers Refr as a materialistic hero (Willson 2006, 1069).

*Hrafnkell saga freysgoða* has been mentioned earlier, because of its survivor hero. But also the death of Einarr the shepherd can be a parallel to Barði's. Ref has similarities with Þormóðr Bersason from *Fóstbræðra saga*. This adventurer and poet also killed three people in Greenland. Auðunn also travels to Greenland to get a polar bear (Amory 1988, 12, 16).

Finally, another saga of an outlaw should be mentioned here: *Gísla saga Súrssonar*. Gíslí's values are very similar to Refr's: he is a clever hero, who escapes and protects his life many times by being cunning rather than violent. He slips out from the hands of his enemies, but he cannot escape from the last fight when he has to face with preponderance. This scene is an interesting difference, since Refr can escape from all his enemies. Both heroes can survive a similar situation, when their enemies try to burn down the house or fortress where they live (Wolfe 1973, 4).

## 5. 2. Imitation, Parody, Satire?

After the analysis of similar patterns in other sagas I would like to go back to the argument: what type of saga is *Króka-Refs saga*? Is it an imitation? I disagree with this argument. It is true that many patterns are showing similarities and it is very likely, that apart from the kings, all characters are fictional. References on the past of Refr's family is minimal, and the role of his own family is also not significant, apart from his wife Helga, who will be instigator of one of the conflicts. The author still tries to keep the narrative historical by using "it is said", or "nothing is told of the journey" (Wolfe 1973, 4). These formulas are well known from sagas, to give the feeling of the passing time between two more interesting scenes.

The lack of Icelandic institutions was mentioned earlier, but another typical saga-feature is present: feud. Refr kills several men to protect his honour, but these do not fit in Theodore Andersson's model, which contains revenge and counter revenge only once. Martin Arnold identifies this structural element twice (Arnold 2003, 185–86). There are two extra features in connection with the feud-scenes: they only have one "round". They are not inherited by the next generation, or the hero's family. Once Refr kills his opponents, the conflict is over. Or, as it was mentioned, he lets Eiríkr go, without taking revenge.

Still, I would argue that these similarities are not the sign of an author who lacks in ideas, but someone who has a very good knowledge of the existing saga corpus. Since *Króka-Refs saga* is one of the youngest ones, it is very likely that the author was able to access and read those texts that are shows similarities – and of course, even more. In her analysis, Patricia M. Wolfe points out the lack of many things and patterns. I found many contradictions in her arguments. One of these is the absence of topographical details. While Refr’s enemies seek the source of the water for the sprinkler system, we get a quite detailed description about the area. The lack of religious matters is also a contradiction: Gestr makes a reference on “the one who made sun”, and pious pilgrimage of Refr to Rome (Wolfe 1973, 5, 6).

*Króka-Refs saga* is certainly not a parody. Martin Arnold’s argument about the transformation of the classic saga-heroes is true, and there is no doubt that Refr is an example for these characters (Arnold 2003, 182). *Króka-Refs saga* does have funny, rather unexpected episodes. Refr’s escape from the fortress on the ship is one of these. This scene has been carefully built up: from the visit of Bárðr to Greenland throughout the solution from the king Haraldr until the siege. The reader (especially the one who has knowledge on such tragic stories of Icelandic heroes) feels that this is the end for Refr, he cannot escape. And then he does so in an unexpected way.

And finally it has been discussed if *Króka-Refs saga* is a satire according to Frederic Amory. Then the author would have created a grotesque character as a main hero, or possibly his opponents would not have been equal with him at all. Certainly there is only one, Haraldr, who is equal with him. The most grotesque scene is the one with the ship on wheels, which can be just a play with the expectations of the audience, which would foresee the tragic end of the hero.

### **5. 3. Conclusion:**

Martin Arnold pointed out the difference between 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century saga-writing, and the fact that 14<sup>th</sup> century Iceland was already a colonized country. Therefore, the memory of self-government must have been important for saga-authors. They wanted to shape sagas to their age, but did not want to break from the traditional *Íslendingasögur* (Arnold 2003, 181). I disagree, however, with the understanding of *Króka-Refs saga* as parody or satire just because it uses so many elements of other sagas, and its hero does not die with a tragic end. My reading suggests that the goal of the author was to produce a text on the solid ground of saga-literature. The presence of unexpected or even funny elements are part of the plan: to create an amusing



story, which is purely fictional. The presence of unexpected or even funny elements are part of the plan: to create an amusing story, which is purely fictional.

## Chapter 6. Final Conclusion

As I have presented through this thesis, there is a general consensus among scholars, that *Króka-Refs saga* is different from most of the Icelandic family sagas, yet similar as well. Different because its characters are fictional, and we can also assume that the events never taken place. Still, many patterns from other well-known sagas have been discovered and analysed. My discussion was built on this idea, and offered an alternative solution: the author of *Króka-Refs saga* constructed his work based on the sagas of the outlaws. My choice was to take *Grettis saga* as an example, and I presented my analysis based on the characteristics of Grettir and Refr and some episodes that are present in both sagas.

In this analysis I presented that a very similar childhood was followed by a problematic adulthood. Living on the margins of society is present in both of their lives, but their solutions to problems are different. Both heroes are aliens to the society where they live: Grettir is a viking in the farmers' society, while Refr stands out with his advanced talent in craftsmanship.

One last question needs to be discussed here: what was the aim of the author in creating *Króka-Refs saga*? Patricia M. Wolfe thinks that he wanted to reflect on the conditions of contemporary Iceland, the loss of freedom, and limited individuality. This approach is questionable, since as I discussed earlier, Refr has no direct opposition towards the king, even though he is an opponent. His respect of Haraldr is present, but in fact, Refr does not want to earn his friendship.

It is also clear that the author had a good knowledge of the saga genre, and used many patterns from them. The absence of long genealogies and detailed description of characters, who do not affect the plot can be explained: he wanted to focus on Refr. As a created character he does not need to have created ancestors. Clearly, the aim of this saga was never the promotion of any great families in the past or present. Many of the sagas were written to legitimize the power of certain families, but *Króka-Refs saga* does not serve the purpose of such promotion. Also, the author wanted to underline, that this character is just imaginative.

The author used patterns from other sagas. I argued that Refr has similarities with Grettir. I would not suggest, that the author's sample was *Grettis saga*, but I do think that he was familiar with the Outlaw sagas and also that he had a great knowledge of legal texts. We do not know who he was, but he might have been familiar with Norwegian law. The reference from *Gulapingslove* in connection with Refr's putative behaviour suggests this.

I would like to go back to one sentence in *Króka-Refs saga*, which - in my opinion – gives us the answer to why the author created the saga. When Refr is about to leave on his ship from Iceland, his uncle Gestr says farewell to him: “Ef þér verðr eigi útkvámu auðit, þá vil ég, at þú látir skrifa frásögn um ferð þína, því at hún mun nokkurum merkilig þykkja, því at ég hygg, at þú sér annarr sprekingr mestr í várri ætt”.

His aim was to create a different hero than those in the other sagas. This hero is able to slip out from the worse situations. Exclusion from society will not put him into a marginal situation, he is able to come back, and emerge. His talent will be his most important weapon to fight with. Therefore, will he be able to survive. He is also sensible, not a cruel killer. He punishes himself when he realises his mistakes. *Króka-Refr* is a hero who is not destined for death, but for a happy end.

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