Defining the Human
Skin, Shapeshifting, and Sin

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Introduction

This article focuses on depictions of skin(s) – fleshy objects used to cover the human body that are representative of a state of being or a specific identity. In contrast to the traditional interpretation, connecting skin-wearing with mythological or shamanistic shapeshifting, I connect the literary use of skins donned by monstrous figures in the Old Icelandic corpus to the animal skin garments that were fashioned for Adam and Eve after their expulsion from Paradise. This important detail of the protoplasts' new clothing within the widely-disseminated story of the fall of man has been overlooked as a literary topic of any substance in the field of Old Norse-Icelandic literature, although it has recently received attention in neighboring fields,[1] underlining its wider literary importance in the Middle Ages. The allegorical meaning attached to the garments by Late Antique and medieval theologians – that of shame and animality – provides a fruitful avenue through which to interpret further depictions of humans in animal skins in Old Icelandic literature. This symbolism surrounding the human-in-animal allows for a reading of a human-animal hybridity, while also underlining the negative connotations that come with bestial behavior, thus distinguishing man from beast. Non-human behavior and appearance can be tied to the corruption of humanity as a result of original sin.

[1] Two of the most influential works in neighboring medieval area studies are Salisbury (1994) and McCracken (2017).

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These reflections clarify the task of defining what *is not* or *should not* be the paragon of humanity.

This study focuses on two examples. The first is the trolls of the *Hrafnistumannasögur*. There are four sagas in total, *Ketils saga hængs*, *Gríms saga loðinkinna*, *Örvar-Odds saga*, and *Áns saga bogsveigis*. Each saga presents (a) troll-ish figure(s) wearing animal skin clothing, using the same terminology for the clothing that is used to describe Adam and Eve's garments in Old Norse-Icelandic biblical and exegetical texts.[2] The second focus of this study is on later medieval depictions of humans donning an animal skin in order to "turn" into wolves (were-wolves, if you must), stories that provide fertile material with which to interpret the Christian rhetoric of the animality of humans after the fall of man. These depictions are found in medieval Romance or sagas from nearby genres that are heavily influenced by the Romance genre, such as *Völsunga saga*, *Ála flekks saga*, *Tíodels saga*, and Marie de France's *Strengleikar*. The were-wolf and the troll are a critical pair to view together, for while at first they might seem rather different, the troll often showcases wolfish qualities (Su 2022: 49) and both figures represent uncanny representations of the human: "whereas the wolf is a human being who comes a bit too close to monstrosity, the troll is a monster with disturbing traces of humanity" (Su 2024: 118). These two examples of skin-wearing represent a medieval Icelandic mindset that grapples with the separation of humans from other animals, what that means, what the consequences of crossing over from humanity to animality are, and finally, how to define the human by identifying the animal.

Skin: *kyrtill*, *stakkr*, and *hamr*

First a note on terminology. The terms used to describe Adam and Eve's garments, as well as the trolls' garments in the *Hrafnistumannasögur*, are the nouns *skinn-kyrtill* and *-stakkr*, which are found throughout the Old Icelandic corpus. In her study of clothing in the *Íslendinga sögur*, Anita Sauckel (2014: 91–96) shows that those who practice magic are often depicted wearing animal skins or pelts, of which both *skinnkyrtill* and *skinnstakkr* are employed. She emphasizes that the clothing is a reflection of the character's traits – such as that they are pagan, have a poor standing in society, or are generally of bad character, and of course, their ability to perform magic. Additionally,

[2] *Áns saga* does not present a specific character in an animal skin but rather refers to trolls as those who wear animal skins.

she shows that *skinnstakkr* specifically was usually worn by those who were considered part of the lower classes of society (Sauckel 2014: 49–54).

Matteo Tarsi (2016: 89) notes that *kyrtill* was a liturgical term borrowed into Old Icelandic from Old English in the 11th century, although the term does not appear in dictionaries as being used as a word for liturgical vestments in the Old Icelandic corpus. At the very least, his observation indicates that the noun was one that was used within the Church, which exemplifies its use in the biblically-inspired stories of Adam and Eve. *Kyrtill* comes from the Old English *cyrtel*, 'A kirtle, vest, garment, frock, coat' (Bosworth 1921: 190). This noun is thought to be derived from the Latin *curtus*, 'short, mutilated, broken' (Lewis & Short 1969: 504). *Stakkr*, on the other hand, appears to be of Nordic origin and indicates a short garment. de Vries (1962: 542) gives *kyrtill* as a synonym.

The noun *hamr* is a term used to denote the skin which a human puts on in order to "change" into an animal. Additionally, it is used to refer to the sheddable skin of an animal, as it appears in *Stjórn I*, when the reader is told that a snake sheds its *hamr* in the winter (Astås 2009a: 147).[3] Novotná (2024: 100) defines *hamr* as "an outer surface, which is separable from the protagonist, and can be removed without change of his or her essence. Transformation of *hamr* is then merely the donning of an outer layer, not a transformation of the entire being."[4] The were-wolf, a man who puts on a *hamr*, is the focus in this study, but this imagery has been considered just one version of a man turning into wolf, what is often referred to as the 'later' or 'foreign' variant.[5] Knight (2020: 28) points out that instances of shape-shifting that are 'foreign' are often dismissed as not as important as 'native'

[3] This instance is also a translation, specifically from Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*, where *exuvias corporis* is found.

[4] Novotná (2024: 100) argues that this definition only applies to foreign-influenced texts, in contrast to "Old Norse transformations of *hamr*", which she claims portrays a full transformation of soul and body. Ármann Jakobsson (2023: 6) does not address any different categories, but basing his study only on *Ynglinga saga*, *Hrólfs saga kraka*, *Eyrbyggja saga*, and *Njáls saga*, claims that "Even though the contemporary Icelandic word *hamur* would seem to signify the body and its skin rather than the mind and its thoughts, the medieval Icelandic usage of the word *hamr* often indicates that it signifies the mind no less than the skin, or perhaps that these are not easily distinguished. This is potentially unwelcome news for modern scholars asking the question of whether medieval Icelanders believed a human could fully transform into a beast or not."

[5] The "earlier" or "Old Norse" variant includes full transformation (mind and body), where the transformation itself is depicted in various ways; whereas the "later" or "foreign" variant includes a skin that must be put on in order to shapeshift. See Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir (2007) and Novotná (2024: 97).

ones, considered simply of continental or Celtic influence. While this distinction might be important for understanding the history of scholarship within the corpus, I maintain that all instances of shapeshifting are foreign and heavily influenced by Christian literature and thought. Rather than focusing on which stories are inherently Norse and which are imported, however, I prefer to look at manuscript transmission.[6] The oldest extant manuscript containing *hamr* in prose is that of De la Gardie 4–7, a Norwegian manuscript from *c.* 1270 which contains the oldest translations of courtly literature.[7] The text in which the term appears is the *Strengleikar* translated from Marie de France's *lais*. As might be expected, *hamr* is used in this text to describe the skin Bisclavret puts on when he "becomes" a werewolf.[8] The term itself is related to the body word *líkhamr* (lit. "body-shape" or "body-skin"), often seen in texts as *líkamr*. Like *stakkr* and *kyrtill*, it is a clothing-related word. Its cognates in the Germanic languages all refer to a type of body covering (cf. Old English *ham* "undergarment"; Middle Low German *ham* "cloak, hide, blanket"; and Middle High German *ham* "cloak, skin, net" (Clark Hall 1960: 168; de Vries 1962: 208).[9]

Adam and Eve's Garments

The biblical story of Adam and Eve is extant in Old Norse-Icelandic in the fourteenth-century biblical compilation now called *Stjórn I*. While *Stjórn I* does show influence from the *Vulgate*, this foundational Latin Bible translation was not the single source for the Old-Norse Icelandic biblical text, and the documentation of the story of Adam and Eve's garments reflects this. The verse that describes the skins is Genesis 3:21, which reads as follows in the *Vulgate*:

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[6] Gwendolyne Knight (2020: 42) advocates for a similar approach: "Trying to separate the 'native' from the 'new' traditions hardly holds water, but pointing out the peculiarities as well as the unifying features of individual narratives has the potential to reveal vital cultural and literary insights."

[7] The word appears in poetry preserved around the same time, for example in Codex Regius, *Vǫluspá* verse 39. Here I am concerned more with the date of preservation of the physical manuscript rather than the assumed (older) date of said poem.

[8] While the noun shows up in pre-Christian poetry, I am mainly concerned in this study with how Christian scribes use the term to describe animal skins and their effect on humans.

[9] However, in the wider Old Norse context, Novotná (2024: 141–201) shows that the root *-hamr* can take on a wide variety of meanings. In the appendix to her 2024 volume, she includes every textual instance where the root *-hamr* appears. Additional overviews of the use of *hamr* are provided in Knight (2020: 32–33) and Novotná (2024: 55–59).

> Fecit quoque Dominus Deus Adam et uxori eius tunicas pellicias et induit eos (Edgar 2010: 16).
>
> And the Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of skins, and clothed them (Edgar 2010: 17).

The adjective used here to describe the garments is *pellicius* which means generically 'made of skin' (Lewis & Short 1969: 1325) and is therefore not specific as to whether the skin is that of human or animal. This ambiguity likely fed the interpretation of the skins as human bodies. Appropriately, some Classical and medieval commentary, and all Modern Bible translations, explain that the passage refers to God giving the protoplasts a physical body, that is, their own human skin in place of an angelic or heavenly body, rather than animal pelts to cover themselves.[10]

In contrast, the *Historia Scholastica*, an incredibly popular source for medieval vernacular biblical exegesis, specifies that the garments were of animal skins and even gives further interpretation as to the meaning of them:

> Fecitque Deus Ade et uxori eius tunicas pelliceas, id est de pellibus mortuorum animalium, ut signum sue mortalitatis secum ferrent, et ait: Ecce Adam factus est quasi unus ex nobis. Ironia est, quasi uoluit esse ut Deus, sed in euidenti est modo quia non est. (Sylwan 2005: 45).
>
> And God made tunics of skin for Adam and his wife, that is, out of the skin of dead animals, so that they should carry a sign of their mortality with them, and said: "See Adam is made like one of us." This is irony, for he wanted to be like God, but now it is clear that he is not.[11]

It should not come as a surprise that the more interpretive *Historia* version of Genesis 3:21 is found more prevalently than that of the *Vulgate* in medieval Icelandic texts, for the *Historia* was one of the most common sources for pre-Reformation biblical material. Morey (1993: 8–9) points out that there are thirteenth-century translations of the *Historia* into Saxon (c. 1248), Dutch (c. 1271), Old French (c. 1295), Castilian (1221–1284), as well as fourteenth-century Catalan and Portuguese translations. This is in line with *c.* fourteenth-century compilation/adaptation of *Stjórn I*. This interpretation

[10] For example, "Early Jewish and Christian commentators identify these *tunicas pellicias* metaphorically, as skin-like garments or as human skin, that is, as humanity: to be clothed in skin is to shed the garments of glory worn in Paradise and to become human and mortal. Some commentators understood the garments of skin more literally, as animal skins or clothes made from animal skins." (McCracken 2017: 16).

[11] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

underlines that the giving and/or wearing of the skins indicates a divergence from the protoplasts reflecting the image of God.

Equally important and perhaps the most detailed exegesis of the skins is that of Augustine, whose texts were also used extensively in the compilation of *Stjórn I*.[12] In his *De Genesi contra Manicheos*, Augustine discusses the significance and meaning of the skins in great length, interpreting that the skins (or here, tunics) are representative of the protoplasts' mortality. He goes further to say that their own human skin concealed their lying hearts and thoughts; this is when his exegesis begins to sound as if he is suggesting the skins that were given were human bodies. He leaves his allegory behind, however, and specifies at the end of the passage that the skins were made from cattle, putting Adam and Eve on par with "monstrous beasts."

> Nam illa mors, quam omnes qui ex Adam nati sumus coepimus debere naturae, quam minatus est deus, cum praeceptum daret ne fructus ille arboris ederetur, – illa ergo mors in tunicis pelliciis figurata est. Ipsi enim sibi fecerunt praecinctoria de foliis fici, et deus illis fecit tunicas pellicias, id est ipsi appetiverunt mentiendi libidinem relicta facie veritatis, et deus corpora eorum in istam mortalitatem carnis mutavit, ubi latent corda mendacia.
>
> Neque enim in illis corporibus caelestibus sic latere posse cogitationes credendum est, quemadmodum in his corporibus latent; sed sicut nonnulli motus animorum apparent in vultu et maxime in oculis, sic in illa perspicuitate ac simplicitate caelestium corporum omnes omnino animi motus latere non arbitror. Itaque illi merebuntur habitationem illam et commutationem in angelicam formam, qui etiam in hac vita, cum possint sub tunicis pelliciis occultare mendacia, oderunt ea tamen et cavent flagrantissimo amore veritatis et hoc solum tegunt, quod hi qui audiunt ferre non possunt, sed nulla mentiuntur. Veniet enim tempus, ut nihil etiam contegatur: *nihil est enim occultum quod non manifestabitur*.
>
> Tamdiu autem in paradiso fuerunt isti, quamvis iam sub sententia damnantis dei, donec ventum esset ad pellicias tunicas, id est ad huius vitae mortalitatem. Quo enim maiore indicio potuit significari mors, quam sentimus in corpore, quam pellibus, quoniam mortuis pecoribus detrahi solent? Ita cum contra praeceptum non imitatione legitima, sed illicita superbia deus esse appetit homo, usque ad beluarum mortalitatem deiectus est. (Weber 1998: 154–156).

> This death, you see, which all of us who are born of Adam have owed to nature from the start, and with which God threatened Adam when he gave the command that the fruit of that tree was not to be eaten, so then this death is presented under the figure of the skin tunics. They themselves, you see, had made aprons

[12] Within the text itself, this is evident by the continual note of "Ágústínus segir ..."; additionally Astås' (2009a) edition provides abundant references to the text, indicating which parts of *Stjórn I* were taken from which of Augustine's works.

> out of fig-leaves for themselves, and God made them tunics of skin; that is, they set their hearts on the pleasures of lying after turning their backs on the face of Truth, and God changed their bodies into this mortal flesh, in which lying hearts are concealed.
>
> It is not to be supposed, after all, that thoughts can remain hidden in celestial bodies in the same way as they do in these present bodies of ours; but just as some at least of our inner thoughts and feelings are revealed by the expression on our faces, and especially by our eyes, so I am convinced that in a similar way no feelings and thoughts of the spirit whatsoever are concealed in the transparent simplicity of heavenly bodies. And so such a dwelling place and such a change into angelic form will be earned by those people who even in this life, when it has been possible for them to conceal lies under tunics of skin, have still hated and avoided such falsehood out of a most ardent love of truth, and who only keep covered up what their listeners are unable to bear, but lies they never tell at all. The time will come, you see, when nothing will be covered up; *for nothing is hidden which will not be made manifest* (Luke 12:2).
>
> But these two continued to remain in Paradise, even though now under the sentence of God's condemnation, until it came to the tunics of skin, that is, to the mortal condition of this life. What more effective indication, after all, can be given of the death, which we are aware of in the body, than skins which are flayed as a rule from dead cattle? And so when the man went against the commandment and sought to be God, not by lawful imitation but by unlawful pride, he was cast down into the mortal condition of monstrous beasts. (Rotelle 2002: 92–93).

Similarly, in book 13 of his *Confessions*, Augustine reiterates the mortality which the skins represent: "And you know, Lord, you know how you have clothed humanity in skins when – by reason of their sin – they became subject to death."[13] Augustine's stance is thus: The prelapsarian form of Adam was made in God's image; the new sinful human covered in clothing (that of an animal) does not reflect God's image. Kay (2017) elaborates on this foundational perspective:

> Because they come from dead animals, the tunics of skin fittingly represent the mortality with which God punished the first couple's sin. Additionally, they imply that sin *animalizes* the human being. Augustine understood the statement that human beings were created in the image of God as marking their difference from other animals, which lacked likeness to their creator. The garments made from animal skin symbolize how far human beings, through sin, have fallen away from this privileged resemblance to God into the dissimilitude from him of the beasts. On the other hand, the fact that the effects of sin can be represented as

[13] "Et tu scis, domine, tu scis, quemadmodum pellibus indueris homines, cum peccato mortals fierent." (Hammond 2016: 362–363).

> donning a garment means that, like a garment, they can also be taken off, laid aside, and replaced with another (Kay 2017: 43).

The tradition that was received in Old Icelandic texts is reflective of the Augustinian interpretation and that found in the *Historia Scholastica*, which specifies that the skins Adam and Eve were given were *animal* skins from God to cover themselves after they sinned. This is contrastive to the Vulgatian exegesis, that Adam and Eve did not have physical bodies before the Fall. The animal skin both defines what humans are against something they should not be (animalistic), but also unsettles the boundary between human/animal in that it brings to light that which humans *are* in their current postlapsarian state of being. The only theological way to remedy this is through salvation. Both the *Historia* and Augustine's works were well known in medieval Iceland and both undoubtedly had a strong impact on how the story of the garments was interpreted in Icelandic texts.[14] The *Historia* emphasizes the mortality the skins represent, while Augustine goes further to emphasize both the mortality and *animality* that the skins represent.

In his edition of *Stjórn*, Reidar Astås (2009b: 59) records in his marginal notes that the source for the interpretation of Genesis 3:21 in *Stjórn I* is the *Scholastica Historia* (25,2–4 and 7), which reads as follows:

> let guð drottín*n*, þa f*yrer* englan*n*a þionostu kyrtla af dauðra kuikenda skin*n*um ve*r*ða giǫrfa adam ok eue synandi þ*ei*m s*ua* mark sialfra þ*ei*ra dauðleiks.[15]
>
> The Lord God had shirts of skins of dead living beings made for Adam and Eve by means of the service of angels, showing them [Adam and Eve] in this way a sign of their own mortality.

Kvikendi refers only to a living being; it could refer to either animal or human ('a living creature') (Cleasby & Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1957: 364). Yet the mention of shirts, *kyrtla* (acc. pl.), and the adjective *dauðra* ('dead', gen. pl.) underlines that this does not indicate the giving of human bodies but rather something to put on the body, likely that of a dead animal. The Palm Sunday sermon that immediately follows this passage specifies further, however, that the scribe believes the *kyrtlar* in the biblical passage are in fact

[14] In addition to the plentiful references within the text of *Stjórn I*, the impact of the *Historia* in medieval Iceland is overviewed in Wolf (1991).

[15] Cf. Astås (2009b: 58–59). This line appears in the manuscripts AM 226 fol. 9ra lines 21–23 and AM 227 fol. 9ra lines 9–12. Astås indicates there is no notable variations in this verse. All quotes from *Stjórn* are represented exactly as they appear in Astås' edition. Italics represent expansions of suspensions, contractions, and truncations.

animal skins, as the term *hárklæði* ('hair-shirt') is used indicating an animal pelt, again underlining the mortality the skins typify:

> h*er*filigt hærkleði gefr h*on* (kirkjan) þ*ei*m [stórglœpamǫnnum] i m*er*kíng fýr sagðra skinn kỳrtla (Astås 2009b: 59).
>
> A wretched hairshirt she [the Church] gave them [sinners] as a sign of the aforementioned skin shirts.

Despite the importance of *Stjórn* in the dissemination of biblical material, the extant manuscripts are rather late, the earliest copy of *Stjórn I* dating to c. 1350. Interestingly, there were several other Old Norse-Icelandic texts that pre-date the *Stjórn* manuscripts that discuss the garments of Adam and Eve. One example, from *Konungs skuggsjá*, as is found in the manuscript AM 243 b α fol., 54v, offers a c. 1275, albeit similar, interpretation of the meaning of the skins. The story of the fall of Adam and Eve is contained in a chapter concerning verdicts and penalties that is meant to demonstrate how mercy should be practiced in justice, using Adam and Eve as examples.

> Ðvi næst gaf guð þeim Adami oc Eyvo skinnkyrtla oc mællti við þau. Mæðr þvi at þit skamþuz noctra lima þa hylit yccr nu mæðr starfs ismottum oc uglæðis klæðum oc farit nu aviðatto iarðar mæðr annsamligho starfi oc leitit yccr fœzlo. (Holm-Olsen 1945: 83).
>
> Thereafter God gave Adam and Eve coats of skin and said to them: "Since you are ashamed of your naked limbs, cover yourselves now with the garments of travail and sorrow and fare forth into the wide fields to find your food with irksome toil [...]" (Larson 1917: 27).

In this exegesis, there is an emphasis on the skins as covers for their nakedness. The use of the verb *at hylja* ('to cover, hide') indicates an external cover to the body, since it is their naked private parts ('limbs', *lima* gen. pl.) that should be covered. The garments then exist because of their sin, as the need to cover their nakedness came only after their disobedience and resulting awareness of their unclothed parts; the garments thus physically represent the reason they must leave Paradise. Larson's translation does not fully encapsulate the meaning of the original: *í-smótt* is a 'cloak with a hole for the head to pass through' indicating a specific type of clothing that is *starfs*, 'of trouble/labor' (i.e. travail), and then a synonymic parallel, *uglæðis klæðum* (normalized to *ógleðis-klæði*), 'a mourning dress' (i.e. sorrow). (Cleasby & Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1957)

The garments are "sorrowful" garments because they represent the protoplasts' new animality. Just after they eat of the apple and directly before they

receive the tunics, Adam and Eve compare themselves to animals, realizing that unlike themselves, animals are covered with fur or feathers, and recognize that they, too, now need this same covering for their nakedness.

> Þa kunnu þau þægar at skammazt nocðra lima þar sæm þau sa fugla licami hulða væra mæðr fiaðrum en dyra licami mæð hari en þau sa sialfra sinna licami necta væra. oc skamðuz þau þæss mioc. (Holm-Olsen 1945: 81).
>
> For immediately they were ashamed of their naked limbs, since they saw that the bodies of the birds were covered with feathers and those of the beasts with hair, while their own bodies were naked, and they were much ashamed of that. (Larson 1917: 266).

The skins offer the reader the common typology that corruption *can* lead to redemption – in this case, Adam's sin and new animality will allow him to learn through suffering and serve as an example for medieval readers, who will acknowledge the solution available to them – through the figure of Christ.

The version of *Kross saga*[16] in *Hauksbók* (c. 1290–1334) states that

> Sva er sagt siðan Adam hafði syndína gerua i paradíso. ok hann var þaðan brott rekinn í einum skinnstakki firir syndína. (Overgaard 1968: 1).[17]
>
> So it is said that after Adam had sinned in Paradise he was thrown out of that place in a skin shirt for his sin.

Again, we have a specificity of garment type – a new noun, *stakkr* – as well as a description of the meaning of the skin-shirt. This section of *Hauksbók* is dated to 1302–1310 by Stefán Karlsson (1964), still earlier than the extant *Stjórn I* manuscripts.[18]

Early Modern Continuity

Representative of the continuing popularity of the story of Adam and Eve, *Eitt æfintir af Adam* appears at the end of AM 65a 4to (seventeenth century). The tale is expanded upon from the version in *Hauksbók* and is written as a

[16] This title is created by Overgaard; the rubric on the MS is *hvaðan kominn er drottins*. (AM 544 4to 17r).

[17] This is the first line of both A and B versions.

[18] The story appears to be well read, for the mention of the skin is the first line of the story, marked in the middle of the folio by a red initial. The page where the text begins (17r) is rather worn in comparison to the surrounding folios. It is the last bit of the quire, just before a well-known (in modern times, at least) map of Jerusalem, and is written in its own hand (no other parts of the MS were written in this same hand).

standalone tale. As an individual excerpt, it represents what Quinn (1962) has termed *Seth's Quest*.[19] The first line of the tale reads:

> So er sagt sidann Adam og Efa vorv vt rekinn vr paradis j einvm skinnkirlvm firer sitt brot [...] (Overgaard 1968: 1).[20]
>
> So it is said that then Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise in a skin shirt for their violation [...]

The mention of the skins appears again in the apocryphal tale *Seth's Quest* that covers the time period after Adam and Eve left paradise.[21] In the eighteenth-century manuscript Lbs. 841 8vo, the story is expanded upon and now we are told of an exact time of day when Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise. Similar to the episode found in *Konungs skuggsjá*, the skin shirts are used to hide the protoplasts' nakedness, using the verb *hylja*.

> Nærri umm middag edur litlu sydar enn umm nyundu stundu tyd dags voru þaug ut rekinn bædi nakinn. Gud gaf þeim tvo skinnkyrtla til ad hilia med syna bligdun. (Overgaard 1968: 19).
>
> Near midday or a little later than the ninth [canonical] hour [nones] of the day they were expelled, both naked. God gave them two skin shirts to cover themselves in their shame.

In what Overgaard terms texts E and F of *Kross saga*, we see another Early Modern example (1644) of a continuation of the previously discussed texts. In this manuscript, a title states that this tale comes from chapter 22 of "*Adamz bok*":

> Adam burtrekin ur paradysu epter synd sijna skrijddur skinnkyrtli. (Overgaard 1968: 59).
>
> Adam, driven out of Paradise after his sin, [was] dressed in a skin-tunic.

Overgaard (1968) prints a parallel Latin edition of the *Vitae Adae et Evae* under the text of *Kross saga*, which shows that the Latin description of the above sentence does not mention a shirt. If the Old Icelandic was based on

[19] It follows a short ghost story about a priest in England. Again, the line about the animal skins is the opening sentence in the story, on the page, and thus on the quire. The format of the manuscript in octavo indicates that it was transportable and the content implies the little book was likely used for storytelling.

[20] The text appears on fol. 59r in the manuscript AM 65 a 4to. The version in *Hauksbók* reads as such: "Sva er sagt siðan Adam hafði syndína gerua i paradíso. ok hann var þaðan brott rekinn í einum skinnstakki firir syndína" (fol. 17r).

[21] For further background on this text, see White (2022).

such a text, it would mean that the scribe felt it necessary to add in that the protoplasts had received the shirts.

In another Early Modern example, this time in poetic form, *Kross rímur* offers us an emotional picture of Adam after receiving the skins:

> [17] Hriggur hræddur kirtle klæddur komenn
> ä eimdar palla
> særdur græddur i mǫrgu mæddur
> ä myskun guds reid kalla.
> (Overgaard 1968: 95–96).
>
> [17] Grieved, scared, dressed in a kirtle
> placed on the throne of misery
> wounded yet healed, in much exhaustion
> he decided to call upon God's mercy

The contemporary poem *Adams óðr* 'Adam's song' underlines the garments as punishments for their sins:

> [26] Adam, far þú úr augsyn mér og
> þið hjónin bæði.
> Skinnkyrtla tvo skikka eg þér, skulu
> það ykkar klæði.[22]
>
> [26]Adam, leave my sight
> the both of you [Adam and Eve]
> I ordain you with two skin shirts
> with which you should clothe yourselves.

It is clear that the story of Adam and Eve's demise was not just a popular medieval story, but one that lived on through the Early Modern period, when it was copied and re-worked into different prose and poetic forms. That a seemingly minor detail of the skin shirts consistently appears in the story of the Fall stresses that they were a central element of the overall story.

A Popular Theme

By no means is the incorporation of the Latin story of the protoplasts receiving skins unique to the Old Norse-Icelandic corpus; although some versions provide a slightly different interpretation and some versions even state the opposite. The related material is found in many other medieval vernacular

[22] AM 622 4to, 46v, line 22. In the last line, the MS reads *skulu* although it should be *skulud*.

traditions and media beyond prose texts, such as passion plays and poetry. For example, a similar description of the garments is found in the German *Eva und Adam*, a translation of the apocryphal text *The Life of Adam and Eve*, in which the protoplasts are given woolen garments (i.e., skin with the hair still attached) that are said to be extremely uncomfortable (McCracken 2017: 17). Although the medieval French vernacular bible, *La bible française du XIIIe siècle*, does include Adam and Eve receiving skins, it also notes that it is foolish to think that God would have slayed the animals in order to provide skins for Adam and Eve. It does not, however, provide an alternative as to who would have done the slaying (McCracken 2017: 18–19).

Stephen D. Ricks shows that the garment was the topic of many stories in Islamic and Judaic literature (both Classical and Medieval). In some cases, the garment was handed down, all the way to Noah, and worn by these men for different reasons. The Judaic take on the skins seems to be much more detailed, positive, and forward-looking than that of the medieval Christian interpretation:

> The source of our knowledge of the garment of Adam is Genesis. But where the account in Genesis is strikingly spare, later Jewish and Muslim traditions are unswerving in describing its sacredness: it was divinely bestowed; it was originally a garment of skin; the skin itself may have been of some extraordinary origin such as Leviathan; it was a primordial creation, created on Friday evening; its celestial origins justify its use as priestly garb; its sacred nature and force as a symbol of authority was recognized by others who could either use or abuse them; and the garment of Adam is seen as the type of the heavenly garb that would be acquired by the righteous [...]. The vestments given to Adam symbolize the dignity of fallen man and the possibility of restoring to him the glory of God that he had originally enjoyed. (Ricks 2000: 721).[23]

These passages about Adam and Eve's garments found within the Old Norse-Icelandic corpus are not simply being copied from one place to another; the use of different vocabulary and descriptions of the scene and the shirts themselves indicates that the scribes were interpreting and recording a story they already knew rather than copying a text from one manuscript to another. This certainly underlines the popularity of the story and, because of its early (and continuing) attestation, the influence the image had on other texts. The following sections will explore that influence, first on the *fornaldar-*

[23] Rick's description of the skin garment as "priestly garb" or "vestments" gives us a link to the Old Norse-Icelandic word *kyrtill* borrowed from Old English in the 11th century, which, according to Tarsi (2016: 89) was a word used for liturgical vestments.

sögur, and then on the *riddarasögur*. The focus in both investigations is the animal skin: its literary purpose, its moral indications, and its connection, directly or indirectly, to the Christian belief in the story of the fall of man.

Trolls in Animal Skins

The troll as a figure continues to develop in the Icelandic literary tradition; that is, the medieval troll is not the same as the pre-Christian trolls of poetry nor the fairy-tale trolls of the nineteenth century to the present (Lindow 2014). The elusive figure of the medieval troll has been approached and discussed in various ways. Ármann Jakobsson (2008: 44–52) counts no fewer than fourteen classifications of trolls in medieval Icelandic literature. Wilbur (1958: 139) evaluates the historical linguistic roots of the word *troll*, settling on a definition of "a monster, an evilly disposed being who confuses and deceives his victims." What is of most interest to this study, however, is that trolls are often depicted wearing a *skinnkyrtill* or *skinnstakkr*. These skin-wearing trolls appear in medieval Icelandic literature from around the fourteenth century and onwards, post-dating the previously discussed foundational sources on Adam and Eve's garments. This particular troll of medieval Icelandic literature that this study is concerned with is an outcast; he or she (usually she) lives in the forest or another wild landscape such as a cave or the ocean. (S)he is depicted as strangely similar to pagans, in that (s)he can usually perform magic, eats horse meat (and sometimes human meat), and is of poor ethical character. (S)he usually has very bad hygiene and looks generally messy, dirty, and sometimes scary, with a giant stature.[24] In this sense (s)he can be easily compared to the Old English figure of the Wild Man or Wodewose. While the Wodewose's wildness is often depicted by the plentiful amount of hair on his body (thus hiding his nakedness), the troll's wildness shines through via the donning of a skin shirt or skirt, which is described as being long in the front and buttocks-exposing short in the back. This tunic or skirt is described in Old Icelandic texts with the same terminology as the garments of Adam and Eve. The strange and uncanny differences underline the corruption of the human

[24] Many scholars (esp. Merkelbach and Ármann Jakobsson) have pointed out that the term *troll* can be used for a variety of figures, including humans. My goal here is not to reclassify how the term is used but rather to reinterpret a group of trolls that are depicted a certain way.

race: while the protoplasts' garments were meant to *cover* their nakedness, the trolls' garments *expose* that which is meant to be hidden, enhancing their monstrosity.

Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir is the first scholar to dedicate a study to the topic of trolls' clothing.[25] Her study concludes that the skins symbolize two main concepts: firstly, they depict the perceived wildness and inferiority of northern inhabitants such as the Sámi and Finns, as understood by medieval scribes. Secondly, the shortness of the skins at the back signifies the perceived unbridled sexuality and inappropriateness of women outside of society. Aðalheiður suggests that trolls are often depicted wearing skins because the northern regions are renowned for fur goods, particularly clothing (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2017: 336). While she does not make a connection between trolls' clothing and Adam and Eve's garments, she acknowledges that clothing reflects both an individual's social standing and the audience's worldview. While trolls share features with other supernatural beings, they ultimately reflect "an extreme and exaggerated version of human nature and characteristics" (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2017: 329). Similarly, Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (2013: 60) characterizes trolls as "[...] Other, that is, everything that is not human, or [...] humans in 'disguise'." Applying Cohen's Monster Theory, she claims that "the monster is a pure construct. A hybrid figure that embodies and mirrors not only the fears and anxieties but also the desires of the culture that produces it." (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2013: 60–61) She goes further to say that monsters that share features with humans make the greatest impression on the reader because they bring out feelings of vulnerability within the recognizable. The characteristics of trolls that are monstrous are therefore those which are the most "undesirable and dangerous" to society's ideas of what is considered normal. The monstrousness, or that which the reader fears in the figure of the troll, is actually the fear of that which is "inherent in human beings, ourselves, and our corporeality [...] it is man's deep-rooted fear of aspects of his own nature" (p. 61). Like Adam and Eve after their expulsion from Paradise, trolls who are depicted wearing skin shirts represent the animality that is inherent within humans, placing them, skin-shirt clad, somewhere in between animal and human. This depiction reflects the anxieties of late medieval Icelanders, especially those related to theological questions surrounding human nature and original sin.

[25] Her study builds on previous scholarship, such as Hermann Pálsson (1997: 23), Motz (1993), and Vídalín (2013), who come to similar conclusions.

Giant Humans – Definitions and Origins

The task of nailing down a solid definition of what *troll* indicates in the Old Icelandic corpus is an impossible one. As already mentioned, several scholars have shown that the noun *troll* can refer to a variety of things, including monsters, humans, and annoying women.[26] It is, however, possible to group the skin-clad trolls of the Hrafnista sagas together as they share a variety of features, namely their size. In each case of the encounters in the sagas in question, the trolls are described as large, even giantish.

The appearance of Adam and Eve's animal skin garments on trolls is in line with the biblical narrative of colossal humans, for the protoplasts were often described as being of giant stature, like trolls. AM 764 4to (folio 2r) states "Þessi maðr hinn fyrsti var lx at hæð", 'This man, the first, was 60 [cubits] tall'. On the same folio Eve is said to have been 50 cubits. While the method of measurement is not specified, Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir (2000: 90) supposes it to be the cubit (OIcel. sg. *alin*/*ǫln*, pl. *álnir*) due to the fact that the tradition of Adam and Eve's colossal height uses this mode of measurement. Because a cubit was a unit of measurement measured by the length between one's elbow and longest finger, there is no precise translation of this height; but 60 cubits is roughly equal to 100 feet. It is unclear just why Adam and Eve were thought to have been so tall;[27] one can speculate both a positive and negative interpretation, that of a super-human created in the image of God and thus "larger than life", or that the protoplasts were sinners and therefore were connected with the corruptions of the human race, such as those of the giants.[28]

The biblical explanation for the existence of giants appears in the Genesis section of *Stjórn I*, where it states that giants existed both before and after the flood:

> þan*n*tíma sem man*n* folkit tok at fiǫlgaz iu*er*olldin*ní* þa sa sýn*ir* Guds dǽtr man*n*an*n*a. at þǽr ua*ru* miok uęn*ar*. þ*at* er s*ua* at skilia. at sid ferdug*ir* menn sýnir seth. sa girndar augum t*il* dęttra kaýns *ok* þ*ei*ra afkiępmís. lǫgðuz meðr þ*ei*m *ok* toku þęr ser t*il* eigin kuen*n*a af hu*er*re sambuð er þ*ei*m fedduz risar. þ*at* er *ægi* akueðit a hu*er*ium tíma þetta varð. huart þ*at* varð a dǫgum eðr fýʀ. *ægi ok* huart

[26] For an overview and further citations, see Grant (2019: 78).

[27] Cohen (1999: 5–6) points out that the medieval English rather believed that *all* ancient people (in this case, the pre-Celts) were giant-sized. This is intricately connected with the larger-than-life stone ruins found in the area.

[28] The narrative of Adam and Eve's gigantic form is also found in the teachings of Islam. The difference from the Christian story is that the protoplasts were created as giants, but shrunk in size once they were expelled from Paradise, casting a positive light on their gigantism.

> þ*at* var micklu f*yrer* h*an*s dagha eðr litlu. fedduz *ok* aðrer risar ept*er* flodit iþ*ei*ri b*or*g sem ebron heit*er* huer*er* er siðan stað festuz i þ*ei*ri b*or*g a egipta l*an*dí sem tham heit*er ok* þar af voru þ*ei*r kallað*er* týthanes af hu*er*ra ætt er enath feddiz *ok* býgðu h*an*s sýner ifýrrsagðri ebron af hu*eri*u*m* er golias meðr fleirum oðrum var komin*n*. (Astås 2009b: 79).
>
> In that time when humans began to multiply over the earth, God's sons saw that the daughters of men were very beautiful. It should be understood thus, that virtuous men, the sons of Seth, looked with lustful eyes at the daughters of Cain and their offspring, lay with them and took them as wives. From their relationships giants were born. It is not known when this was, whether it was recently or farther in the past, during [his] time [Noah's] or a short time before. Other giants were born after the flood in that town called Hebron, who later settled down in that city in Egypt called Tanis and from there they are called titans from which line Anak comes, and his sons dwelt in the aforementioned Hebron whence Goliath and many others came.

The notion linking giants to Anak's lineage originates from Numbers chapter 13 (quoted below from the *Vulgate*). In this passage, it tells of the account of spies who were sent to various places, including to Hebron, who then report their findings to Moses and Aaron. They describe encountering the descendants of Anak in Hebron, who live in a land flowing with milk and honey. Caleb proposes conquering the land, prompting responses from the others:

> "Nequaquam ad hunc populum valemus ascendere quia fortior nobis est." Detraxeruntque terrae quam inspexerant apud filios Israhel, dicentes, "Terram quam lustravimus devorat habitatores suos; populum quem aspeximus procerae staturae est. Ibi vidimus monstra quaedam filiorum Enach, de genere giganteo, quibus conparati quasi lucustae videbamur." (Edgar 2010: 734).
>
> "No, we are not able to go up to this people because they are stronger than we." And they spoke ill of the land which they had viewed before the children of Israel, saying, "The land which we have viewed devoureth its inhabitants; the people that we beheld are of a tall stature. There we saw certain monsters of the sons of Anak, of the giant kind, in comparison of whom we seemed like locusts." (Edgar 2010: 735).

That giants were said to be created and reside in Hebron links them to Adam and Eve, who were created and buried in that same place.[29] Tina Boyer (2016: 35, footnote 24) highlights that biblical giants are consistently portrayed as

[29] This is noted in several places in Old Icelandic literature, including *Elucidarius*, *Stjórn*, and the Holy Cross material.

evil antagonists in opposition to the will of God. Linking them to the originators of sin, Adam and Eve, is thus a logical step. According to Augustine, the determining factor of humanity was reason, regardless even of the outer appearance of a being: "Whoever is born anywhere as a human being, that is, as a rational mortal creature, however strange he may appear to our senses in bodily form or colour or motion or utterance, or in any faculty, part of quality of his nature whatsoever, let no true believer have any doubt that such an individual is descended from the one man who was first created" (Friedman 1981: 91; see also Wei 2020: 107). Viewing biblical giants through this perspective, we should recognize biblical giants as humans.

The first and second sons of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, also play an important role in the genealogy of giants. Out of jealousy, Cain killed his brother Abel and was thereafter associated as the father of sinful and corrupt offspring, including anyone with any type of deformity (see Mellinkoff 1981). It is therefore even more fitting that giants are said to be descended from Cain (while humans of "normal" stature are said to be descended from Seth). The association of Cain with monsters and giants is found both in the Bible and in Judaic folklore.[30] *Stjórn I* states that many large and strong men inhabited the city which Cain and Enoch built, assumed to be giants.[31] Jewish lore says that Cain received two horns after he was exiled for killing his brother, representing his degradation from humanity. According to the Armenian Adam book, when Cain wanted to die, God covered him with an animal skin, which resulted in his death, for he was mistaken as an animal (Friedman 1981: 97; see also Mellinkoff 1981: 59–62).

Giants and trolls are not simply "a handful of stupid and wild loners in caves and desolate places" (Ármann Jakobsson 2009: 185), although, when taken at face value they certainly might appear to be just that. Instead, they should be seen as deeply representative of the beliefs and anxieties of medieval Christian Icelanders, playing a significant role in the definition of selfhood.[32] More modern folklore both in Scandinavia and Iceland underlines the connection between the sinful characters in the Bible and monsters, spirits, and demons. In Iceland, the elves and hidden folk are said to be the unwashed children of Eve – the ones who were not as bright looking as her

[30] Another notable mention is found in Beowulf, where Grendel is said to be Cain's kin and bear some sort of mark indicating this. Cf. Mellinkoff (1981: 32).

[31] "Heðan af er þat auðsynt at þann tima hafa verit marger storer menn ok sterker." (Astås 2009b: 66).

[32] Merkelbach (2019: 12) suggests that we define ourselves against the Other, exactly as I will suggest below in my evaluation of the *Hrafnistumannasögur*.

other children and whom she neglected. As a result of her hiding them from God, he made them invisible. In Scandinavia, land spirits are thought to be the offspring of the Nephilim – fallen angels who in the biblical tradition, were said to have been like giants (Werth et al. 2021).

The Sagas of Hrafnista – *Hrafnistumannasögur*

The sagas of the men of Hrafney are four in number, beginning with Ketill *hængr* and subsequently telling of the next three generations, one each saga. Their oldest attestation together is in AM 343 a 4to (*c.* 1450–1475), wherein they appear in genealogical order. The first saga, *Ketils saga hængs*, takes place in Hálogaland, Norway, a locale infamous in the sagas for being a pagan area, led by jarl Hákon. Each protagonist, like a saintly figure, is portrayed as a *puer senex* in the beginning of his story,[33] similar to the popular saga hero, Egill Skallagrímsson, who is said to have begun composing poetry at the age of three. Their troll-slaying abilities (arguably the protagonists' main function) underline their commitment to ridding the land of evil beings. They do this with a set of supernatural arrows that Ketill receives and then are passed down each generation. Although the first two heroic figures, Ketill and Grímr, are not Christian, they are depicted as noble pagans, on several occasions denouncing the Norse gods, a foreshadowing of the conversion of Örvar-Oddr to Christianity. The Christian perspective, then, is shown through the protagonist. Despite Ketill's obvious hatred for trolls, he is the son of a half-troll. The trolls are thus representative of something he hates but are also reflective of the self. The Christian undertones of the saga are thus evident from early on.[34] Ketill assumes in the third chapter that the bad weather is brought on by witchcraft. The noble heathen theme becomes clearer during Ketill's encounter with the pagan king Framarr, who asks for Ketill's daughter's hand in marriage (and is denied). Framarr is said to be one who sacrifices often to Odin at a burial mound, and it is there where they decide to duel over his daughter's hand. Ketill turns angry when Framarr's son states that his father has been given much strength from Óðinn, because "hann trúði ekki á Óðin", 'he [Ketill] didn't believe in Odin'. Ketill goes further to speak a verse about it: "Óðin blóta gerða ek aldrigi, hefik þó lengi lifat", 'I've never offered to Odin any sacrifices, yet I've lived long'. The anti-Óðinn story culminates in Framarr

[33] An overview of this *topos* can be found in (Carp 1980). She explains that "[...] certain children were characterized as having traits appropriate to persons of very advanced years [...]".
[34] Arngrímur Vídalín (2013) connects all four of the Hrafnista sagas to a Christian worldview.

denouncing the god on his deathbed after receiving a deadly blow from Ketill's sword: "Hugr er í Hængi, hvass er Dragvendill, beit hann orð Óðins, sem ekki væri. Brást nú Baldrs faðir, brigt er at trúa honum", 'The Salmon has daring. Dragvendil is sharp; it hacked Odin's words as if they had not been. Balder's father fails now, it's folly to believe in him'. To underline Ketill's role as noble heathen, the troll calls Ketill *inn viðfǫrli* in chapter five, likening him to the holy men who have traveled on pilgrimage or long trips on a holy mission.

Like his grandfather Ketill, Örvar-Oddr is portrayed as a *puer senex* in the first portion of *Örvar-Odds saga*. Portrayed as large (even giant-like) and strong, he is also a troll-slayer like his father Grímr. To continue this family business, he inherits the supernatural arrows from his father. Although he is born into a pagan family, he is early on portrayed as possessing the knowledge that the pre-Christian gods are feeble and eventually he converts to Christianity. We are told that "Odd wasn't accustomed to making sacrifices, because he trusted in his own might and main [...]" (Hermann Pálsson 1986: 44) Although he is a reluctant Christian, Oddr soon becomes an ascetic figure. He travels far and wide until he comes to the river Jordan where he "washes himself" (90) likening him to Jesus, who was baptized in the same river by John the Baptist. He then goes into the forest and becomes a wild man, clothing himself in bark (108). After this transition, Oddr is said to believe only in one God and is then depicted as burning pagan temples and killing priestesses (130–133).

Although the *Hrafnistumannasögur* are full of supernatural characters and Viking-era events, the scribe(s) are clearly writing from their own Christian perspective, with the aim of depicting the pre-Christian protagonists as a foreshadowing of the future belief of their descendants. The use of literary topoi such as the *puer senex* figure points to the influence of hagiography,[35] which is also seen in the figure of Oddr, who mimics the practices of the ascetics. His addition of a bark covering emphasizes his vulnerability in the wild in comparison to his indestructability in his silk shirt, which is discussed in more detail below.

[35] Teresa Carp (1980: 737) claims that this literary *topos* was most common in hagiography: "This motif [*puer senex*] was particularly popular if not stereotypical in hagiographical literature of the central and late Middle Ages. Hagiographers used it as a foreshadowing device and to reinforce the pious belief that sainthood was predestined and manifested at a very early age. The notion that a future saint would reveal his or her religious calling through precocious and preternatural behavior goes back ultimately to apocryphal accounts of the infant Jesus, who was seen as paradigmatic of the ideal child. Parallel notions also occur in the Old Testament and other ancient religious literatures."

Skin on Skin

> Wearing is a powerful act. (Bain 2017: 117).

Sarah Kay (2011: 17) points out that readers of parchment books would have been constantly exposed to the "fragility" of the animal-human divide simply by thumbing through a book made out of animal skin. The act of reading and writing on parchment reminds the human that the animal skins represent the status of animals as serving the will of humans – an inferior status. In many medieval stories, the skin "works" for the human in practical ways: to cover, provide, warm. In the same way, the wearing of skin often entails the absorption of qualities of the skin by the wearer, the skin providing something, positive or negative, for the human. Such an interaction is underlined in stories of humans donning wolf skins, and thus "becoming" wolves (a theme discussed below in more detail). The same is seen in the figure of the trolls in the Hrafnista sagas. Both the appearance of the figure in their own skin, and that which is covering their skin, play an important role in defining the character. Skin is a threshold or barrier between self and society. It defines the one in it by race, color, age, features, and more. The appearance of the protagonists in contrast to the trolls, then, is a reflective one: the protagonist sees what he is but does not want to be or become in the figure. The troll in the skin-shirt reminds the man of the range of possibilities within the human race: outside of the tame, built world, the wild takes over and is reflected on the surface. As Derrida (2008: 93) states, "the power over the animal is [...] the essence of the human," underlining that the resistance by the protagonists to become what is in front of them defines their humanity – the "right" kind of humanity.

An illuminating example of this is found in the figure of Forað, a troll whom Ketill encounters when he goes to shore to fish in *Ketils saga hængs*. Forað (OIcel. "dangerous place" or "monster") is wearing a *skinnkyrtill*, her skin is dark as pitch, and she is first portrayed as wading out of the sea. Her name encompasses both the locale trolls usually inhabit – the wilderness, the forest, or in this case, the sea – and the danger she represents as Other. She and Ketill exchange a number of poetic verses, in which the reader learns that Forað is hated by *búmenn*, a term that refers to humans who live in a cultivated area such as a farm, and later, a town or city (*bú* and *bær*, 'town' or 'farm', come from the same root). As such, she represents the wild, untamed, and uncultivated landscape and those who live in it and positions herself in opposition to men like Ketill who live in cultivated areas and

participate in structured society.[36] She is called both a *tröll* and *flagð*.[37] Yet, the status of her (in)humanity is blurred, for her ability to produce poetic verses on demand underlines her ability to reason and at the same time connects her to the tradition of the past. Her poetic exchange with Ketill is for the most part a battle of wits; she is no stupid troll. Forað is said to be engaged to a Jarl, and the reader cannot help but wonder if this is referring to Hákon jarl, the infamous pagan leader of Hlaðir, for in the section directly following the encounter with Forað, Þorgerðr Holgabrúðr is mentioned, who is portrayed in other sagas as Hákon's patron goddess. Further blurring the line between human and animal, Forað is able to shapeshift. She turns into a whale just before going back into the water, when Ketill manages to land a lethal arrow just under her fin.

In *Gríms saga loðinkinna*, Lopthæna (the unique name meaning "air-chicken" or "sky-hen") appears first to Grímr on the shore as an ugly troll woman wearing a skin-shirt, come to save the dying Grímr after a fight with a local landowner. She offers him life and he accepts, whereafter she takes him into her shirt for transport and then to her cave. In this way, the skin-shirt offers him a second chance at life. She keeps offering to help him in exchange for his attention (such as to kiss her or lie with her) and when he rejects her, she tells him she won't help him, so he gives in. After sleeping next to her, he wakes up to see his betrothed, Lopthæna, who had been cursed into that troll-shape. She had been missing for a long while and had been cursed to never leave the troll shape until he came and accepted help from her. The skin-shirt thus acts as a disguise for Lopthæna, while also representing her curse. Its malleability to carry Grímr to safety lends to its function as a gateway out of both his and Lopthæna's situations. Like the garments of Adam and Eve, Lopthæna's skin shirt represents the corruption of her humanity while also being, both literally and figuratively, the way out of that corruption. After she turns back into her beautiful human self, Grímr sees the skin of the troll woman lying on the floor and he quickly burns it. The story of the enchanted Lopthæna connects the trolls of Hrafnista to stories of shape-shifting were-wolves, discussed in greater detail below, in that the wolfskin of the shape-shifter is typically burned after the supposed transformation is over, in order to keep the skin from again affecting anyone else.

[36] For deeper ecocritical evaluation of the dichotomy of wild/tame and the literary theme of wilderness in Old Icelandic literature, see White (2023: 180–189).

[37] The variation of terms might not be important, as scholarship has shown that troll/giant terms can be interchangeable, although a plethora of views (mostly from the past) can be found to the contrary. For an in-depth overview of the history of this discussion, see Grant (2019).

Forað and Lopthæna are major characters in *Ketils saga* and *Gríms saga* that represent foils to the protagonist. In both cases, they define Ketill and Grímr by reflecting that which the two heroes are not and even fear becoming. While in these two instances the narrative gives enough pause for the reader to reflect on the figures of Forað and Lopthæna, the skin-shirt clad troll as foil appears quite often elsewhere in the Hrafnista sagas, but only fleetingly in the narrative and the trolls are not given names. A striking encounter is found in *Örvar-Odds saga*, when Oddr is chased out of his boat onto the shore by a troll in a skin-shirt. Like Forað, the woman seems to be able to travel underwater easily. When she comes up to shore, Oddr shoots an arrow at her. An uncanny moment happens when the troll puts her hand up to stop the arrow, and it goes through her hand, into her eye and out the back of her head, which seems to only perturb her. As if this otherwise lethal blow was only an annoyance, the monstrous figure goes back to the mainland to leave Oddr in peace. In one of his first encounters with a troll, Grímr finds himself chasing a skin-shirt clad troll up a mountain and into a cave. Once he enters, he sees two trolls, both in skin shirts, lying next to a fire discussing him. They appear to know all about his family, for they state that Grímr and his father are the most skilled at killing trolls. They go on, however to gossip about how Grímr will never be able to get close to his wife (the missing Lopthæna), indicating that they are fiends sent to throw him off his quest. In a passage that mimics a famous scene from Gregory's *Dialogues* in which demons sit around a fire discussing the downfall of the protagonist (see Grønlie 2009), Grímr pays them back for their gossip by killing them both. While the presence of the trolls' animal skin tunic is fraught with meaning, the lack of skin (here, flaying) and the introduction of a magical silk tunic constantly reflects back and forth the importance of wearing, and therefore, not wearing. The layer on one's body defines the human and not-so-human characters in *Örvar-Odds* saga in various ways.

The evil figure Ögmundr is the son of a human man and a female giant with a human head and an animal body. He is also called a demon and has black and blue skin. This coloring defines him from the beginning as Other and particularly as an evil human, but he is redefined when Oddr pulls his beard so hard during battle that the skin comes off with the hair, essentially flaying Ögmundr's face completely off to the bone.[38] With this flaying, Ögmundr goes from a dark monstrous figure to an inhuman, spirit-like

[38] Ögmundr is what Merkelbach (2019: 18) identifies as a social hybrid: "someone who is (or was) human but has now taken a step outside of the human community."

being. His loss of skin represents his further loss of humanity.[39] In an attempt to remedy his loss of beard, he begins demanding the kings of the eastern realms pay him tribute by sending their beards once a year, which he makes into a cape and wears regularly. By displaying his collection of royal beards on his cloak he attempts to restore the human, male identity which Oddr took from him with the flaying. Despite this futility, by the end of the saga Ögmundr has become nothing more than a spirit, having completely lost his humanity.

At the same time, Ögmundr's opponent Oddr gains a second skin when he receives a tunic made of silk woven by several women around the world. This human-made tunic of human-spun material gives Oddr the magical ability to resist any blows that hit his tunic. His gaining of this second skin underlines his humanity and signals a shift in position both for Oddr and Ögmundr, while Ögmundr's loss of skin pushes him farther away from his human half and closer to his giant ancestry. Skin thus works in multilayered ways: The animal skins worn by the trolls symbolize their animality and corruption. In contrast, the silk tunic worn by Oddr, a "second skin", symbolizes his humanity, while Ögmundr's lack of skin underscores his inhumanity and lack of human traits.

Corrupted Humans in Animal Skins

The trolls (and by default, giants) in the *Hrafnistumannasögur* represent a multi-faceted yet theologically sound image: a giant animalistic human with outward features contrary to the humans made in the image of the Christian God and inner features also reflecting the sinful nature of one branch of Adam's descendants. Their size is reflective not only of their connection to the original sinners, but also representative of their otherness and their antiquity, that is, existing since before the coming of Christ. Their given form of clothing again connects them to the protoplasts but also underlines their belonging to a time and place of which medieval readers could only imagine. The seemingly passing mention of the existence of the skin shirt casts an uncanny image on the reader; the skins were well known to have been clothing for the protoplasts after their expulsion from Paradise but imagining them on a monstrous character requires the reader to think deeper into the symbolism of why a troll would be skin-shirt clad. The uncanny experience of the reader would thus be immediate: one would expect the

[39] In a wider context, it also represents the stripping of his masculinity and authority. See Livingston (2017: 308).

wearer (in this case, trolls) to be connected, possibly in age, definitely in character, to the exiled protoplasts, meaning their character would be in one way or another, sinful. That they are also giants with unsightly features further connects the reader's knowledge of primordial giants as the offspring of Cain's sons and Seth's daughters to the creature on the page in front of them. The trolls depicted in these skins, then, can be interpreted as a corruption of the original couple, descendants that represented the straying from God's original plan for creation. As Adam was created in the image of God, any diversion from his likeness would be construed as either a punishment for sin or a corruption of his kind.[40]

The encounter between the protagonists and the skin-clad trolls is manifold: on a basic level, it represents the conquests of the noble heathen (and later, Christian) hero in the wild, clearing the peripheral lands of their outlawed and wild inhabitants who get in the way of the protagonists' quests. On a deeper level, the skin-clad trolls represent the past, the long-lived descendants of Cain, who were corrupted on account of their ancestor's sinful choices. Every aspect of their being constitutes the antithesis of Christian society yet also speaks to its very existence. Ugly, large, animalistic humans donning skin-shirts is an uncanny image in light of the story of Adam and Eve: after they sinned God made them the garments to wear as a reminder of their animality and mortality. In that same way, the skins remind the protagonist of the sinful past of his race, while it also acts as a warning (Friedman 1981: 90). That each troll-slayer is partly troll himself, is a reminder that what he sees in the troll is partly a mirror image of the self. He is a part of this troll and could just as easily become like it should he choose a certain path.

Humans in Wolf Skins

The Creation of animals

The *Vulgate* mentions that God created both wild animals and cattle,[41] but *Stjórn I* specifies that God created both wild and domesticated animals because he foresaw that man would sin:

[40] Friedman (1981: 90) elaborates: "[...] mixtures of animal and man, or physically anomalous men, could only be regarded with extreme distaste" because "a minority was *per se* inferior to the majority because the majority was closer to God's image."

[41] The text reads: "Dixit quoque Deus, "Producat terra animam viventem in genere suo,

> Skapaði h*a*nn á̋ þeima deghí vꝑ á iǫrðina þren*n* kuikenda kỳn eítt er alidỳr þ*at* er v*er* kǫllu*m* bu smala. an*n*at skridq*ui*kendí. þridia ǫn*n*ur *fer*fętt kuikendi sem villí dýr *ok* f*yrer* þa sǫk at guð uissi þ*at* f*yrer* at maðren*n* mundi sỳndalegha falla þa skapaði h*ann* bueð ho*nu*m t*il* feðu *ok* viðrhialpar ept*er* komanda erfiðí. (Astås 2009b: 29).
>
> He created on the earth that day three types of creatures: one is the domestic animal, which we call sheep and cattle. Secondly, reptiles. Thirdly, other four-footed animals such as wild animals, and because God knew beforehand that humans would sinfully fall, he created for them food [animals] and help [beasts of burden] for the coming difficulties.

This interesting gloss to the story of the creation of animals indicates a belief that God foresaw the Fall and thus the usefulness of wild and domesticated animals as maintenance for humanity. The servile status into which animals were created was thus on account of the sinful act of humans. This subservience was constantly underlined by Late Antique and medieval theologians. The most common analysis places humans above animals because of their reason, which is also considered the defining mark of humanity. Augustine was a leader in this rhetoric, discussing it in his *Confessions* and several other works (Sorabji 1993: 195–207).

> Quod habet potestatem piscium maris et volatilium caeli et omnium pecorum et ferarum et omnis terrae et omnium repentium quae repunt super terram. hoc enim agit per mentis intellectum, per quem percipit quae sunt spiritus dei. alioquin homo in honore positus non intellexit; comparatus est iumentis insensatis et similis factus est eis. (Hammond 2016: 390).
>
> That human beings have power over the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, and all livestock and wild beasts, and all the land, and every crawling thing that crawls over the earth. They do so by reason of their mental acuity, which enables them to discern what is from the Spirit of God. Otherwise "those in positions of honor have no understanding: they are compared to senseless cattle, and become like them." (Hammond 2016: 391).

As is evident in the above quote, Augustine is basing his thoughts concerning the definition of a human on biblical ideas. In his *City of God* he goes even further in his exegesis to ponder whether the "do not kill" command (of the ten commandments) could also be valid for animals and plants since they are

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iumenta et reptilia et bestias terrae secundum species suas." Factumque est ita. Et fecit Deus bestias terrae iuxta species suas et iumenta et omne reptile terrae in genere suo. Et vidit Deus quod esset bonum." (Edgar 2010: 6–7).

clearly living and could die. But he states that that is an error in belief by the Manicheans, and rather, we should believe that the command is only reserved for humans, for animals and plants lack reason (see Wei 2020: 107).[42]

This belief is evident in *Stjórn I*, where it states that animals do not have reason like men and are therefore inferior:

> [...] erv ǫll ǫn*n*ur kuikendí man*nínu*m vnd*er* lagit æ*igi* f*yrer* likamsims skýlld vtan helldr f*yrer* þa skýnsemd *ok* skiln*in*g sem v*er* hǫfvm *ok* þau hafa æ*igi* þo at likamin*n* váǿ se ǻǻ ia*m*uel s*ua* uorðin*n* sik at ha*nn* sýní þ*at* a sialfu*m* s*er* at v*er* sém bet*ri* en*n* ǫnnur kuikendi *ok* f*yrer* þa greín guði liker. þ*uia*t mannzins likamr at eins er rettr skapaðr *ok* uppreistr t*il* himíns sem fýʀ var sagt. (Astås 2009b: 34).
>
> [...] all other creatures are subject to the rule of man not because of the body, but rather because of the reason and understanding, which we have and they do not, even though our body is such that it shows in that we are better than other creatures, and on that account, similar to God. For that reason, the body of man is the only one created properly and raised up towards the heavens, as has been previously stated.

Pertinent to our discussion on were-wolves, Augustine notes that wild animals "punish [man] for his sins, exercise his virtue, try him for his own good, or without knowing it teach him some lesson" (quoted in Wei 2020: 124). Although animals were created as inferior to humanity, they serve an important purpose beyond being food and clothing. Encounters with, or *as*, wild animals, are thus deeply significant in the post-Fall salvific journey.

"Were-wolves": Origins

From Ovid's *Metamorphosis* to Pliny's description of the Arcadians, tales of werewolves abounded in the Classical period. Eventually, these popular tales – seen as remnants of pre-Christian belief – caught the eye of the early Christian Church. Such a transformation from man into beast was contradictory to Christian theology and thus warranted comment. Early Christian thinkers such as Tertullian (155–220 CE) and St. Ambrose (339–397 CE)

[42] An overview of this ageless debate, which certainly predates Augustine, is beyond the scope of this article. What is important to this study is where the discussion was when these texts were being produced. However, it is important to note that the topic of whether humans were the only animals with morals and reason, thus separating them and putting them above non-human animals, was a hot topic in Classic Philosophy, which trickled down to Augustine, and still continues to be a point of discussion today. A fantastic overview of the debate can be found in Sorabji (1993).

wrote that men can be *like* beasts but cannot *be* beasts because they, unlike animals, have a soul, which is made in the likeness of God, and souls cannot change; thus metamorphosis is impossible (Kratz 1976; Sconduto 2008). Conceivably the most influential stance taken against literal shapeshifting is that of St. Augustine. In his fifth-century work, *De Civitate Dei*, or *The City of God*, he begins by discussing tales he had read and heard, of men changing into beasts. These tales, he writes, are not to be believed:

> Haec uel falsa sunt uel tam inusitata, ut merito non credantur. Firmissime tamen credendum est omnipotentem Deum posse omnia facere quae uoluerit, siue uindicando siue praestando, nec daemones aliquid operari secundum naturae suae potentiam (quia et ipsa angelica creatura est, licet proprio uitio sit maligna) nisi quod ille permiserit, cuius iudicia occulta sunt multa, iniusta nulla. Nec sane daemones naturas creant, si aliquid tale faciunt, de qualibus factis ista uertitur quaestio; sed specie tenus, quae a uero Deo sunt creata, commutant, ut uideantur esse quod non sunt. Non itaque solum animum, sed ne corpus quidem ulla ratione crediderim daemonum arte uel potestate in membra et liniamenta bestialia ueraciter posse conuerti, sed phantasticum hominis, quod etiam cogitando siue somniando per rerum innumerabilia genera uariatur et, cum corpus non sit, corporum tamen similes mira celeritate formas capit, sopitis aut oppressis corporeis hominis sensibus ad aliorum sensum nescio quo ineffabili modo figura corporea posse perduci [...] (Dombart et al. 1955: 608–609).
>
> Stories of this kind are either untrue or so at least so extraordinary that we are justified in withholding credence. And in spite of them we must believe with complete conviction that omnipotent God can do anything he pleases, by way of either punishing or of helping, while demons can effect nothing in virtue of any power belonging to their nature – since that nature is angelic by creation, though now it has become wicked by their own fault – except what God permits; and his judgements are often inscrutable, but never unjust. Demons do not, of course, create real entities; if they do indeed perform any feats of the kind we are now examining, it is merely in respect of appearance that they transform beings created by the true God, to make them seem to be what they are not. And so I should not believe, on any consideration, that the body – to say nothing of the soul – can be converted into the limbs and features of animals by the craft or power of demons. Instead, I believe that a person has a phantom which in his imagination or in his dreams takes on various forms through the influence of circumstances of innumerable kinds.[43]

[43] He continues: "This phantom is not a material body, and yet with amazing speed, it takes on shapes like material bodies; and it is this phantom, I hold, that can in some inexplicable fashion be presented in bodily form to the apprehension of other people, when their physical senses are asleep or in abeyance. This means that the actual bodies of the people concerned are lying somewhere else, still alive, to be sure, but with their senses suspended in lethargy far more deep and oppressive than that of sleep. Meanwhile the phantom may appear to the senses

Building on Tertullian and St. Ambrose, Augustine thus denies that metamorphosis can take place by any means except through God's power alone. Any transformation brought about in other ways must then be illusory and demonic. Augustine's beliefs concerning shapeshifting were not only used as an authority for later medieval thinkers such as Burchard of Worms, St. Boniface, and Thomas Aquinas, but also became a foundation for depicting shapeshifting in line with Christian thought.[44] One example of this is found in Gerald of Wales' *Topographica Hibernica*, a treatise on Ireland's geography and folklore. It tells a story of a priest who is approached in the woods by a talking werewolf. The male wolf tells the priest not to be afraid, for he is only a man under a curse from St. Natalis. His friend, a she-wolf, who is under the same curse, is dying, and he bids the priest to give her last rites. The priest reluctantly follows the wolf into the forest to find a she-wolf who greets him with human speech. In order to reassure the priest that he will not be committing blasphemy by giving an animal communion, the wolf pulls down the skin of the she-wolf from the head to the navel, peeling it back to reveal her human body. Reassured, the priest then gave the woman her last rites and the wolf rolled back the skin into its original form. An interesting aspect of this tale is that the wolves are in lupine form as the result of a curse from a saint, which could be interpreted as a form of divine punishment. We see a similar instance in *Konungs skuggsjá*, or "The King's Mirror," in which a group of men are cursed by St. Patrick as a divine punishment for wickedness. After St. Patrick prayed to God to curse the disobedient clan, they were all turned into wolves for a period of time, during which they were "worse than wolves, for in all their wiles they have the wit of men, though they are eager to devour men as to destroy other creatures." (Sconduto 2008: 33).

After Gerard tells his story of the priest and two wolves, he goes on to explain the theological implications of such a happening, which he attributes to Augustine:

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of others as embodied in the likeness of some animal; and a man may seem even to himself to be in such a state and to be carrying burdens – one may have the same experience in dreams. But if these burdens are material objects, they are carried by demons to make game of men, who observe partly the actual bodies of the burdens, partly the unreal bodies of the animals." (Bettenson 1984: 782–83). [ita ut corpora ipsa hominum alicubi iaceant, uiuentia quidem, sed multo grauius atque uehementius quam somno suis sensibus obseratis; phantasticum autem illud ueluti corporatum in alicuius animalis effigie appareat sensibus alienis talisque etiam sibi esse homo uideatur, sicut talis sibi uideri posset in somnis, et portare onera, quae onera si uera.sunt corpora, portantur a daemonibus, ut inludatur hominibus, partim uero onerum corpora, partim iumentorum falsa cernentibus.]

[44] Werle (2021: 102–105) likewise acknowledges the importance of Augustine's views on shapeshifting for medieval audiences.

> Dæmones igitur seu malos homines sicut nec creare, ita nec naturas veraciter mutare posse, simul cum Augustino sentimus. Sed specietenus, quæ a vero Deo create sunt, ipso permittente, commutant; ut scilicet videantur esse quod non sunt; sensibus hominum mira illusione captis et sopitis, quatinus res non videant sicut se habent, sed ad falsas quasdam et fictitias videndum formas, vi phantasmatis seu magicæ incantationis, mirabiliter abstrahantur. (Dimock 1867: 106).
>
> We agree, then, with Augustine, that neither demons nor wicked men can either create or really change their natures; but those whom God has created can, to outward appearance, by his permission, become transformed, so that they appear to be what they are not; the senses of men being deceived and laid asleep by a strange illusion, so that things are not seen as they really exist, but are strangely drawn by the power of some phantom or magical incantation to rest their eyes on unreal and fictitious forms. (Wright 1894: 83).

The wolves' ability to speak in Gerard's story immediately reveals their human nature and points to a difference between their appearance and their true humanity. Furthermore, it underlines one interpretation of the Christian Augustinian lycanthropy model, that of an illusory change rather than a change in nature. Before the woman pulls down the skin, she appears to onlookers as a wolf, the skin, or covering, acting as a layer that conceals her true identity – that of a human. The werewolves in Old Norse-Icelandic literature discussed below follow a similar pattern: a man puts on a skin of a wolf and, accordingly, behaves as the animal would.

This is not the only type of shapeshifting that appears in the corpus, however.[45] Bynum points out (2005: 96–97) that by the thirteenth century, attitudes towards werewolves becomes complicated. While the Augustinian model had much influence and staying power, it also heightened the fear of true transformation. Thus, literature begins to reflect these fears of a literal severance of soul from body.[46] This fear might explain the multiple depictions

[45] Gwendolyne Knight (2020: 41) criticizes the use of the term "shapeshifting" because it puts all instances into one pot, so to speak, and even more so the idea of a "tradition" of shapeshifting within the corpus: "Although shapeshifting was certainly a well-known motif in Old Norse literature, the plurality of not only methods but also ideologies and inspirations precludes any sort of 'tradition of shapeshifting'; rather, many traditions, some indigenous, some borrowed, some part of cultural memory, others adapted to suit the needs of the story, combined and drew upon a shared vocabulary to express a multiplicity of ideas."

[46] Bynum (2005: 102–103) shows that this discussion amongst theologians, notably Thomas Aquinas and Peter Lombard, becomes especially fraught when attempting to explain how angels and demons take on the shape of humans. They both concede that angels and demons can be "overclothed" with human bodies, thus circumventing a theologically problematic full transformation: "these theologians actually tipped the discussion to emphasize angelic or

of shapeshifting within Old Norse-Icelandic literature. Gwendolyne Knight (2020) separates depictions of transformation in the corpus into three categories, while Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir (2007) separates them into two.

Small categorizes the texts in question as part of her "overlay model" of reading skin: that of when a wolf skin is presented to a human and is placed on top of human skin. This type of literary werewolf goes through an illusory change (i.e. Augustinian) rather than an actual metamorphosis (Small 2013: 83).[47] The texts in Small's study are written in Latin and French, yet the vocabulary corresponds well to the Old Norse-Icelandic. The noun *hamr*, skin or form, the term used to denote both the wolf skin and the shape or form of the animal, in this sense resembles the Latin and French terms used to describe the change in form when one becomes a werewolf (Latin *forma*, Old French *forme*). The changing of form or skin is reflected in the terms *hamskipta*, 'to change form/skin' and *hamrammr*, 'to be able to change one's shape or form' (Cleasby & Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1957). The parallels in vocabulary advocate for engagement between the Old Norse-Icelandic scribe(s) and older continental traditions of literary werewolves. Bearing in mind that the first attestation of a literary werewolf in Old Icelandic comes from the translated *lai* of Marie de France,[48] the employment of cognate vocabulary is unsurprising. Yet, the associated lexis underlines an understanding of the regnant Augustinian illusory lycanthropy model, which implies an illusory change over a material one. Like the horror of seeing one's self in a trollish creature, the man-in-wolfskin reflects the horror of transformation.

Wearing Skin

The earliest literary werewolf of Old Norse-Icelandic literature is found in a translation from the Breton *lai*, *Bisclavret* written by Marie de France named *Bisclaretz ljóð*, first preserved in De la Gardie 4–7, a thirteenth century Norwegian manuscript (Cook & Tveitane 1979; Knight 2020: 40). The story

demonic use of bodies (a topic that clearly titillated and horrified them) while continuing to deny metamorphosis."

[47] Minjie Su (2022: 36–37) questions the applicability of Small's models to Old Norse-Icelandic literature, focusing on the fact that some skins are not implicitly said to be put on before transformation (cf. *Ála flekks saga*), although they might be shed afterwards. For our purposes, this detail does not matter, as the focus here is on the skin (which we know was worn because it was shed) and that the human keeps his reason while in the skin.

[48] In the form of *Bisclaretz ljóð*, a translation of the French *lai*, *Bisclavret*.

tells of a knight who says he *hamskiptumk*, using a reflexive form of *hamskipta* 'to change form/skin' (Cleasby & Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1957). This reflexive act – that of changing the form or skin of *one's self* – is only attested in prose in this text and a later rewriting of it, *Tíodels saga* (see Cleasby & Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1957; ONP). Elsewhere, the process of "becoming" wolf is expressed using the active verb *hamskipta* or the phrase *fara í ham*, 'to go in to a form/skin.'[49] The reflexive verb is especially pertinent, as the knight Bisclavret is only able to change form by the act of taking off his clothes, and can only come back to his human form by putting his clothes back on. The act of disrobing encapsulates the reflexive act inherent in the verb; he undresses *himself* into a naked state, revealing his animality. When he again dons his clothing, he is putting on, as it were, his humanity.[50] Like Oddr's silk tunic in *Örvar-Odds saga*, Bisclavret's second skin of cloth, his clothing, is thus the defining factor of his humanness; it is also why he must hide them in order to be sure that he will be able to "become" human again after his stint in the wild, by putting the clothes on again. Not only does he willingly "become" wolf, but he explicitly retreats during his naked bouts into the wild forest, in which he performs the ultimate taboo, homicide. This anti-chivalric behavior can only take place if the knight removes his identifying qualities – namely clothing – and is physically outside of society, in this case, in the forest. That he specifically leaves his clothes by an old chapel symbolizes the shedding of the societal expectations imposed upon humans by the Church; laying down his humanness in the form of clothing, he leaves the chapel into the wild and behaves in ways that would not be accepted in Christian society. Like Adam and Eve after the Fall, the werewolf, possessing human intellect and rationality, must exist in the wild.

Wearing acts as a medium through which the wearer takes on a new identity, willingly or unwillingly (Novotná 2024: 96). While the second-skin for Bisclavret is his clothing, the natively-written sagas discussed in this study portray an actual wolfskin used to change shape. For example, in chapter eight of *Völsunga saga*, we are told that Sigmundr and Sinfjötli come upon a hut in the forest, where they find men sleeping with magical wolves' skins hanging above them. The men, and thus also the skins, are under a curse, and whoever puts the skins on will only be able to take them off every ten

[49] It is pertinent to underline here, as already mentioned, that the instances of shapeshifting discussed in this article are not the only types of shapeshifting found within the corpus.

[50] Although throughout the process he retains his human reason, as pointed out by the king when he encounters Bisclaret in wolf form: "Þetta kuikuendi hævir mannz vit" (Cook & Tveitane 1979: 92).

days. They don the magical wolves' skins ("þeir fóru í hamina") (Guðni Jónsson 1950: 123) before going into the forest and behaving like wild animals. During their time wearing the skins, they talk to one another in human language, although they are able to howl like wolves. Their constant bickering and disagreement indicates that they retain their human nature and reasoning. On the tenth day, when they are finally able to take the skins off, they make sure to burn them so that no one else would suffer from such a curse while wearing the skins. Like the burning of Lopthæna's troll/animal skin, the burning of the wolf skin represents the purgative aspect of ridding one's self of the animal covering; a shedding and resolution of a difficulty in the character's life.

This episode in the saga was added by its medieval composer, and is not based on Eddic poetry like the latter parts of *Völsunga saga* (Ashman Rowe: 203). This Christianized version of the werewolf is reflective of Augustine's teachings and even shows evidence of being influenced by the works of Marie de France, the author of *Bisclavret*. Carol Clover (1986: 80) shows that chapter eight of *Völsunga saga*, the same chapter in which the shapeshifting occurs, a scene is borrowed from Marie de France's *lai*, *Éliduc*. I therefore boldly pair this episode with other similar instances of shapeshifting with a skin, instead of considering it as an older, native tradition such as Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir (2007) and Bourns (2021).

Similarly, in *Ála flekks saga*, the protagonist Áli is cursed by a half-troll to become a wolf, "verða at vargi" (Hui et al. 2018: 26). The fiend approaches him while he is in bed with his new bride, and it is specified in the text that Áli is naked except for his undergarments, "Áli var þá afklæddr ǫllum klæðum nema línklæðum" (Hui et al. 2018: 26). Like Bisclavret, Áli's nakedness characterizes his state of animality. While in the wolf's skin he maintains his reason and is able to remember his kin, who recognize him by his eyes when they see him. We are not told the details of his initial transformation, most notably how he got into the skin, but when he is left in a room alone overnight, his foster-mother wakes up to him naked in human form, on the bed next to a wolf's skin. Like in *Völsunga saga*, they quickly make sure to burn the skin so that no one else suffers further from its curse. White (2019) points out that Áli's constant encounters with trolls and his transformation into a wolf are reflective of his inner struggles with identity. In this way, Áli's experience is similar to the protagonists' in the *Hrafnistumannasögur*.[51]

[51] To further connect the themes within the sagas, the troll Nótt in *Ála flekks saga* is depicted wearing a *skinnstakkr* and plays a similar role as the trolls discussed in the *Hrafnistumannasögur*.

Shapeshifting is found abundantly in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, but werewolves are rare. The depictions in *Völsunga saga* and *Ála flekks saga* are the only ones of their kind in the corpus, where a man puts on a skin to turn into a wolf as a result of a curse, while keeping his humanity, aside from the similar narrative involving a troll skin, discussed above, in *Gríms saga loðinkinna*. This version of the werewolf is in line with Augustine's beliefs concerning shapeshifting and Gerard's depiction of those beliefs, and if not transmitted directly from Augustine's works, these ideas could have easily come to Iceland via other ecclesiastical or literary works containing those ideas. In line with Augustine's general stance on shapeshifting, then, the men who "become" wolves in *Völsunga saga* and *Ála flekks saga* do so as a result of magic (what Augustine would call "demonic work"), by means of wearing a magical skin that creates an illusion for those looking on, and even perhaps some kind of delusion for those who are wearing the skins, so that they believe they are actually animals. The key to both stories is that their humanity stays intact.

Tíodels saga, a later adaptation of *Bisclaretz ljóð*, gives us a clear picture of an acknowledgement in Iceland that shapeshifters could not literally change from human to animal, and the story of Adam and Eve is even directly discussed in connected with nakedness. When Tiodel is discovered, he does not want to go back into his clothes in front of others; a knight then proposes that the story of Adam and Eve might explain his reluctance to be naked in front of people:

> Hafa þær bækur haldið sem um heimsköpunina eru, að tveir menn voru skapaðir af almáttigum Guði, syndlausir í Paradís: Adam og Eva. Og svo voru þau sköpuð, að þau skömmuðust sín eigi nakin að standa, og forðuðu engum lið né lim á sér, heldur enn augna sinna. Enn eftir boðorðabrotið, skömmuðust þau nakin að standa. Má vera, að svo megi hér fara, að dýrið megi skammast að auðsýna sig mörgum manni (Hall et al. 2018: 9).

> Those books which are about the creation of the world have maintained that two people were created by Almighty God, sinless in Paradise: Adam and Eve. And they were created such that they were not ashamed to stand naked, and they hid neither their joints nor limbs, let alone their eyes. Yet after the Fall, they were ashamed to stand naked. It is possible that it might be the same thing here: the beast may be ashamed to exhibit himself to many people (Hall et al. 2018: 9).

Tiodel, the main character, is able to "change" into a variety of animals, simply by putting on the appropriate skin, including a white bear's and a wolf's skin. Tiodel remarks that while in the forest, he is the strongest of all the animals, because unlike them, he possesses human nature and

wisdom: "and I am the strongest of them [animals] on account of human wisdom and nature" ("er [eg] þeirra sterkaster fyrer saker mannligrar visku og natturu") (Ohlsson 2009: 17). The illusory transformation thus behaves as a mode with which people's animalistic predispositions come to the fore. The abominable behavior of the wolves reminds the reader of what is *wild* in comparison to what is *civilized*. Like the trolls discussed above, the ravenous acts of the wolves represent that which is inherent in humans, an untamed savagery which, from the Christian perspective, is a result of the depravity of humanity after the Fall. The fact that these werewolves retain their human reason shows that the human race is not completely lost into corrupted animality; for through the same perspective, it is still possible to find salvation via Christ.

Wrapping Up

> Metamorphosis represents the degradation of the human into the bestial. (Salisbury 1994: 168)

These literary tales of man parading as beast reflect the belief that humans have the potential to deviate from their rational selves by giving into their animalistic capabilities. At the same time, the tales underline the real fear of medieval Christians that lust, hunger, and rage – those qualities which exist as a result of the first sin – can overwhelm their spiritual and sensible selves.

Yet, the image of the werewolf clearly emphasizes the hierarchical relationship between humans and animals. In the Augustinian vein, wild animals exist not only for food,[52] but to test humans, punish them, or teach them a lesson. All three of these are accomplished in the tale of the man-into-wolf story, while also underlining the undesirableness of being-animal and the status of animals as subservient to humans.

Bisclavret willingly experiences his wolfish adventures, while Áli, Sigmundr, and Sinfjötli are cursed to do so. The unwilling transformation that the wolfskins bring send the men into an experience that is precisely anti-human. They kill humans and cattle – domesticated animals used for the maintenance of humans – as well as horses. Their behavior while in the skins encapsulates that which humans *should not* do, explicating for the reader what is acceptable within human society and outside of it. Their

[52] It is important here to note that wolves are not a source of food. Their role as predators thus exaggerates Augustine's roles for wild animals.

actions represent what real wolves actually do – terrorize and kill humans and cattle while residing in hidden, wild, spaces. This intricate connection with hunting for food is explored further below.

The forced "transformation" is representative of their inner animality, outwardly embodied by the animal skin. Like the skin-clad trolls, the wolf skin is reflective of the "were-wolf's" inner state, yet can be taken off, underlining the character's ability to change, learn, and grow. Transformation, as Caroline Walker-Bynum (2005) has shown, is really a question of identity.

Beneath the Skin: Hunger

> One of the ways communities defined themselves was by what they ate. (Salisbury 1994: 55).

The literary portrayal of wildness and animality is intricately connected with food and hunger. Likewise, the connection of the themes of hunger and famine with the Fall is a natural one, for hunger only exists in connection with hunting because of Adam and Eve's sins. In the garden they needed not toil for food, while after their expulsion tilling of the ground was necessary to grow food for their maintenance. Both (were)wolves and the trolls of the *Hrafnistumannasögur* are positioned as threats to humans' food supplies. While wolves, by nature, attack cattle and sheep, werewolves are depicted as killing both cattle and humans.[53] The trolls in question hoard not only meat useful to humans, that of cow and sheep, but also forbidden meat: that of horses and humans (see Maraschi 2019). Both the wolf and the troll thus endanger the food supply for the saga characters, while also putting themselves in danger.

In the *Hrafnistumannasögur*, the protagonists in *Ketils saga hængs* and *Gríms saga loðinkinna* travel outside of their normal habitations because there is a famine; they therefore go into the wild north to find food in unconventional spaces in times of desperation. When the protagonists encounter trolls, there is always a matter of food to be dealt with. The story lines in *Örvar-Odds saga* and *Áns saga bogsveigis* portray a rather different environment than its predecessors. The status of religion is linked to the

[53] The historical evidence for the presence of wolves in Scandinavia is reviewed in (Pluskowski 2006: 79–85).

depiction of food scarcity. While the pre-Christian figures of Ketill and Grímr deal with famine, and struggle further with trollish adversaries who limit their ability to hunt and fish, the Christian figures of Oddr and Án live a life where feasting is a normal event, both at home and at the royal court. Ketill and Grímr must travel north to get food because of scarcity at home, while Oddr chooses to travel north so that he can raid the pagan Finns. The Christian figures enjoy a life of abundance while their pagan ancestors struggle for food.[54]

The first time Ketill encounters a troll, it is because he has wandered out into unknown territory to fish during a famine. The second troll whom Ketill encounters, Kaldrani, steals his fish while he is sleeping. The following night, Ketill stays awake to discover Kaldrani stealing his fish, after which he kills the giant. Several years later, there is again a famine, which causes Ketill to go north to fish. As he comes to shore he encounters the troll Forað, who tries to prevent him from fishing. He shoots an arrow at her as she flees in the shape of a whale. Only after this could he successfully fish and take his catch back home. Each time Ketill encounters a fiend, its purpose is to coerce him or distract from successful hunting. Like his father, Grímr also experiences famine in Hálogaland. He travels north to fish. During his first night in the north all of his catch has been stolen. The second night, he intercepts two trolls, Feima and Kleima, trying to break his ship. In poetic verse the two women tell Ketill that it was their father who stole his fish the night before. Grímr immediately kills Kleima, and Feima dies shortly thereafter. The trolls act as foils to the human struggle for food; they highlight the exertion the protagonist must endure in order to procure food during the famine, in a landscape known to the reader as an unchristianized northern wilderness. While the above interactions underline the struggle of hunting, the giant Surtr, whom Ketill encounters, accentuates the Christian viewpoint of the story. Ketill discovers that the giant Surtr has been hoarding various types of flesh. Ketill finds the flesh of several northern animals and at the bottom, salted human flesh. This triggers a warning in Ketill that Surtr is not a friend and as soon as he comes close to the giant he chops off his head.

While the animality of trolls is uncannily reflective to humans of their potential animal nature, putting on a wolf skin and taking on animalistic be-

[54] Pernille Ellyton (2021) shows in her study that *Örvar-Odds saga* is likely the oldest of the *Hrafnistumannasögur*, indicating that *Gríms saga* and *Ketils saga* were composed to fill in the history of the family before Oddr. This would highlight the scribe's tendencies to depict the pre-Christian past as a time of struggle before the coming of Christianity.

havior is a medium through which humans can act out, and thus rid themselves of, their inherent animalistic behavior. This behavior, as we see in the exegetical descriptions of Adam and Eve's garments, is a direct result of the original sin. As a literary device, both the skin-clad troll and the werewolf remind the reader of the corruption of humans after the Fall, and more specifically how the boundaries between human and animal become more blurred than in Paradise due to the more real possibility that humans might not always choose correctly. Humans' animal nature is reflected in the need to hunt for food – a punishment for sin – while also struggling to balance the rules of humanity, namely, to eat only certain meat, and never human.

Cannibalism upsets the order imposed upon humans and animals during the creation, that man should rule over and eat animals and fish. This separation and hierarchy between humans and animals is evident in the figure of the werewolf. The werewolf, a man in animal's clothing as it were, performs exactly the actions and behaviors that humans should not. He violently attacks and kills other animals, as well as humans, both for consumption. The werewolves in all cases are said to eat, and sometimes ravage, their prey. Voracious hunger is intricately connected with the wolf. This is encapsulated in the Icelandic vocabulary of consumption. The verbs *að éta* and *að borða* separate man from beast by placing man at a table. *Að éta* was used for both humans and animals to describe general eating up to around the fifteenth century, when *að borða* (literally, 'to [sit at a] table') comes into use. This late usage is undoubtedly tied to the introduction of courtly culture and the need for a new way to describe it. *Að éta* then becomes an insult to humans, for they should not be eating like animals.

Conclusion: What Defines a Human?

> Bodies in medieval texts can be perceived as a matter in the narrated world, as being a consciously created part of a textual universe. (Künzler 2016: 153).

Usually scholars discuss monstrous, shapeshifting characters, especially trolls, as distinct from humans, specifically belonging to the category of "Other". I am claiming, however, that it is precisely humans who are the Other. More specifically, it is sin – fallen humanity – that informs the Christian idea of corrupted humankind and civilization, thus othering humans.

Humanity is thus defined by belief and behavior. This extends to how

one dresses and what one eats. How one's behavior fits into the accepted social domain determines how one is classified. This is intricately connected with theological ideas of what separates humans from other animals, that is, the ability to reason. Humans thus are expected to make choices, the right choices (in contrast to the wrong choices made by Adam and Eve), that place them within the confines of the civilized, Christian world. Any deviation from choices that place one in this sphere results in a classification of Other.

This otherness is captured in the material of the *skinn*. Immediately upon their expulsion, the gifts of animal skins from God covered Adam and Eve's shame while embodying their new role in the world: one in which they must work for food and clothing and strive to control their sinful nature. In the same way, the trolls in animal skins act as reminders to the protagonists of the *Hrafnistumannasögur* of the post-Fall state of humanity. The uncanny resemblance between the protagonists and the trolls, both physically and of ability, prompts the realization and warning that humans *can* be animalistic. The figure of the man-in-wolfskin takes that realization one step further by demonstrating that animality in words. The were-wolf performs that which the protagonists of the *Hrafnistumannasögur* recoil at in the figure of the troll. Both the skin-clad troll and the wolfskin-wearing man warn the reader of their potential wildness, which also underlines the opposite: that a civilized life is possible through salvation and participation in the Christian Church – a life that one must choose, perhaps even against their nature.

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Summary

This article focuses on depictions of skin(s) – fleshy objects used to cover the human body that are representative of a state of being or a specific identity. In contrast to the traditional interpretation, connecting skin-wearing with mythological or shamanistic shapeshifting, I connect the literary use of skins donned by monstrous figures in the Old Icelandic corpus to the animal skin garments that were fashioned for Adam and Eve after their expulsion from Paradise. This important detail of the protoplasts' new clothing within the widely-disseminated story of the fall of man has been overlooked as a literary topic of any substance in the field of Old Norse-Icelandic literature, although it has recently received attention in neighboring fields, underlining its wider literary importance in the Middle Ages. The allegorical meaning attached to the garments by Late Antique and medieval theologians – that of shame and animality – provides a fruitful avenue through which to interpret further depictions of humans in animal skins in Old Icelandic literature. This symbolism surrounding the human-in-animal allows for a reading of a human-animal hybridity, while also underlining the negative connotations that come with bestial behavior, thus distinguishing man from beast. Non-human behavior and appearance can be tied to the corruption of humanity as a result of original sin. These reflections clarify the task of defining what *is not* or *should not* be the paragon of humanity.

This study focuses on two examples. The first is the trolls of the *Hrafnistumannsögur*. There are four sagas in total, *Ketils saga hængs*, *Gríms saga loðinkinna*, *Örvar-Odds saga*, and *Áns saga bogsveigis*. Each saga presents (a) troll-ish figure(s) wearing animal skin clothing, using the same terminology for the clothing that is used to describe Adam and Eve's garments. The second focus of this study is on later medieval depictions of humans donning an animal skin in order to "turn" into wolves (werewolves, if you must), stories that provide fertile material with which to interpret the Christian rhetoric of the animality of humans after the fall of man. These depictions are found in medieval Romance or sagas from nearby genres that are heavily influenced by the Romance genre, such as *Völsunga saga*, *Ála flekks saga*, *Tíodels saga*, and Marie de France's *Strengleikar*. These two examples of skin-wearing represent a medieval Icelandic mindset that grapples with the separation of humans from other animals, what that means, what the consequences of crossing over from humanity to animality are, and finally, how to define the human by identifying the animal.

Keywords: Biblical Studies, Theology, Werewolves, Trolls, Shapeshifting, Identity

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