Elves in Distress

Icelandic *Huldufólk* Legends in Light of Nineteenth-Century Internal Migration

Joshua Lee

Abstract

The Icelandic *huldufólk* (hidden folk) transitioned from dangerous, unpredictable beings to the pastoral ideal of conservative *Icelandicness* over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Contemporary *huldufólk* legends often feature humans protecting *huldufólk* from construction projects or other dangers threatening local landscapes, or conversely emphasize the revenge sought by *huldufólk* if landscapes are destroyed. I examine two subgenres of Icelandic *huldufólk* legends: *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* (midwife to the fairies), a migratory legend type, and *nauðleitan huldufólks* (hidden folk seeking aid) as classified in the Icelandic folklore database *Sagnagrunnur,* to find forerunners to the aforementioned contemporary legends. Positive interactions within these legends reflect nineteenth-century socioeconomic changes: population growth, internal migration, and the displacement of the rural poor. I contrast these two legend types with a larger corpus of *hefndir huldufólks* (hidden folk's revenge) legends, highlighting how internal Icelandic displacement and close or home settings characterize the positive interaction legends, but not the ones about negative interactions. This difference is gendered, with female storytellers' repertoires proportionally likelier to contain positive interaction legends. In contrast, *hefndir huldufólks* legends negotiate danger within a wilderness landscape disconnected from internal migration, and potential fears surrounding the loss of children in harsh environments rather than economic hardship.

Keywords: Iceland, legends, elves, huldufólk, migration, folklore, agriculture, displacement

Icelandic *huldufólk* (hidden folk) beliefs feature prominently in contemporary Icelandic folklore, international media concerning Iceland, the Ice-

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landic tourism industry, and Icelandic conservation discourse (Markham 1982:2; Lyall 2005:3). These modern legends are usually connected to construction sites and development plans, and scholars have remarked on how elves tend to be emblematic of a conservative *Icelandicness* that resists social change and modernization (Hafstein 2000:95). Actual belief varies and has waned in the twenty-first century: just under half of Icelanders surveyed in 1974 answered that elves were either probable or certain to exist (48%), whilst in 2006 a similar survey found 27% of Icelanders with the same belief, and in 2023 this had dropped to 20.7% (*Icelandic Folk Belief Survey* 2023:75). Contemporary Icelanders employ elf legends as a means to advocate for environmental conservation and to push back against governmental centralization and urbanization, as well as to conserve cultural values (Hall 2014:4). Icelanders cite the need to protect elves' places of habitation, or to avoid elf revenge, and have taken a custodial role towards these supernatural creatures as a proxy for local environmental preservation. This understanding is distant from medieval and early-modern conceptions of *álfar* and *huldufólk,* which depict them as dangerous, unpredictable, and potentially divine or diabolical, beings to be avoided, warded off, or appeased (Gunnell 2017:203). Evidently, a shift has taken place: elves went from being the primary manifestation of the Other in Icelandic folklore to exemplifying the pastoral ideal of the traditional Icelander (Hafstein 2000:89, 98–99).

This article examines positive interactions between Icelanders and *huldufólk* in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century legends. The legends selected for study here are those tagged as *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* (midwife to the elves) and *nauðleitan huldufólks* (hidden folk seeking aid) in the Icelandic folklore database, *Sagnagrunnur*. These 111 legends mirror the modern story pattern of *Icelanders helping elves* and, in examining them, I seek to identify who is telling these more positive elf-related stories, what sort of positive (or negative) interactions are going on in the legends examined, and what meaning(s) contemporary Icelanders found in these stories of in-group and out-group interactions. I then compare these to 204 legends in the extreme negative: *hefndir huldufólks* (hidden folk's revenge), using this contrast to highlight elements of the positive-relation legends.

In his examination of Danish legends, Tangherlini analyses *macro-, meso-*, and *micro-levels* to answer *who* is telling *what* stories, and *why* specifically these stories (1994:36–38). The macroscale concerns historical trends that affect the lives of storytellers: essentially the political, social, and economic context. Tangherlini's mesoscale is the repertoires of a hundred "exceptional" storytellers. The mesoscale can instead be a domain: the narrative structures and limits surrounding a particular area of

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folkloric knowledge (Tangherlini 2018:4–7; cf. Dégh 2001:77–79). The microscale focuses on storytellers' biographies, examining how personal idiosyncrasy and life circumstances might factor into the stories they tell, as well as how they conform to the demographic trends identified in the previous levels (Tangherlini 1994:36–38).

My study adapts this framework to uncover how *huldufólk* legends reflect Icelanders' changing relationships with local landscapes, and how engagement with what I term "positive interaction" or "elves seeking aid" legends may have been gendered. My macroscale is the changing social and economic conditions in Iceland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Due to geographical limitations and the lack of digitized information on informants' biographies, the microscale must be discarded. Instead, two mesoscales are employed. The first is the narrative domain of Icelandic *álfar/huldufólk* legends. The second, more specific mesoscale is my selected corpus of the 111 "elves seeking aid" legends. Trends identified within this lower mesoscale are related back to the macroscale: economic and social changes within Iceland during the nineteenth century. These trends are filtered through the limits of the domain: any specific trends may be representative of narrative convention rather than reactions to macroscale events (on the other hand, the first mesoscale may also reflect on the macroscale). This framework allows an exploration of not only what sort of exchanges happened in these potentially positive interactions between in-group and out-group, but by whom these stories were told, and why. Strategies for navigating supernatural encounters can apply more broadly to macroscale-level social or economic concerns seen through the looking-glass of the *huldufólk* narrative domain.

Iceland in the Late Nineteenth Century

Iceland's nineteenth-century historical conditions provide the macroscale, the larger context within which these *huldufólk* legends were told. Like many nations, Iceland underwent dramatic social upheaval during the nineteenth century. Iceland was under Danish rule and had not been self-governed since 1262. The eighteenth century was catastrophic. Smallpox and other disease outbreaks, famine, and a volcanic eruption reduced the Icelandic population by roughly 10,500 between the years 1783 and 1786, and Iceland did not again reach 50,000 until several decades into the 1800s (Karlsson 2000:177–181; Magnússon 2010:21).

At the onset of the nineteenth century, the country was sparsely populated and reliant on livestock agriculture. Reykjavík, the largest settlement, had a population of 307 in 1801, and most of the population of

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47,000 lived on farms (Karlsson 2000:185). These farms were organized into *hreppar* (sg. *hreppur*), communes of twenty or more farms whose central function was to administer poor relief. The Icelandic societal model required persons to be tied to farms, whether as owner, member of a household, or as a contracted labourer or domestic servant, and this was enforced through laws compelling everyone to have a fixed place of residence, or prove their access to sufficient land to feed a cow or six ewes (Magnússon 2010:22–26; Karlsson 2000:231). This societal model had remained remarkably stable for a millennium. Pastoral farming of sheep and cattle formed the backbone of an agricultural system which, despite relatively low productive output, was extremely labour-intensive (Karlsson 2000:27, 55). Roughly 35–40% of the Icelandic population throughout the nineteenth century were domestic servants or farm-labourers working on a yearly contractual basis. Written sources from early in this period reveal an obsession with food, as hunger always threatened, and although the last famine was in 1803, the population boom of the later nineteenth century meant that access to food remained a concern for a large percentage of the Icelandic population. Women often performed similar work to men on farmsteads, and a series of laws in the latter half of the nineteenth century granted women the right to equal inheritance (1850), the right to personal autonomy at age twenty-five (1861), and the enfranchisement of widows who owned farms in local elections (1882) (Magnússon 2010:22–23, 273–274). This political push towards equality masked gendered realities in farming and fishing workplaces which continued into the twentieth century (cf. Hastrup 1998:153). Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir has demonstrated how women venturing into the wilderness or public sphere were portrayed within folktales as positive, if this was temporary, but as a threat to social order if permanently assuming masculine identities (2021).

The first broad social change had already begun by the nineteenth century. In 1786, to combat famine after a volcanic eruption, the Danish government lifted the Danish Crown's monopoly on trade. Any Danish citizen was then permitted to trade with Iceland, and six coastal harbours were turned into trading towns. In 1854, further limitations on trade were abolished: foreigners were allowed equal trading rights with Danish citizens. This led to an immediate influx of foreign goods, with 30% of imports coming from countries beyond Denmark in 1856 (Magnússon 2010:182, 244). In the latter half of the nineteenth century, trade with Britain grew exponentially, primarily sheep for silver or gold, a rarity in previous Icelandic trade (Karlsson 2000:246; Magnússon 2010:32). Trade in luxury goods also rose dramatically, with imports of tobacco, coffee, sugar, and spirits tripling or more in the century (Karlsson 2000:227).

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The second, greater change was internal. The population gradually rose due to a decline in child mortality, the age of marriage falling, and the subsequent increased birth-rate. By 1855 it had reached 65,000, by 1870, around 70,000. This population increase strained the agricultural system, and people began to establish farms further inland on marginal, less productive land. This expansion went well during a relatively warm period in the 1830s and 1840s. In 1855, an epizootic scab disease spread from English sheep brought to Iceland to improve breeding stock, and in subsequent years the Icelandic flock was reduced by 40%. At the same time, the average temperature dropped by 1.12 degrees (Celsius), and 1859 was the coldest year on record. Many marginal farms failed around this period. Numerous families were driven to poor relief, and the number of paupers more than doubled during the 1850s and 1860s (Magnússon 2010:26–30; Karlsson 2000:224–230).

Poor relief was the responsibility of one's native *hreppur,* a tradition dating back to Commonwealth Iceland. Icelanders could, however, win the right to poor relief in a different *hreppur* by spending ten years residing there. Local authorities resorted to extreme measures to move families on before they reached this point, displacing them from familiar social and physical landscapes, and maintenance of paupers was sometimes auctioned off to the lowest bidder (Magnússon 2010:27; Karlsson 2000:55, 252). There was an intense social stigma attached to being on poor relief, with terms like *sveitalimur* (a term perhaps best translated as 'rural appendage') used derogatorily (Magnússon 2010:27). Despite the legal requirement to be tied to a farm, labourers and poor families migrated to coastal villages, and the fishing industry boomed in the latter half of the century (Karlsson 2000:224–225). These fishing villages were also stigmatized as antisocial places characterized by violence, alienation, and degeneracy (Hastrup 1998:58, 139). Many Icelanders' ties to the landscape, mediated through production of food and previously legally reinforced, were dissolved in practice, if not in law. The population boom combined with the scab epidemic and climate deterioration of the 1850s caused an unprecedented degree of internal migration, as families searched for poor relief, new land to farm, or access to the sea.

This period of displacement, population growth, and change, alongside the increase in trade with new foreign countries (primarily Britain) provides the contextual macroscale for the legends told and collected at the time. Traditional relationships to the land and reliance on land and sea for food production were challenged both via larger-scale imports, and by the local landscape's inability to sate the hunger of a growing population.

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The Narrative Tradition of *Huldufólk*

The domain, or first mesoscale, of this study is the narrative tradition surrounding *huldufólk* legends in Iceland. The terms *huldufólk* and *álfar* ('hidden folk' and 'elves') are used interchangeably throughout this essay, following prominent folklorists such as Jón Árnason and Terry Gunnell, but a recent survey of folk belief demonstrates that although 40.1% of Icelanders see no distinction between the terms, 20.7% do (Icelandic Folk Belief Survey 2023:80–82). The term *huldufólk* may have arisen as a way to avoid saying *álfar,* perhaps for fear of summoning these capricious creatures. The first surviving instance of *huldufólk* is from the rhyming verse *Jarlmanns rímur* (*c*. 1500) (Þorgeirsson 2011:53). The term was frequently used in medieval Icelandic texts alongside the term *áss* or *æsir* ('god', 'gods') and *huldufólk* were possibly worshipped as minor pre-Christian deities tied to the land (Gunnell 2007:120–127). Alaric Hall suggests that *álfr* was another term for *vanr,* a member of the secondary tribe of pagan Scandinavian deities that held associations with nature and fertility (Hall 2007:216). This association was not distinct, and *álfar* seem to have overlapped with all manner of supernatural creatures: dwarves, trolls, and the nebulous *vættir* (Jakobsson 2015:216). Conceptions of *álfar* evolved, and somewhat stabilized, in the following centuries. In fourteenth-century Icelandic romances, they began to take on associations with specific rocks or boulders (tethered as Icelanders were to farms), theft of children, and issues in childbirth: all common themes associated with elves across various folkloric traditions (Gunnell 2007:120). Elves, here, become intimately tied to landscapes in a distinctly local sense. Here, too, they begin to mirror social change: in *Þáttr Þiðranda ok Þórhalls* in GKS 1005 fol. (*Flateyjarbók, c*. 1390), elves are depicted as being forced to move at the onset of conversion (Hafstein 2000:97). Seventeenth-century scholars debated how elves fit into biblical cosmology and proposed alternatively that they were human and spirit hybrids, that they were some kind of evil or demonic spirits, or fallen angels (Gunnell 2017:203–206). At this point, *huldufólk* began to take on the traits common in nineteenth-century folklore: they lived in dwellings much like the Icelanders' own, albeit inside hills or boulders, and they owned livestock and did agricultural labour (Sveinsson 2003:176).

Nineteenth-century depictions of *huldufólk* generally conform to a pattern of being the social Other. They had their own churches, kings, and beautiful clothing, mirroring Icelandic society whilst remaining an outgroup, with whom it was dangerous to interact (Sveinsson 2003:178). They lived in rock formations near farmsteads: stones, hills or cliff-faces, occupying a peripheral place between human abode and wilderness (Ege-

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ler, Jónsdóttir & Jónsson 2024). They were often invisible but could make themselves visible at will (Sveinsson 2003:176). They often communicated to humans through dreams, a nuance characteristic of Icelandic folklore. Positive interactions did occur, but if one refused an elf's hospitality, the elf might take cruel, unpredictable, and potentially long-lasting revenge (Aðalsteinsson 1993:125–130). *Huldufólk* legends included illicit romances between humans and elves, groups of hidden folk engaging in festivities during holidays (typically Christmas Night or New Year's Eve), and elves seeking human aid with childbirth (Aðalsteinsson:123–126). These are far more varied than the modern story pattern previously detailed. Elves also began to feature in the nationalist cultural milieu: Indriði Einarsson's *Nýársnóttin,* written in 1871, featured an *álfkona* protagonist in a newly designed Icelandic "national-costume". Terry Gunnell posits that these theatrical elves had a long-lasting influence on shaping modern conceptions of the *huldufólk* as conservative, nationalist representatives of Icelandicness as a whole, divorced from their local landscape-based context (2012:322).

The second mesoscale is my corpus, derived from the *Sagnagrunnur* database and comprising two parts. First, the motif of *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* ('midwife to the elves', sometimes also termed *álfkona í barnsnauð*, 'elf woman in labour'), indexed as ML 5070 by Reidar Christensen. This is a migratory legend type with variants across northern Europe. There are 61 legends of this type in *Sagnagrunnur,* excluding the four Scottish variants. The second section comprises 50 instances of *nauðleitan huldufólks* (hidden folk seeking aid) legends; a further 34 overlap with *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* and are grouped in that category.

This created a corpus of 111 legends. This analysis was accomplished through use of the text analysis tool *Voyant,* which allows for the rapid identification of quantitative word frequencies (and patterns therein) within my second mesoscale, although manual compilation of inflected forms was needed. This provided a distanced perspective on what Linda Dégh terms the "selection from sets and subsets" of motifs in legend creation (2011:421). *Voyant*, however, cannot identify lexical variation or context. Therefore, I also incorporated close reading of the corpus to identify individual or lexical idiosyncrasies and qualitative information, for example, in the heterogenous rewards received from *huldufólk*. I have included my own count of narrative elements from my reading where appropriate.

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Data from *Sagnagrunnur*	*kona* (woman) - all inflections	*maður* (man) - all inflections	*hún* (she) - all inflections	*hann* (he) - all inflections
Combined corpus 111 legends, 19,485 total words	294	174	1,021	531
ljósmóðir hjá álfum (midwife to the elves) 61 legends, 12,760 total words	198	127	689	383
nauðleitan huldufólks (hidden-folk seeking aid) 50 legends, 6,725 total words	96	47	332	148

Table 1: Gendered signifiers.

An emphasis on female characters is immediately apparent. This is unsurprising for the *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* legends but is also true of the *nauðleitan huldufólks* legends. It could be thought that men are instead referred to by profession; however, adding a male-associated occupational term like *bóndi* (farmer, in all inflections) only adds 56 instances, and fails to account for female-associated occupational terms like *húsfreyja* (housewife, 19 instances). The female dominance of these specific legends holds true for their informants. Of the entire legend corpus on *Sagnagrunnur* (11,044), 6,276 have a gendered informant (*heimildamaður*) listed.

Although the numbers are not exact (we lack details for roughly half), this is probably representative, in a loose sense, of Icelandic tradition and shows female informants telling approximately 32% of Icelandic legends, while male informants told 68%. There were more male storytellers overall, but the stories in which *huldufólk* require assistance of some kind were slightly more likely to be told by women, and feature more female characters than male at a rate of roughly two to one. Júlíana Þóra Magnúsdóttir has demonstrated that Icelandic women's repertoires were more likely to contain supernatural encounters and specifically *huldufólk* legends (2023). This trend appears magnified within *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* and *nauðleitan huldufólks* legends. Although rarer than male storytellers overall, women were more likely to have a *huldufólk* legend in their repertoire, and even more likely to have a legend from these two groupings, than men were.

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Data from *Sagnagrunnur*	Total	Male	Female
Legends with gendered *heimildamaður* (informant)	5,937 out of 11,044	4,055 68.3%	1,882 31.7%
Huldufólk-legends with gendered *heimildamaður* (informant)	635 out of 1,002	352 56.4%	272 43.6%
nauðleitan huldufólks legends with gendered *heimildamaður* (informant)	32 out of 50	15 46.9%	17 53.1%
ljósmóðir hjá álfum legends with gendered *heimildamaður* (informant)	30 out of 61	13 43.3%	17 56.7%

Table 2: Informants by gender.

Types of interaction and exchange between *huldufólk* and Icelanders can be understood using Tangherlini's version of Wilhelm Nicolaison's legend structure (1987). Nicolaison's (1987:72) model builds upon the six-part model developed by William Labov and Joshua Waletzky (1967), deeming three narrative elements necessary, *orientation, complicating action* and *result*, whilst *abstract, evaluation* and *coda* remain optional. Tangherlini takes these three necessary elements and adds a fourth element, *strategy,* to better characterize protagonist reactions to the *complicating action* (2018:4–5). In this study, the *orientation* is the macroscale identified above, the threat/disruption aspect of the *complicating action* is the request for aid (and thus extended interaction with an out-group), the *strategy* is either to render or refuse aid, and the *outcome* is whatever reward or repercussion comes from the employment of the strategy (Tangherlini 2018:4–5). In the *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* legends, the type of assistance requested is a given, but the type of aid sought in the *nauðleitan huldufólks* legends may also indicate what socio-cultural concerns these stories are alluding to. Additionally, Bo Almqvist has identified two strains of the Icelandic iterations of *ljósmóðir hjá álfum:* "the Reward Redaction" and "the Eye Ointment Redaction," the former referring to tales in which the midwife receives some sort of fantastical reward, the latter where the midwife is given (and then often loses) second-sight (Almqvist 2008:295). These Icelandic legend-characteristics in *l*jósmóðir can be examined alongside the human-elf interactions in *nauðleitan*, as shown in Figure 1.

Almqvist's identification held true to an extent for the *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* stories: there were 54 instances of an inflected form of the word *auga,* in 16 of the 61 stories. Almost all (7/8) instances of the word *gull* were from this corpus as well: rewards ranged from golden purses and coins to textiles like silk or velvet to magical items (e.g., sand that turns to gold) (Combined Corpus). Close reading shows five instances where

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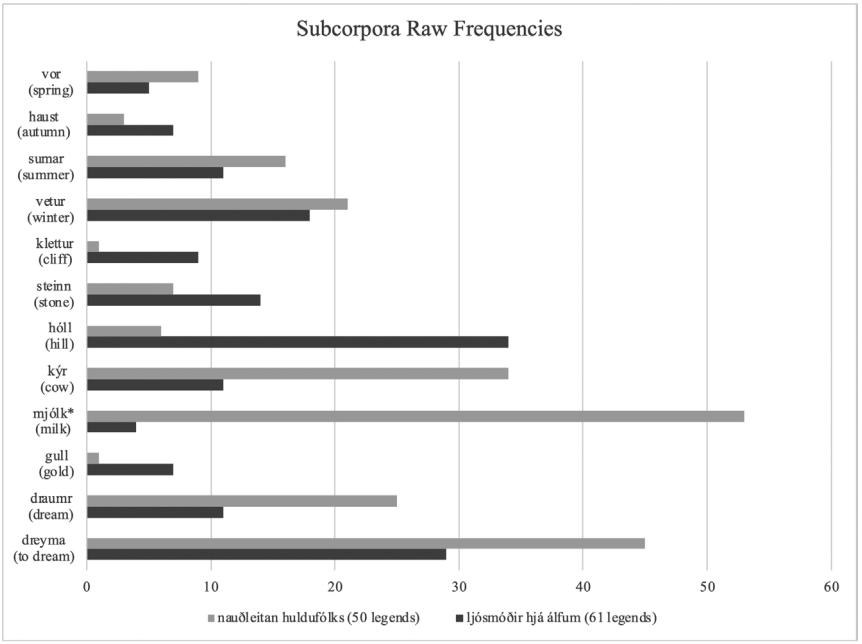

Figure 1.

the reward was that no mother or child would die under the midwife's care again, perhaps reflecting concerns about the high rate of child mortality. Almost a third of children died during their first year between 1815 and 1855 (Karlsson 2000:224). The following legend from Fljótshlíð in southern Iceland is typical of the *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* (midwife to the elves) type:

> Þorbjörg Þorláksdóttir was once washing laundry in a stream near the farm Teigur, when an unfamiliar man came up to her and asked her to help his wife who had not been able to give birth. She went with him up the hayfield and saw her surroundings change then, and saw a small turf house, which she had never seen before. She went in with the man and saw a woman there on the floor and two other women standing over her. She laid hands on the woman and the woman immediately gave birth. The man offered her porridge, but she declined the offer. He then accompanied her home and repaid her with a beautiful silk skirt which remained in her family for a long time. He also added that she would be a lucky midwife (Guðni Jónsson 1940–1957, I:72–75).

The exchanges in the 50 *nauðleitan huldufólks* legends are far less fantastical. There are, of course, aspects of exchange that cannot be characterized simply through lexical frequency: in 30 out of the 50 stories, there is some type of request for farm resources: either milk (some form of either milk or milking was mentioned in 22 legends in this section), use of sheep or cattle, or simply food (here I rely on close reading, as *Voyant*

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is unable to identify these *in toto*). In seven instances, the hidden folk perform some type of assistance around the farm in exchange for these farm resources. Temporal markers are also a little more common here, with seasonal terms *sumar,* and *vetur* and *vor* (appearing as *vorið, vortími* and *vorlag*) appearing relatively more frequently (interestingly, the correlation with *haust* is inverted). Term frequency, however, must be combined with an informed *pars pro toto* reading of legends as examples of the subcorpus. A typical legend following this exchange pattern is as follows:

> The storyteller's parents moved from Hlöðuvík to Hælavík in the spring of 1884, with a small livestock herd after many years of hardship. Only a few ewes were brought, but the penned ewes on Strandir usually milked well. One evening it was as if two ewes were milked dry just when they had been herded. That night the housewife dreamed of a woman who said she had milked the ewes because she desperately needed milk for a young child. She hoped that she would not need the milk any longer than half a month. After that time had passed the housewife dreamed about the woman who thanked her and said she would look to repay the couple's farm and gave them blessings. Many things went well in Hælavík thanks to the elf-woman after that (Arngrímur Bjarnason & Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1954–1959, III:106–108).

Several stories have similar gifts of goods, less fantastical than in the *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* stories: a silver spoon and a pound of tobacco, a silver belt (four legends), or a rose-red skirt. These *huldufólk* lack the wealth they are sometimes associated with elsewhere. Some stories included no recompense, whilst some had generalised rewards in terms of "prosperity on the farm forever after".

Almqvist observes that the Icelandic versions of these stories feature less harmful outcomes than in other traditions, with no permanent blindness or other damage befalling the midwives (Almqvist 2008:296–297). In my corpus, the request for aid was refused in three instances, and in one other, the human fulfilling the request told others about it. In all four this led to negative consequences, with livestock or even children dying, alongside a more general curse to live in poverty.

Henning Feilberg notes that the element of dreaming, and the uncertainty as to whether events take place in the waking or dreaming world, is a uniquely Icelandic variation of the "midwife" legend type (1910:71–73). Júlíana Þóra Magnúsdóttir identifies this as particularly prominent within female repertoires (2023:171–173). Discussion of dreaming demonstrates the limitations of Voyant: an inflection of the verb *dreyma* appears 29 times, in 18 of the 61 *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* legends. It appears 45 times, in 31 of the 50 *nauðleitan huldufólks* legends. Secondary indicators of dreaming complicate this slightly: inflections of *vakna* 'awaken' appear more frequently in *ljósmóðir* (16 instances) than *nauðleitan* (7). Closer examination reveals that occasionally a protagonist awakens

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after meeting with a *huldukona* or *huldumaður,* and occasionally before, setting these encounters in the middle of the night but only sometimes within dreams (if one takes the protagonist awakening at face value). Given this ambiguity, the element of dreaming appears more explicit within *nauðleitan huldufólks* legends, but sleep providing an avenue for supernatural interaction is present in both legend types.

The Term-Frequency Inverse-Document-Frequency (TF-IDF) analysis in Figure 2 compares the terms most likely to differentiate these two corpora, that is, which terms are most indicative of that corpus:

This confirms various aspects of the raw frequency analysis: *mjólka* (milk) is integral to non-midwife positive interactions. Eyes, a part of the international midwife-tradition, are strongly indicative of the *ljósmóðir* legends and relatively absent in the *nauðleitan* corpus. The inflected verb *vaknar* here is also of note, as is *askur* (bowl). Current limitations in automatic lemmatization of Icelandic (the term *huldufólk* itself, *inter alia,* is not labelled correctly) make it necessary to present the unlemmatized, inflected word-forms here. Despite these limitations, a lemmatized version provides further insight as shown in Figure 3:

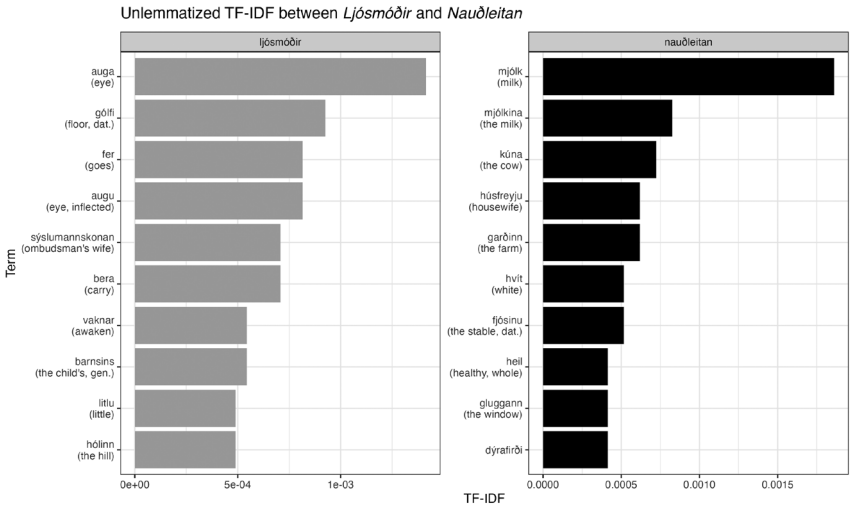

Figure 3.

Almqvist and Kirsi Kanerva have written excellent analyses respectively of the *ljósmóðir* stories and the role of eye damage in early Icelandic literature (Almqvist 2008:273–325; Kanerva 2013:7–36). The fantastical nature of the rewards and the slightly lower frequency of the dreaming motif may indicate a strong international tradition in which the narrative structure was more fixed: local storytellers had fewer reasons and opportunities to localize the narrative to reflect shifting societal concerns. In

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contrast, the requests and rewards of *nauðleitan* would have been commonplace in everyday life, tied to local food production or rooted in local landscape (indeed, the lemmatized TF-IDF indicates that these aid leg-

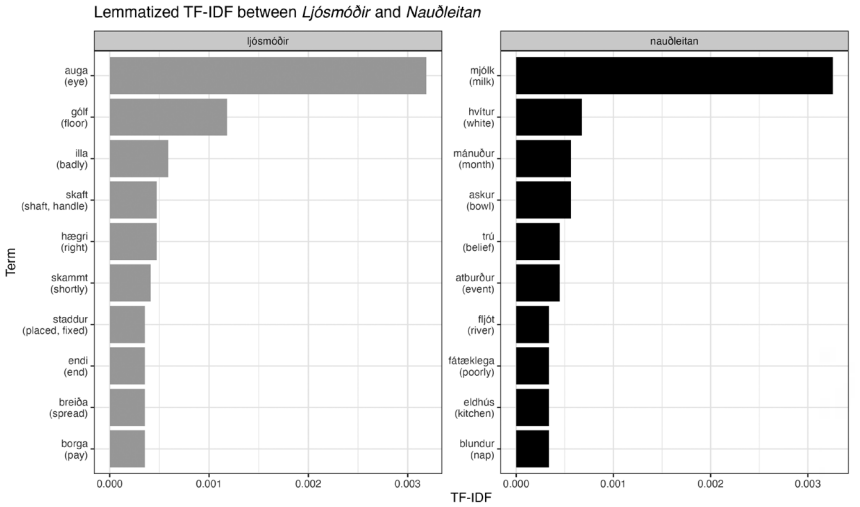

Figure 2.

ends are as strongly correlated with *mjólk* as the midwife legends are with *auga*). Although insecurity about food was by no means new to Iceland in the nineteenth century, the degree of agricultural strain was unprecedented. Even the material rewards are luxury goods of the sort that were now being imported into Iceland: fine cloth, tobacco, silver goods. Along with the relative lack of narrative constraints in comparison to the *ljósmóðir* corpus, this may indicate that these stories better reflect sociocultural anxieties of the time, as they are more grounded in nineteenth-century Icelandic lived experience of food scarcity. The increased emphasis on dreaming, a traditional Icelandic folkloric element, may further indicate the localized nature of these tales when compared to the *ljósmóðir* legends, although this is by a small margin, and may also be related to female storytelling (Magnúsdóttir 2023). This is not to say that the *ljósmóðir* stories lacked sociocultural meaning, nor that they were divorced from local landscapes. There was, after all, a reason why they were repeatedly told, into the twentieth century, and the stories continually feature the "midwife" venturing into the local landscape where the *huldufólk* dwell. Almqvist has explored potential reasons for the proliferation of these stories, highlighting potential anxieties in young women surrounding pregnancy and childbirth, concern over access to skilled midwives in rural communities, and the possible popularity of these legends amongst midwives themselves (Almqvist 2008:310–312). Although child mortal-

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ity declined sharply, anxieties surrounding childbirth remained, allowing for the continued transmission of these tales. The *huldufólk* here are linked to specific societal fears, though less localized to Iceland or to the nineteenth century, distancing them from the evolution of *huldufólk* from foreign Other to distinctly Icelandic. Given Almqvist's prior analysis, the remainder of this essay will focus on *nauðleitan*, although it refers to *ljósmóðir* for additional context.

Positive Interaction Legends

In the *nau*ðleitan legends, the most common pattern can be described as follows: the threat/disruption constitutes a request for either food or the means to create food, from an out-group. This carries with it the double threat of risking interaction with an out-group and the loss of one's own resources. The strategies are either acquiescence or refusal. The outcome for the former is mixed: sometimes there is no repayment, and the status quo is maintained. Sometimes there is some sort of material reward, or help. If the request is refused, misfortune follows, possibly involving the death of livestock or people (the sample size for refusals is very small, however). Such are the acts of a desperate, starving, possibly displaced out-group. The message is apparent: in a time of scarcity, those in need must be helped, despite their not being from one's own local community.

Icelandic society remained quite homogenous in the late nineteenth century, and so the identity of the out-group is not immediately apparent. One obvious possibility is foreign merchants, who began to visit the country in 1854. Some descriptions of the hidden folk, as here from a *ljósmóðir* legend, suggest this: "Here it is significant that hidden folk have connections with other lands and deal with their own kind's merchants who sail between lands and who buy and sell with others even though we cannot see them" (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, I:16–17). The emphasis on merchants travelling to other lands could reflect the British merchants who came to Iceland in the latter half of the nineteenth century (or the Danish merchants who held exclusive trading rights with Iceland before that). Some of the rewards received, such as the silver spoon and pound of tobacco, are essentially trade goods (Þorsteinn M. Jónsson 1964–1965, V:125–126). But this interpretation fits neither context nor pattern of exchange. Rather, spoon and tobacco are in exchange for fodder for a hidden-woman's livestock for the winter (Þorsteinn M. Jónsson 1964–1965, V:125–126). Nor do legends outside the "request-for-farm-resources" group fit the sort of exchange typical between Icelanders and foreign merchants. In one, Sveinbjörn Jónsson, a farmer from Ysta-Skáli, is asked

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(in a dream) to help an elf-woman ill with dysentery (Þórður Tómasson 1948–1951, III:112–113). In another memorate, the informant Margrét Árnadóttir tells of an ongoing friendship with a hidden-woman in Hreiður with whom she exchanges advice, favours, and coffee (Guðni Jónsson 1940–1957:145–147). These are neighbourly interactions, not the short-term exchange of trade goods.

Furthermore, the similarities between *huldufólk* and Icelanders are emphasized in the legends. In the following passage, the wife of a *sýslumaður* (an ombudsman) has just been granted the ability to see the *álfar*:

> It is said that there were great rocks and big boulders near Burstafell; the sysselman's wife saw now that this was indeed different than it seemed, and these were actually all sorts of dwellings, houses and a big village; it was completely full of people all behaving just like any other people, mowing and raking and tilling hayfields and meadows. It had bulls, sheep and horses and all went inside as other farmhands did, and likewise the people went with other people and did as they saw fit (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, I:15–16).

The *huldufólk,* although a dangerous out-group, are essentially Icelanders. When interpreted through the context of the macroscale, the hidden people resemble the out-groups from the late nineteenth century that would need farm resources or food, who could repay in the form of labour (or not repay the aid at all), and who are most similar to Icelanders albeit strangers, are either those on poor relief or those migrating internally. These were Icelanders, and so socio-culturally familiar, but strangers to the farm or region, in a nation where everyone was supposed to be tied to a farm. Before the population boom, internal migration was primarily tied to predictable patterns following seasonal work, but population growth jeopardized this predictability (Magnússon 2010:30). A series of governmental petitions and bills from 1859–87 grappled with the strain on the poor relief system, indicating towards contemporary anxieties (Karlsson 2000:230–232). The intense social stigma that accompanied being on poor relief (and thus receiving food/farm resources from others, an extra step away from land and independence) made the destitute an out-group within their own country. The elves in the *nauð*leitan huldufólks legend type are cast as those whose bonds to their local landscapes, seen so prominently in other *huldufólk* legends, have been severed, as they no longer provide sustenance.

This interpretation frames the exchanges in these legends as benevolent, and largely they are. They promote a prosocial and potentially one-sided exchange of resources in a society where a common reaction to the poor was to drive them away from one's *hreppur* (Magnússon 2010:27). Nevertheless, two undercurrents may highlight potential anxieties motivating the exchanges in the *nauðleitan* legends. The first is the negative

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outcomes when the resources are refused. There are only three instances of this within the *nauðleitan* legends, but there are several more within the *ljósmóðir* corpus, and nineteen legends overall overlap with *hefndir huldufólks*. These involve conflict surrounding land or resources: the stories that involve "elf-revenge" may indicate a fear of societal breakdown due to the strain on the traditional agricultural system. Secondly, the seven exchanges in which farm resources are exchanged for labour fold these Icelanders back into the traditional social order as essentially labourers-for-hire, reinforcing the conservative social order that primarily benefitted those 15–20% of Icelandic men who owned at least a small farm of their own (Karlsson 2000:261). The exchange of a set amount of farm resources for a set amount of work mirrors the annual contracts that these labourers were given (Magnússon 2010:23). Despite this, given the alternatives of expulsion or lack of aid, these legends encourage prosocial acceptance of those who had become untethered to their original locality by food-scarcity, bringing them back into communion with the local landscape.

The female-centric aspect of the 111 legends discussed can be partially explained by anxieties surrounding childbirth manifesting in the *ljósmóðir* stories, following Almqvist's rationalization (Almqvist 2008:310–312). That this tendency towards both female characters and female informants holds true for the *nauðleitan* legends (albeit to a slightly lesser extent) indicates that there is something more happening. It may instead have to do with narrative location: these tales involve the *huldufólk* coming to the farmstead rather than a human venturing to a wilderness or partially wild liminal setting, traditionally solely the domain of Icelandic men. Kirsten Hastrup observes that gender continually influenced both Icelandic spatiality and specifically food production, and perhaps in both *ljósmóðir* and *nauðleitan* legends, *huldufólk* venture to female-specific domains (1998:154–160), or, as Júlíana Þóra Magnúsdóttir suggests, already exist there, on the edges of the household (2023:170). Magnúsdóttir further identifies dreams as an especially prominent narrative feature in stories told by women, a factor previously discussed as especially prominent within the *nauðleitan* legends (2023:171). As demonstrated, both *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* and *nauðleitan huldufólks* legends were predominantly told by women. Perhaps a confluence of factors influenced this: narratives centred on the household, reproductive anxiety (for the *ljósmóðir* legends), narratives dealing with the distribution of food (in *nauðleitan huldufólks*), and featuring female supernatural characters, all possible signs of what Magnúsdóttir terms "women's narrative tradition" (2023:173).

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Negative Interaction Legends

These analyses of the positive interaction legends have been tested by comparison to 226 legends in *Sagnagrunnur* tagged *hefndir huldufólks* (hidden folk's revenge). I have excluded two for being prologue-like in nature. There are nineteen that overlap with either *nauðleitan* or *ljósmóðir*, as stories of failed potentially positive interaction. I have separated these into a distinct comparative corpus, resulting in 205 *hefndir* legends as one sub-corpus and 19 overlapping legends as another. When compared under the same categories as Table 1, one finds that there are marked gendered differences in *hefndir* compared to the combined positive-interaction corpus:

Data from *Sagnagrunnur*	*kona* (woman) - all inflections	*maður* (man) - all inflections	*hún* (she) - all inflections	*hann* (he) - all inflections
hefndir huldufólks (hidden-folk's revenges) (205 legends)	300 rel. freq. 9,279	219 rel. freq. 6,773	852 38.6% of sing. pron	1,353 61.4% of sing. pron
Stories that overlap (19 legends)	56 rel. freq. 16,204	40 rel. freq. 11,574	218 63.9% of sing. pron	123 36.1% of sing. pron

Table 3: Gender signifiers in comparative corpus, to be compared with Table 1.

The low frequency of *maður* is because men are often referred to by name (Eyjólfur, Jón á Stapi, etc.) or by profession in this body of legends. The relative prominence of male storytellers in *hefndir* relative to *nauðleitan* and *ljósmóðir* holds true in the (limited) storyteller data:

While indicative rather than precise, these data again suggest that negative-interaction legends (hidden folk's revenge) reflect the informant ratios found in *huldufólk* legends as a whole (see Table 2). Although female informants provide only 31.7% of the total legends on *Sagnagrunnur* (with tagged informants), they provide 43.6% and 43.5% of *huldufólk* legends and *hefndir huldufólks* respectively, indicating that while hidden-folk legends of all sorts were slightly more popular amongst female storytellers, prosocial-interaction legends (or potentially prosocial, in the case of the overlapping legends) were far more popular with them than *hefndir huldufólks* or others.

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Data from *Sagnagrunnur*	Total	Male	Female
hefndir huldufólks (hidden-folk's revenges) excluding overlap	131 out of 204	74 56.5%	57 43.5%
Overlapping legends	8 out of 19	4 50%	4 50%

Table 4: Informants by gender in comparative corpus, to be compared with Table 2.

The content of *hefndir* also seems to differ from that of *ljósmóðir* and *nauðleitan*. There is far less emphasis on resources and resource-management, with terms such as *mjólk* and *kýr* occurring less frequently, indicating that the revenge is not directly aimed at food production. Protagonists appear to be younger (and male): inflections of the terms *piltur* and *drengur* appear far more frequently, and *hefndir* legends emphasize youth through other phrases, for example, *var* á unga aldri ('was of young age') or *var á tólfta árinu* ('was twelve years-old'), and so on (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, I:78–79; Þorsteinn M. Jónsson 1964–1965, V:92–94).

Terms such as *steinn, klettur,* and *hóll* reflect narrative and location in *hefndir huldufólks,* indicating the common theme of a boy throwing stones at a hidden-folk dwelling, and demonstrating that these tales usually include humans going to *hólar* (hills) which hidden folk live in, rather than the reverse (although in *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* legends, landscape-features are also common, marking where the midwife goes to assist the birth). Other terms, such as *smali* (shepherd), *bóndi* (farmer), and *húsfreyja* (housewife), do not appear to follow a particularly strong pattern:

Due to the large size difference between corpora, considering relative frequency (raw frequency/total word count) may prove useful, as in Figure 4.

One can surmise from this that female storytellers might centre stories closer to the domestic sphere, as hidden folk come to the home to request aid, and that, while prosocial interactions may affect milk or livestock, antisocial interactions seem to affect these less often. Negative-interaction stories seem to have a particular interest in child protagonists, although female storytellers were still more likely to tell *hefndir huldufólks* legends than other, non-*huldufólk*-related legends (cf. Magnúsdóttir 2023). One can also assess this, as in Figure 5, via a lemmatized TF-IDF, to assess the relatively important terms when comparing the combined "aid" legends (*ljósmóðir* and *nauðleitan* together) to *hefndir huldufólks*:

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Term frequency:	Combined corpus (*ljós* + *nauð*); 111 legends 19,485 tw	*hefndir huldufólks*; 205 legends 32,332 tw	*ljósmóðir hjá álfum*; 61 legends 12,760 tw	*nauðleitan huldufólks*; 50 legends 6,725 tw	overlap (*hefndir* plus either *nauð* or *ljós*); 19 legends 3,456 tw
*mjólk** (milk)	57	18	4	53	6
kýr (cow)	45	39	11	34	6
smali (shepherd)	9	21	8	1	5
húsfreyja (housewife)	19	18	4	15	4
bóndi (farmer)	56	95	42	14	14
stúlka (girl)	66	77	54	12	17
piltur (young boy)	8	16	5	3	0
drengur (boy, lad)	13	77	10	3	1
steinn (stone)	20	103	13	7	0
hóll (hill)	40	91	34	6	10
klettur (cliff)	10	38	9	1	2

Table 5: Raw term frequencies across subgroups.

Verb and noun forms indicating aid stand out here, as well as *kaupstaður* and *garður* indicating sites for positive interactions, whilst *grjót, kasta* and *smali* witness the disturbance the (usually young) protagonist of the *hefndir* legends creates within the environment, and *hefna, hefnd,* suggest consequences. This analysis indicates conclusions similar to the more targeted relative word frequencies in Figure 3.

Word tallies can only indicate broad overviews and must be combined with close reading. A typical story from *hefndir* is as follows:

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A small boy on Dyrahólaey was very impudent and full of misbehaviour. The talk was that elves lived in the cliff on the island but the boy did not believe that. He poked at the cliff with a stick and relieved himself over the path on the cliffs where he thought there might be elves underneath. One time he did not come home and not a thread was found after much searching. Yet scraps of his intestines were found across the island. Clairvoyant

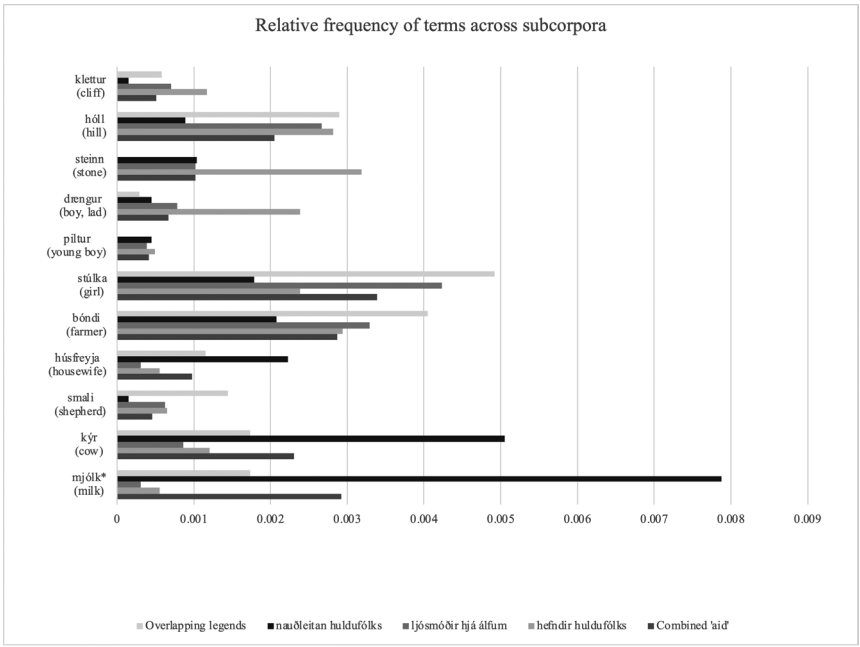

Figure 4.

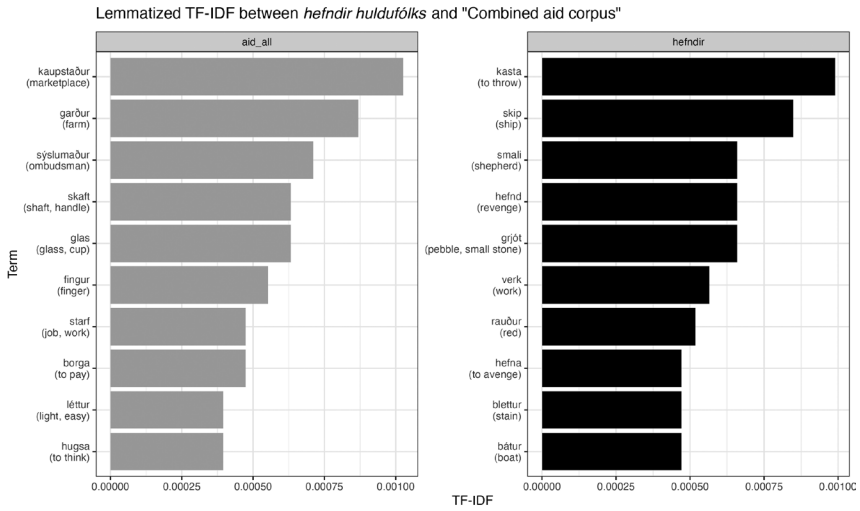

Figure 5.

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> men saw him above on the cliff and sometimes heard his cry on the land up there (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, III:59).

While there are other patterns here, as *hefndir* is quite a broad category, revenge for youthful folly seems to dominate this legend-type:

> There is a stone on Pétursey which folk believed that the hidden folk might be in and parents banned their children from playing near the stone. One boy did not obey and was always playing near the stone. The boy disappeared and could not be found. During the winter the farmer saw his son come into the barn twice in tattered clothes, and during the spring his skeleton was found next to the stone (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, III:60).

Although contemporaneous with the positive interaction legends, the chief concerns appear to be unrelated to food production and population growth, but instead perhaps reflect concerns about child mortality (or the destructive potential of children's naughtiness) and the dangers of the natural landscape. *Hefndir huldufólks* legends take place on the peripheries of farmsteads or just beyond them, further into wilderness landscapes. Child mortality decreased rapidly throughout the course of the nineteenth century, perhaps indicating that these legends originated from an eighteenth-century social context. Children frequently worked and played unsupervised, ranging beyond the farmstead, so perhaps adult audiences continued to find meaning in these legends. They may be didactic, teaching children to heed their parents' warnings and more broadly encouraging obedience to the older generation (or pre-existing customs), a social conservatism somewhat reminiscent of the prosocial legends. These stories involve the child venturing out of the farm landscape into wilder environs: going to where the *huldufólk* are, rather than the inverse, and they discourage disrespect of local landscapes. These differences in location, protagonist, and didactic tone contribute to a different narrative attitude towards hidden folk than that of *nauðleitan huldufólks:* here they are bound to, rather than displaced from, local landscapes, and represent different environmental and developmental fears.

The legends that overlap between *nauðleitan* or *ljósmóðir* and *hefndir huldufólks* have a more similar profile to the former two categories regarding pronoun- and storyteller-gender as well as content keywords, suggesting that they conform more the narrative lens of the prosocial-interaction legends (a prosocial interaction gone wrong) than the purely antisocial *hefndir huldufólks* legends. The *huldufólk* as representative of the internal migration of displaced, poverty-stricken Icelanders in the mid-nineteenth century only holds true for the prosocial stories, and specifically *nauðleitan huldufólks,* and the *huldufólk* remain representative of fears surrounding dangers inherent in landscape, although both repre-

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sent the potential for danger from without the homestead (see aforementioned consequences of not rendering aid to the *huldufólk*).

The *Huldufólk* as Icelandic Out-group

The (relatively small) quantitative analysis facilitated by *Voyant* allowed me to highlight associations with gender, landscape, and recurring features of these legend types (such as milk), while close reading identified narrative trends within *strategy* and *outcome*. These, placed within the larger context of societal change, illuminate nineteenth-century counterparts to twenty-first-century depictions of humans aiding distressed elves. The identification of the *huldufólk* with the rural poor within the *nauðleitan* legends points forward to the twentieth-century view of *álfar* as "like Icelanders from two or three centuries back" (Hall 2014:9; Hafstein 2000:95). Modern *álfar* still subsist on the livestock-herding that dominated the old Icelandic agricultural societal model (Hafstein 2000:95). The negative interactions in *hefndir huldufólks* appear to lack this association between *huldufólk* and rural agriculture, with less emphasis on indicators such as *mjólk* or *kýr* (see Table 5), but place more emphasis on *hólar, steinar,* and other *huldufólk* habitats. They are more directly tied to landscape than to *huldufólk*-human similarities and food production. The negative-interaction stories lack the twentieth- and twenty-first-century identification of *huldufólk* as quintessentially Icelandic, and thus as people to be aided. The negative-interaction stories instead may reflect general anxieties surrounding child mortality or danger associated with wilderness. The legends in my main corpus mirror the modern pattern of Icelanders helping the elves, even if twentieth- and twenty-first-century aid consists of preventing urbanization rather than sharing resources, that is, preventing the separation from a local landscape rather than aiding the victims of prior displacement (Hafstein 2000:99). Valdimar Hafstein sees the dichotomy as reversed: the agents of modernity now represent the Other (2000:101). This need not be the case. As Hafstein himself notes, the rural population went from 87% to 8% of the total during the period 1890–1990 (Hafstein 2000:95; *Hagskinna: Sögulegar hagtölur um Ísland* 1997:Tafla 2.7). The association of the *álfar* with the rural poor identified here may have broadened during the twentieth century to encompass the rural population in its entirety during this urban demographic shift. Rural living became far less common and increasingly both idealized and othered, just as *huldufólk* were to be temporally distanced from modern Icelanders. Hastrup's characterization of the farming community's semantic importance to "Icelandicness", despite the rapid decline of the urban population (1998:46), mirrors Hafstein's observations of the *huldufólk* in the

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contemporary Icelandic cultural consciousness (2000:95). Farming communities were symbolic of quintessential Icelandicness but had become increasingly remote from the everyday life of many Icelanders, just as the elves had become. Further research might examine the 77 legends tagged as *verðlaun huldufólks* (hidden folk's rewards) to see if they conform to the patterns identified in my corpus of positive-interaction legends, as well as involve a more rigorous temporal dimension to assess precisely how these trends evolved over this period.

There is a strong association with both female informants and female characters in the positive-interaction stories, suggesting these stories existed primarily within a female storytelling tradition, but less so in negative-interaction legends such as those of *hefndir huldufólks,* indicating a preference for positive-interactions within female storytelling. The legends in *nauðleitan huldufólks* and *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* had relatively stronger focus on food production, livestock, and childbirth, indicating higher emphasis on these topics, both within female storytelling and specifically within positive-interaction *huldufólk* legends compared to negative-interaction *huldufólk* legends.

The *nauðleitan* legends, and to a lesser extent those of the *ljósmóðir* corpus, thus reflect anxieties surrounding the population boom and resulting displacement within Iceland from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. They, like *huldufólk* legends of the late twentieth century, provided a discursive means to come to terms with (or resist) societal change and navigate changing cultural relationships to landscape. The pattern of exchange across the corpus encourages assisting out-groups, whether with medical needs such as childbirth, or in the sharing of resources in a rural setting where this was crucial to survival. The assistance rendered may have a socially conservative element that reinscribes the old agricultural societal model, re-placing the displaced poor.

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[1] This article grew out of ideas initially developed in PhD coursework at UC Berkeley, where I am working on developing theories of early narrative, emphasizing Old Norse literature and Icelandic folklore. Earlier drafts of this paper have been presented at SASS. I am grateful to Timothy Tangherlini and Kate Heslop for their comments on these earlier drafts, as well to as the referees and editors of Arv for their helpful suggestions. That said, all mistakes and infelicities in the manuscript are my own.

[2] For further information on Sagnagrunnur, see Terry Gunnell's account of the database's early days (2010); or alternatively visit the current iteration of the database at ismus.is/tjodfraedi/sagnir/.

[3] This does not mean that this sort of analysis cannot be done with Icelandic material, and one may look to Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir (2015) and Júlíana Þóra Magnúsdóttir (2021) for such work.

[4] Potential avoidance of the term álfar is akin to the early-modern taboo against speaking the devil's name (cf. Woods 1959:76–77), and the subsequent proliferation of euphemisms for the devil (cf. Valk, 2001:45).

[5] For examples, see Henning Feilberg (1910:69–84).

[6] This corpus is composed of legends from: Árngrímur Fr. Bjarnason (1954; 1959); Bjarni Harðarson (2011); Einar Guðmundsson (1932); Guðni Jónsson (1940–1957); Helgi Guðmundsson and Árngrímur Fr. Bjarnason (1933-1946); Huld: Sagn alþýðlegra fræða íslenzkra, (1935–1936); Ingólfur Jónsson (1974); Jón Árnason (1954–1961); Jón Þorkelsson (1956); Magnús Bjarnason (1950); Oddur Björnsson (1977); Ólafur Davíðsson (1978-1980); Rauðskinna hin nýrri, vol. 1. (1962); Sigfús Sigfússon (1982-1993); Sigurður Nordal and Þórbergur Þórðarson (1962); Torfhildur Þorsteinsdóttir (1962); Þorsteinn Erlingsson (1954); Þorsteinn M. Jónsson (1964–1965); hereafter simply "Combined Corpus".

[7] I have included here raw word counts and total words, so that readers may calculate relative word frequencies should they wish.

[8] It must be noted that, due to Icelandic grammatical structure, this pronoun analysis may be taken as indicative of larger difference, but does not stand alone as evidence of gender

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disparity.

[9] "Þorbjörg Þorláksdóttir var eitt sinn að þvo þvott í læk við bæinn Teig, er til hennar kemur ókunnugur maður og biður hana um að hjálpa konu sinni er ekki gat fætt. Hún fer með honum upp túnið og sér hún þá umhverfið breytast og lítinn torfbæ, sem hún hafði aldrei séð fyrr. Hún gekk inn með manninum og sá þar konu á gólfi og tvær aðrar yfir henni. Hún fór höndum um konuna og fæddi hún þá. Bauð maðurinn henni graut, en þekktist hún ekki boðið. Þá fylgdi hann henni heim og launaði henni með fagurri silkisamfellu sem lengi var til meðal afkomenda hennar. Einnig lagði hann það á, að hún yrði heppin yfirsetukona." All translations are my own.

[10] "Foreldrar sögumanns fluttu frá Hlöðuvík til Hælavíkur vorið 1884 með lítinn bústofn eftir mikil harðindaár. Fært var frá fáeinum ám en kvíaær á Ströndum mjólkuðu venjulega vel. Kvöld eitt var því líkast sem tvær ærnar væru þurr-mjólkaðar þegar þeim var smalað. Um nóttina dreymdi húsmóðurina konu sem sagðist hafa mjólkað ærnar því sig hefði sárvantað mjólk handa ungbarni. Vonaðist hún til að þurfa mjólkina ekki lengur en hálfan mánuð. Að þeim tíma liðnum dreymdi húsfreyju aftur konuna sem þakkaði fyrir og sagðist að launum skyldi líta til með búsmala þeirra hjóna og bað þeim blessunar. Var margt sem vel gekk í Hælavík þakkað álfkonunni eftir þetta."

[11] For example, in "Huldukonan í Miðdal" the protagonist Valgerður awakens as an unknown woman comes into her room, leaving vaknaði ambiguous: has she really awakened (Guðni Jónsson 1940-1957, II:2)?

[12] A TF-IDF (Term Frequency – Inverse Document Frequency) chart takes each word in a text and measures how important each word is to that text, or in this case, body of texts, when compared to another corpus or multiple other corpora: words frequently used in one corpus, but rarely in the other(s) score higher. TF-IDF calculates the word frequency (how common a word is to a single corpus) and multiplies it by the inverse document frequency (how rare a word is across the compared corpora). This is the most common method to parse texts in digital library search engines (Beel et al., 2016).

[13] This choice is not without precedent, see: Sigurður Ingibergur Björnsson, Steingrímur Páll Kárason and Jón Karl Helgason (2021). The word-counts and word-frequencies in Fig. 1, Table 5, and Fig. 4 were lemmatized individually.

[14] For further examination of dreaming in Icelandic folklore, see Gabriel Turville-Petre (1958).

[15] "Hér af er merkjandi að huldufólk hefur aðdrætti frá öðrum löndum og höndlun við síns slektis kaupmenn sem sigla á milli landa og höndla so saman hvörjir við aðra þó við sjáum þá ekki."

[16] "Er svo sagt að nálægt Burstafelli séu klappir miklar og björg stór; sá nú sýslu-mannskonan að þetta var raunar öðruvísi en sýndist og þetta voru í raun allt bæir, hús og þorp stór; var það allt fullt af fólki sem hafði allt atferli sem annað fólk, sló og rakaði og yrkti tún og engjar. Það átti naut, sauði og hesta og allt gekk innan um annan búsmala; og eins gekk fólkið með öðru fólki og vann það sem því sýndist."

[17] Other huldufólk legend types also involve movement through landscapes, for example, in stories of hidden-folk trouping during Christmas or New Year's night. This may have facilitated the identification of huldufólk with migration, but these stories are more closely tied to landscape features, similar to the later discussion of hefndir huldufólks. For an example of this type of legend, see: "Flutningur álfa og helgihald" (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, I:120).

[18] Both are tagged on Sagnagrunnur, but "Enn af háttum huldufólks" is a prologue-like commentary on huldufólk legends (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, III:6), the other, "Inngangur að 2. grein K. – Álagablettir", is also an inserted prologue (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, I:463).

[19] Lemmatization is the reduction of each word to its dictionary form. For an explanation of TF-IDF as a methodology, see note 12, and for a discussion of the use of TF-IDF methodol-

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ogies in an Icelandic context, see Sigurður Ingibergur Björns-son, Steingrímur Páll Kárason, and Jón Karl Helgason (2021).

[20] "Smaladrengur í Dyrahólaey var mjög ósvífinn og látæðisfullur. Talið var að álfar byggju í klettum í eynni en strákur var ekki trúaðar á það. Hann pjakkaði með stafnum í klettana, 'brá brókum' yfir gati sem þar var á klettunum af því hann hann hélt að þar væru álfar undir. Eitt skipti kom hann ekki heim og fannst ekki þrátt fyrir mikla leit. Þó fundust úr honum garnirnar í slitrum um eyna. Skyggnir menn sáu til hans yfir holunni og stundum heyrðust óð hans á land upp."

[21] "Í Pétursey er steinn sem fólk trúði að huldufólk væri í og bönnuðu foreldrar börnum sínum að leika sér við steininn. Einn drengur hlýddi þó ekki og var alltaf að leika sér nálægt steininum. Drengurinn hvarf og fannst ekki. Um veturinn sá bóndi son sinn koma inn í fjósið tvisvar sinnum tötralega klæddan og um vorið fannst beinagrind hans hjá steininum."

[22] On the decrease of child mortality, see: Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon (2010:30); on eighteenth-century Icelandic mortality rates, see: Gunnar Karlsson (2000:177–181).

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