

A Translation of the Fantastic

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Admiring the manners and values of European aristocracy and the organisation of society in Western Europe, Håkon Håkonsson, King of Norway from 1217-1263, commissioned the translation of several literary works in order to teach his Norwegian court about these foreign manners. One of these works, *Strengleikar*, is a collection of 21 prose stories based on the Old French *Lais* of Marie de France, which was probably translated for the King between 1226 and 1263. Most of this survives in a single manuscript from ca. 1270, Uppsala De la Gardie 4-7. Not all the original stories of the *Strengleikar* collection are known, but the sources for seventeen are found in six Old French manuscripts. The closest of these to *Strengleikar* is manuscript Harley 978, which is held in the British Library.

Fantastic elements are essential parts of the plot of several of these tales. For instance, the hero himself can be a shape-shifter, his mistress a fairy-lady of another world, magical creatures initiate the hero's adventure, while potions give super-powers and enchanted crewless ships mysteriously find safe harbours and love for the protagonist. The translator endeavoured to produce accurate translations of the texts. Nevertheless, the role and representation of these fantastic elements in *Strengleikar* does not always correspond to those found in Marie's *Lais*. Parts of the texts have been reworked or omitted and various additions have been made. In a comparison of the four texts in *Lais* and *Strengleikar* that include the most apparent fantastic elements (*Bisclavret/Bisclaret*, *Yonec/Jonet*, *Guigemar/Guimard* and *Lanval/Janval*), I will examine both the representation of these elements and their potential resemblance to indigenous Old Norse motifs. Throughout these stories the objects and creatures that appear fantastic or magical to a modern reader are presented with no sign of surprise of their supernatural qualities. The fantastic tends to be both obvious and plain and is introduced as an evident part of this world. My main focus will rest upon shape-shifting and the presentation of the other-world and its abundance.

Shape-shifters and their love affairs

Perhaps one of the most fascinating tales in *Strengleikar*, *Bisclaret* is the story of a knight-werewolf and is most likely the first known reference to such a creature in Scandinavian literature (Odstedt, 1943, 2). An unfortunate but courteous knight of high standing is transformed into a werewolf three days a week, but seems to be quite at ease with his destiny until his adulterous and deceitful wife has his clothes hidden while in a wolf's shape, thus preventing him from regaining his human form.

Apparently, the translator has not understood that Marie's *Bisclavret* means 'werewolf', and instead renders it as the knight's name in the Old Norwegian text; *Bisclaret var æinn riddare vaskr ok kurtæiss vapndiafr ok oflugr* ('Bisclaret was a valiant and courteous knight, bold with weapons and strong'). The French noun is rare and its etymology debated (Schwertek, 1992, 160), and it is not surprising if the translator didn't recognize it. Furthermore, in comparing the structure of the

introductions of several *lais* it becomes clear that the most frequent method of presenting the protagonists is formulaic. As in *Bisclavret/Bisclaret*, Marie de France starts out by stating her intention of telling these adventures and then introduces the hero by name. Therefore, I find it plausible that the translator of *Strengleikar* has acted on his expectations, thus mistaking the noun for a proper name.

The passages dealing with the beast in the translation are in general marked by added descriptions and explanations, all made in accordance with the stylistic tradition of the translated *riddarasögur*, containing various, often synonymous and alliterating, collocations emphasising the content of the paragraphs, without giving much new information. For example, the beast lives in *boscages* ('woods') and is running through *forez* ('forests') in the French text, while in the corresponding Old Norwegian lines he lives *i morkum ok i skogum* ('in forests and woods') and runs *um skoga ok um mærkr* ('through woods and forests'). In this manner, the entire introduction of the werewolf is elaborated in the Old Norwegian text. The rendering of verse 7 is interesting; the Old French *garval devindrent* ('became werewolves') is translated into the alliterating *vurðu vargar* ('became wolves') but the native compound verb *hamskiptuzt* ('shifted shape') is added. This addition would give the audience a better understanding of what really happens, and perhaps relate the events with the stories of *hamskipast* that were already known. A bit further on, lines 10-12 in the original also appear to have been carefully reworked for clarity and specificity by the translator. A first glance lead us to believe that the translator has used *in vargs ham* ('in the form of a wolf') to translate *en cele rage* ('in this (i.e. the werewolf's) fury'), but the corresponding *i þæirre æðe* ('in a rage') is to be found later on. Then the specifying addition *mæðan hann býr i vargs ham* ('while he is in the form of a wolf') sums up the introduction before the story moves on. Another interesting addition is to be found in the equivalent of line 76, where the translation adds *mannz ham* ('in the shape of a man') clearly marking the opposition between wolf and man.

The obedient nature of the beast, more a canine pet than a fierce creature is even more striking in the translation, due to a number of expanded descriptions. For example, at the very first meeting between the king and the werewolf, the flesh-eating beast immediately loses the wild character strongly emphasised in the introduction, becoming the most servile and submissive of all the king's men. At this point, the king makes an additional comment about the animal not only being a reasonable creature, but that he is sure that this animal knows him; *ok kœnnir mek at visu*. The added comments insist upon the werewolf's courteous qualities, his loyalty towards his king and his docile and peaceful nature. The latter is emphasised by several added collocations:

Sua var þat kurtæist ok hogvárt ok miuklynt ok goð viliat ok all dri
angraðezt þat við menn ok ængom gærðe þat mæin. þui likaðe þat væl
ollum.

'It was so courteous and gentle and meek-tempered and benevolent, and it never showed anger toward men or harmed any one. Thus it was well-liked by all.'

The animal accompanies the king everywhere, and in the Old French text he sleeps close to the king; *E pres del rei s'alout cuchier*, whereas it is accentuated in the Old Norwegian version that he *huiera nott* ('every night') *suaf (...)* *hia konongs rækkio*

('slept close to the king's bed'). The beast receives the best the court can offer, not only the affection of the king and the men dearest to him, but also, as added in translation; *goðum vistum ok hinum villdasta drykk* ('good food and the choicest drinks'). Moreover, the most notable divergence is to be found in the actions of the werewolf at the end of *Bisclavret*, where it seems that the translator has made a crucial change to the plot. In the Old French text, the deceived husband/werewolf gets his revenge by biting the nose off his cheating wife. Medieval sources reveal that the penalty for adultery for a woman (and not a man) under Frederick of Sicily (1194-1250) was having her nose cut off (Shahar, 1983, 18), and the revenge then becomes quite appropriate. On the other hand, the werewolf tears her clothes off in the Old Norwegian translation, the greatest disgrace possible according to the text. Nevertheless, at the end of both versions it is told that the wife and many of her female descendants share a common destiny: they are born noseless. *Bisclavret* is presumably the source of the Icelandic *Tjóðels saga*, and comparing these, Kalinke (1981, 142) suggests the existence of a lost exemplar of the *lióð* that had both the nudity and the nose-biting, which would explain the inconsistency between the final comments of the text and the earlier revenge. At the end of the story is a remarkable and rare final comment added by the translator, where he not only underlines the natural nature of the unnatural, but where his personal testimony gives the events a new kind of legitimacy:

En sa er þessa bok norrœnaðe hann sa i bærnsko sinni æinn rikan bonda er hamskiftisk stundom var hann maðr stundum i vargs ham. ok talde allt þat er vargar höfðuzt mæðan,

'He who translated this book into Norse saw in his childhood a wealthy farmer who shifted his shape. At times he was a man, at other times in wolf's shape, and he told everything that wolves did in the meantime.'

The wild birds sing in the beginning of April in both versions of *Yonec/Jonet*, but the Old Norwegian text explains the intention of these songs; *hvetiannde hverr annan til astar ok auca* ('inciting each other to love and procreation'). Perhaps inspired by this, the female protagonist complains about her situation, imprisoned in a tower by her aging and jealous husband. She prays and expresses her desire to take a worthy lover, retelling an old tradition of men and women in similar situations finding courtly, but illicit and secret love. In the translation there is no mention of this tradition of women, instead the lady exclaims; *ok sva ma vera einnihverri* ('it can also be so for any woman'). This is the entrance-cue for another shape-shifter, the goshawk-lover. The theme of a woman secluded from the society of men who is visited by a fairy shape-shifter is common among medieval Celtic and Irish literature, where the form assumed by supernatural beings is frequently that of a bird (Cross, 1913, 29). In *Yonec/Jonet* the beauty of the bird is increased in translation through the added *hinn friðazte gasháucr* ('the most beautiful goshawk'), and further on *hinn fegrsti fugl* ('a very lovely bird'). A misunderstanding of the Old French *Giez ot as piez* ('it had straps/jesses on his feet'), has probably led to the odd corresponding Old Norwegian comment *með fogrum fotum* ('with fair feet'). The translator seems to have understood *piez* ('feet') and has added the alliterating mistaken adjective *fogrum*. Consulting the passage in the translation of Marie's *Lais* into modern Norwegian (1982, 78) it reads *og var lodden på benene* ('and had fuzzy legs'), rendering the passage even more

absurd. Taking human form, the knight's unearthly beauty revealed in lines 141-144 is omitted in translation.

On the condition that the knight believes in one true God, the lady will take him to be her lover. In the Old French tale, he then takes his mistress's shape in order to receive the sacrament and explains this to her in lines 153-162. This is, however, omitted in the Old Norwegian translation. One may wonder whether the translator has not understood the passage, or perhaps found it too incredible and therefore chosen to avoid translating it. The text before and after is carefully rendered, line by line, an indication that these lines may have been missing in his source-text.

The third occurrence of shape-shifting is more problematic. In the *lai* of *Guigemar/Guiamar*, a tale of Celtic and Irish provenance, originating from several myths, the hero Guigemar is presented as an ideal courtly knight, unaware of his social and personal incompleteness due to his lacking interest in love. The *lai* originates from several myths. The first part comes from a tradition of fairies transforming themselves into or sending out animals in order to guide the male protagonist in their direction (as cited in Illingworth, 1962, 177), and in the final part the fairy becomes a more traditional *malmariée* of the lyrics. In *Guigemar/Guiamar*, the knight himself initiates the hunt: *Talent il prist d'aler cachier* ('He had the desire to go hunting'), during which he encounters a white hind, a possible transformation of the fairy-mistress. He wounds the animal in the front hooves *en l'esclot la feri devaunt* in the Old French tale. In the Old Norwegian text this is translated into *framan i briostet* ('in the breast'). Another French manuscript from the second half of the thirteenth century, manuscrit français 2168 in the Bibliothèque Nationale, has *pié* ('foot'), which could easily be misread as *piz* ('breast'), and offers a plausible explanation for the divergence. Although he does not give a mortal blow, the knight nonetheless renders the hind incapable of feeding and fending for itself, and thus doomed to die. While dying, the hind addresses the knight, foretelling him his destiny. The choice of tense in the speech indicates that the creature is determining his future as she speaks; *Tel seit la tue destine* ('This will be your destiny').¹ The Old Norwegian translation of Guiamar's meeting with the hind follows the Old French text carefully, but with some discrepancies. The purity and supernatural nature of the creature is indicated in both versions by its ability to talk and its colour, *Tute fu blanche cele beste* ('This animal was all white'), rendered not only white, but *sniohuit*, ('snow-white') in translation. The antlers are a male symbol, but are considered to be an element of the extraordinary, *le merveilleux*, and are possibly a sign of true uniqueness. In the Old French tale, the hind has *perches de cerf out en la teste* ('has deer-antlers on its head'), whereas the translation uses the singular; *hafði æina kuisl hiartar horns i miðio ænni* ('had the branch of an antler in the middle of her forehead'), thus increasing the supernatural qualities of the creature, evoking parallels to the unicorn.

The knight himself is now injured, and his journey through the forest to the lady seems to be predestined and without alternatives; *un vert chemin ki l'ad menez / fors a la laundë* ('a green road leads him through the forest') to a *braz (...) de mer* ('bay of the sea'). The corresponding Old Norwegian passage reads *ok fann hann þá gatu grasvaxna* ('found a path covered with grass'), and the passive protagonist is turned

¹ A similar prediction is found in *Yonec/Jonet*, where the dying goshawk-lover reveals their unborn son's future.

into an active individual. A magical crewless ship then takes him to the lady, possibly a fairy controlling these events. Illingworth (1962, 177) underlines the possible shape-shifting of the fairy herself as a purely academic suggestion, but sees the hind as an agent of the fairy, part of a predetermined plan, probably that of the lady. I agree, but would nevertheless like to stress the resemblances to the shape-shifting-motif.

Fairies who act as agents of destiny are frequent in Celtic and Roman literature, and they are both guardians (*Lanval/Janual*) and lovers (*Guigemar/Guiamar*). They are, to my knowledge, absent in Old Norse medieval literature, except in the translations and adaptations of Old French texts, and do not emerge in the indigenous popular poetry until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In *Strengleikar* they are presented with words similar or equivalent to the ones in the Old French text, but it is never explicitly stated that they are fairies, this knowledge being evident for Marie's audience. They are, for the most part, referred to as *frú* (*lady*) in translation, and their extraordinary qualities would most likely not be understood, the audience lacking the necessary cultural knowledge. The fairy-mistresses in the *Lais* were therefore probably perceived as noble ladies of an outstanding nature by the new audience.

On the other hand, the concept of shape-shifting is well known in Old Norse mythology and literature and was thus familiar to an Old Norse audience. The god Loki, for instance, was an adept shape-shifter and is known to have appeared as salmon, horse, flea and bird. In *Ynglinga saga*, chapter 7, it is told that Óðinn himself is capable of *skipta hömum* ('shifting shape'). In the shape of a bird, a four-legged animal, a fish or a serpent he could in a moment travel to distant countries. During these journeys, his body was asleep or as if dead. These two occurrences of *hamskiptast* differ; Loki transforms his body, his mind always remaining present. On the other hand Óðinn detaches the mind from the body, thus escaping the spatial-physical boundaries of the world.

Lecouteux (1992, 84) considers the zoomorphic shape-shifter fairies in *Lais* to be the Celtic equivalents of the Old Norse guarding spirit known as a *fylgja*. These often emerge as different animals, e.g. a swan, two eagles and a falcon in *Gunnlaugs saga Ormstungu* (Mundal 1974, 30). However, characterizing the *fylgja* as a shape-shifter is not without problems. Certainly, there are similarities between the shape-shifting and the *fylgja*-motif, but whereas the shape-shifter and his mind stay in a transformable body, like Loki, the *fylgja* is the mind occupying different bodies, leaving the unused primary one immobile or asleep, more similar to Óðinn in *Ynglinga saga*. The possibility of considering the talking white hind at the beginning of *Guigemar/Guiamar* as a parallel to the *fylgja* is tempting, and the resemblance would perhaps make the material more familiar to the listeners.

Based on the tales dealing with shape-shifters in *Strengleikar*, *Bisclaret*, *Jonet* and *Guiamar*, I will propose the presence of three types of shape-shifters: 1: The time-dependent, involuntary and unconscious, with a possibility of being trapped in another shape like *Bisclavret*. 2: The voluntary and conscious, with the ability to assume different shapes, in *Yonec/Jonet*. Finally, the questionable type 3: The voluntary and conscious, appearing in another location but possibly leaving a body behind, in *Guigemar/Guiamar*. A search for examples of shape-shifters of these three types in Old Norse sources leaves us with the *fylgja* and the abovementioned Óðinn as parallels to type 3 and Loki as an example of type 2. However, it has proven more difficult to

locate Old Norse examples of type 1. I have succeeded in finding two where the shape-shifting is involuntary because inflicted upon someone with the use of charms, and they are therefore trapped in the other shape. Both examples are from younger sagas: In *Hrólfs saga kraka* Björn is transformed into a bear, and in *Jóns saga leikara*, Jón encounters a man who has been *lostit með úlfhanzka* ('hit with a wolf-glove') and is thus trapped in a wolf's shape (Both cited in Liestøl, 1937, 90-91).

The abundant luxury and unearthly craftsmanship of the other-world

Once in human form, the noble knight in *Yonec/Jonet* claims his everlasting love, and excuses himself for not being able to leave his Old French *paleis* ('palace') until summoned. Here the translation reads *fostr lande* ('native country'). A possible explanation for the discrepancy is that the translator's Old French manuscript had *païs* ('country'). The later, fourteenth-century manuscript français 24432 in the Bibliothèque Nationale has this reading. Of course, their love is doomed, and the husband sets a trap in the window to kill the bird-lover. The danger of the lethal trap is amplified in translation by the alliterating *let hvettia sva hvassa. Sem hinn hvassaste harknif* ('had them filed as sharp as the sharpest razor'). However, mortally wounded, the knight gives some instructions to his mistress before leaving for his native country. She follows, and goes through a hill (Old French: *hoge* Old Norse: *hellir*), all dark inside, emerging on the other side near a city, which is larger in translation: *mioc micla borg* ('a very large city'). An entrance to the other-world through hills or somehow underground is frequent in Old Norse myth and literature, consequently familiarizing the passage to the Old Norse audience. Throughout the description of the journey and the surroundings of the city the translator remains loyal to the Old French tale, and makes only minor changes, the most noteworthy one being the rendering of line 363: *Ki (...) parust tute d'argent* ('that appear to be all silver') into the alliterating *sva skinnande sem silfr klæðe vëre* ('shining as though they were silver garments'). In search of her dying lover, the lady walks through two splendid rooms, before, fairytale-style, entering the third only to discover that this is the knight's room and it is more superbly equipped than the first two. The passage is marked by some added descriptions: the bed-clothes can not be valued, *sva varo þau dyr ok ágæt* ('they were so precious and fine'), though the candles and the chandelier can. Following a rather awkward description of the chandelier, the Old Norwegian text has *varo villdri gulli ok silfre einnar ricar borgar* ('were finer than the gold and silver of a wealthy city'), whereas the Old French verse only mentions the gold. In verse 438, the dying knight gives his mistress a *bliaut* ('tunic'). The manuscript De la Gardie 4-7 had originally *pell*, (some kind of precious cloth, presumably silk), but this has been deleted by the scribe and corrected to the corresponding loanword *bilet*. The next time the lady takes this journey, she is with her son and husband, and they get lost and end up spending the night in a convent, which is rendered richer in the translation through the use of added adjectives: *friða* ('beautiful') and two instances of *dyrlego* ('precious'). The tomb of the dead knight is situated nearby, and its splendour is emphasised in translation. The Old French text reads that the tomb is *coverte d'un palie roé* ('covered with a wheel-embroidered silk-cloth'). The translator turns *palie* into the loanword

PELLI, and accentuates the splendour of the cloth by adding *gullvofno* (*gold-woven*).² The Old French *roé* means decorated with a pattern of circular figures, and the Old Norwegian text has the equivalent: *er hvelgort var*. The cloth is *d'un chier orfreis par mi bendé* ('banded across with precious embroideries'), and the Old Norwegian rendering of this verse is; *ok allt gylloðvm saumat*. The word *gylloðvm*, a dative of *gullhláð* means gold-ribbon, and this part of the translation is as accurate as possible. The localisation of the ribbons is altered; not only located in the middle of the cloth, but all over, hence even more exquisite in the translation. Furthermore, the censers are made of amethyst, and here the translator adds a typical clarifying explanation; *var af gimisteini þeim er heittr amatiste* ('was of the precious stone called amethyst').

Similar descriptions are to be found in both *Lanvall/Janual* and *Guigemar/Guiamar*. In the latter, the description of the crewless magic ship presents the remarkable exotic luxury of its interiors and the otherworldly handcraft of its construction, with no visible joints. The Old Norwegian tale continues: *ne nægling naglanna* ('nor the nailing of nails'), a beautiful alliteration of co-derived nouns, differing from the Old French text (v. 157) where all the rivets are visible and made of *benus* ('ebony'). The translator's misunderstanding of this verse has made the ship even more marvellous, as he has rendered *Ki ne fust tuste de benus* ('that were (i.e. the rivets) not all made of ebony') as *nema var sua til synis sem æinn viðr være allt* ('but it appeared to the eyes as though it were all one piece of wood'). It is likely that he has misread *benus* as *bois* ('wood'), thus altering the verse. Alternative explanations are that his Old French manuscript had *bois* or that he simply didn't know the significance of the word. It is unlikely that his source-text had *bois* in an otherwise similar verse to l. 157 in the manuscript Harley 978. This would be inadequately plain in description of a magical vessel. Considering the obvious richness and diversity of the translator's Old French vocabulary, I would argue that it is improbable that he failed to recognize the word, when a bit further on he correctly translates *ivoire* as *filsbæinum*. The following two verses depicting the beauty of the sail of silk are omitted in translation. The fantastic nature of the ship is highlighted in another omitted passage; the knight is in deep thoughts, because in no place he has heard of ships docking in this area. The magnificent interiors of the abandoned ship are accurately presented in translation, but a couple of additions stresses the extraordinary wealth of the object; the bed is *gorva með myklom haglæik* ('constructed with great skill'), and its inlays are the *fægrestu* ('fairest').

Due to a lacuna of the Old Norwegian manuscript, the translation of the first 156 lines of *Lanval* is unknown. This includes a long passage portraying physical beauty, richness of clothing, and an abundance of food, beverages and caresses extensively, but rather stereotypical, where the lost translation would have been of great interest. The Old Norwegian tale therefore begins at *Janual*'s departure from his mistress, and through the following passage his material fortune due to the love-affair is described. When the fairy and her entourage of maidens enter the final judgement-scene, the translator's work surprisingly does not fit into the usual rhetorical characteristics of the

² Robert Cook (1979, 245) translates this as 'gold-embroidered', and I am reluctant to agree with this. In the story *Guigemar/Guiamar* one has a similar expression; *silkipell gullvofet*, translating *un drap de seie a or teissu* ('a silk cloth interwoven with gold') (My translation).

translated courtly romances. Long passages concerning the luxury and exquisiteness of the mistress's clothing and her beauty are omitted in the Old Norwegian text. The corresponding and altered Old Norwegian passage is constituted of two parts. The first is the added description of the almost supernatural horse. Like the hind of *Guigemar/Guamar* it is *huitr sem snior* ('white as snow'), Cook/Tveitane (1979, 224) claim this is a modification of the above-mentioned omitted description of the fairy-mistress, which refers to *le col plus blanc que neif sur branche* ('her neck whiter than snow on a branch'). An added description of the horse:

sua var hann hogværr gangare skiotr ok vaskr ok einkennilegr yuir allum
dauðlegum hestum
'and it was such a gentle ambler, swift and valiant and unique above all
mortal horses'

differs quite a lot from the corresponding passage in manuscript Harley 978. The second part is a detailed physical description of the fairy that is not translated. At this point 18 lines are missing or extensively altered in translation. Cook/Tveitane (1979, 224-225) judge that this passage was omitted by the translator due to a similar description probably written on the lost leaf of manuscript De la Gardie 4-7. Considering the evidence of the translator's techniques of work in the other tales, I would propose that these discrepancies are not due to the translator's lack of understanding or lack of taste for these lines, but rather to the manuscript he had available differing from manuscript Harley 978.

The other-worlds of *Yonec/Jonet* and *Lanval/Janual* are kingdoms of abundant wealth and beauty. They are seemingly inhabited only by men (*Yonec/Jonet*) or women (*Lanval/Janual*), and it is not easy to gain access or to leave, not even for the fairies themselves (*Yonec/Jonet*). Their existence is to be kept a secret from the real world, and the lovers are prohibited to reveal their existence, and are told that they will lose their love and privileges if they do so. In *Lanval/Janual* the seclusion of the otherworld is emphasised in translation by the added *fra manna augsyn* ('from the sight of men'). Having lost the love of his fairy-mistress by revealing her existence to avoid the queen's approaches, Lanval/Janual is put on trial and risks everything. His fairy-mistress appears at the judgement, rescuing him, but leaves him behind when she returns to the other-world. Not in a very chivalric manner, he jumps on her horse as she is leaving, thus accompanying her to the island of Avalon/Valun, the ultimate fairyland, and is not heard of afterwards. The sparse descriptions of this island differ in the two texts. Whereas the Old French reads *Ceo nus recuntent li Breton/ En un isle ki mut est beaus* ('the Bretons tell us, in an island that is very beautiful'), the translation has *þat hafa sagt hinir sannfroðastu menn. at sv er hin friðasta ey i heiminum* ('The most truly informed men have said that this is the most beautiful island in the world'). In translation, both the use of the superlative and the fact that it is not only the Bretons, but *hinir sannfroðastu* increases the fantastic aspect of the island, but the final addition *i heiminum* renders it completely realistic, belonging to the human world.

The translations of the other-worlds in the tales of *Yonec/Jonet*, *Guigemar/Guamar* and *Lanval/Janual* do not reveal an unambiguous pattern. The material wealth of the other-worlds is at times amplified and made more supernatural in translation, but at the same time the Old French other-world is relocated to the real

world in *Janual*, but remains extraordinary and with obvious resemblances to indigenous motifs in *Jonet*.

I started out examining the shape-shifters in *Strengleikar* and *Lais*, establishing a typology of these and finding parallels in Old Norse mythology and literature, before moving on to investigate the representation of the other-world. On my own return to the real and human world in order to sum up, I would like to insist on the obvious: However close in respect to style and content to a source-text, a translation is a reworked text, including new elements and connotations and this is perhaps even more so in the medieval world. The myths, legends and perceptions of the world undoubtedly lead to disparate understandings of the same tale. Therefore, the translator's role as interpreter is essential and will always affect the transmission. My comparisons reveal a translator fairly true to his supposed source-text, only making minor textual changes in the representations of the fantastic, which are for the most part insignificant to the tales. A close reading of *Guigemar/Guimarr* (Budal, 2001) confirms that his major changes and additions appear in descriptions and scenes of battle and tend to be of a rather formulaic nature. The fantastic element of these tales is to a certain degree translated, but clearly diminished. Nevertheless, certain elements of these texts, like shape-shifters, exceptional luxury and an underground other-world, would be recognized by the Old Norse audience through their knowledge of indigenous myths, but other elements would appear alien or simply not be understood. A true translation of the fantastic in these tales would not be a translation of text, but of ideas, demanding extensive explanations in order to make the new audience able to grasp some of the magic.

All translations from Old French to English are my own. Translations from Old Norse to English are those of Robert Cook (*Strengleikar*, 1979), unless otherwise stated.

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