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Textual production and status contests in rising and unstable societies

edited by
Massimiliano Bampi and Marina Buzzoni

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Introduction

Massimiliano Bampi, Marina Buzzoni

The present collection of essays is based on a workshop entitled *Polysystem theory and beyond*, which took place in Venice on 4-5 October 2010. The original idea was to discuss the application of the polysystem theory and more recent work done by members of the Unit for Culture Research at Tel Aviv University primarily, but not exclusively, on medieval textual production. Despite the huge impact that the polysystem theory has had since its first formulation in the late 1970s on translation studies around the world, it has received much less attention in medieval studies, even though translation has long been one of the major research topics for scholars dealing with the literary and linguistic heritage of the Middle Ages. Therefore, the workshop was conceived as a forum where the ideas and the theoretical tenets put forth by the polysystem theory and culture research, with their focus on the interrelatedness of all the components making up a culture, could be discussed with reference to a variety of case studies pertaining to various epochs and cultures.

The papers presented at the workshop and the ensuing discussions were so thought-provoking that plans were soon made to edit a volume in which both the results of individual research activities and the outcome of the lively debate that took place during the course of the workshop could be collected. The presence of Itamar Even-Zohar, the founding father of the polysystem theory and the main inspirer of culture research at Tel Aviv University as well as at a growing number of other universities worldwide, made the discussion even more fruitful and productive.

All the essays in this collection share a concern with the instrumental and symbolic use of literary texts and aim at raising questions regarding the role of textual activity in the shaping and development of culture. Given the experimental nature of the project, it should be mentioned that the questions raised outnumber the answers provided by the essays.

The adoption of a socio-semiotic approach, which is not concerned with making statements about the aesthetic quality *per se* of literary

texts, enables literature to be viewed as a complex and stratified activity, the aim of which can by no means be confined to providing entertainment and amusement. Indeed, as the title of the present volume indicates, textual production, including literature, can play a major role in status contests involving competing groups or cultures. Texts can be used as tools to enhance the prestige and authority of power holders, who promote and sustain literary activity to legitimate their world-view. Texts, however, can also play a major role in such contests as generators of new options and chances for groups that aspire to occupy a dominant position, thus contributing to creating resources for emergent (or re-emergent) social entities. Furthermore, at the level of relations between cultures, where one exerts a direct influence over the other as a consequence of a difference in prestige, it is worth drawing attention to how a literary polysystem grows in complexity by considering which cultures are perceived as being more prestigious than others at a given moment, thus determining what kinds of texts are chosen to be transferred into the target system. Textual investment seems to be particularly intense – and thus, more articulated – when the society promoting such an investment requires it, and uses it, as part of a self-establishment and self-regulation strategy. This is particularly interesting to analyse in the case of rising and unstable societies, where tools of different kinds are needed either to lay the foundations of a new entity or to direct the development of a society in one direction or another. Hence, from all the above it is clear that the assumption on which the whole volume is based is that dynamics which operate at the level of textual production are best understood if viewed as resulting from the interplay with other levels of organization of society.

The essays deal mostly with textual production in medieval Europe. However, the scope of the volume includes also studies of literary production, both in the form of original works and translations, in 18th-century Germany and 19th-century Iceland.

The collection opens with Itamar Even-Zohar's essay, where the author discusses the relation between textual activity and social energy in connection with the puzzling case of medieval Iceland. Furthermore, the first part of the essay raises crucial questions about the use of non-practical texts through comparative evidence adduced from a variety of sources, ranging from Near Eastern/Biblical texts to Central and Eastern European textual material. This essay has a major explanatory role as it illustrates the instrumentality and symbolicity of culture products, including literary texts.

Iceland and medieval Scandinavia are also the object of study of the following three essays.

In his study, Torfi Tulinius starts from the double assumption that *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* was written by Snorri Sturluson, as is customarily held in international scholarship, and that this saga founded the successful genre of the *Íslendingasögur*. Building on Bourdieu's sociological theory as well as on previous applications of it to medieval Iceland, Tulinius describes how the genre of the *Íslendingasögur* may have appeared as a reaction to the arrival of romance in the Nordic sphere via translations at the royal court, thus contributing to the discussion on the development of the Icelandic literary polysystem from the second half of the 13th century onwards.

Stefka Eriksen's article discusses the position of Old Norse translated *riddarasögur*, and the change in this position within Old Norse literary polysystems, in the period between the mid 13th and the mid 15th century. The discussion is exemplified by a study of *Elíss saga ok Rósamundar*, which is a translation of an Old French *chanson de geste*, *Elye de Saint Gille*. In her view, there was a change of position of the translated *riddarasögur* from 13th-century Norway to 15th-century Iceland. From having a central position in the polysystem in 13th-century Norway, translations of *riddarasögur* may seem to have become not peripheral, but rather internalized and undistinguishable from the indigenous Icelandic compositions.

Massimiliano Bampi's essay proposes some reflections on how the social and political changes that characterise the period of Icelandic history after annexation to Norway (1262-1264) were strictly related to the development of the literary system, especially as regards the nexus between group dynamics and the interaction between saga genres. The core question discussed in his study is whether the growing complexity of the literary polysystem in terms of genres is in any way linked to the fact that competing options were devised by social entities with different backgrounds and different strategies to gain power and enhance their status. At the end of the analysis, two possible ways of approaching the problem are delineated.

Fulvio Ferrari deals with a core issue in the field of medieval Low German literature, namely whether it is possible to speak about «Middle Low German literature». Adopting the polysystem theory, which enables to focus on the distribution and articulation of literary activities in the different social groups and on the different cultural levels in Northern Germany during the late Middle Ages, the author comes to the conclusion that the use of different linguistic varieties in relation to different textual sorts makes it debatable to speak of «Middle Low German literature», and totally inappropriate to speak of «Middle Low German literary polysystem».

Marina Buzzoni's essay analyses the crucial nexus between textual production in the Germanic Middle Ages and group dynamics, focussing on the Old Saxon poem *Heliand*, on the poem *The Death of Alfred* (in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*), and on the political model of Theoderic the Great during his reign in Italy. In particular, she discusses the possible role and contribution of cultural products – not only written texts of different kinds, but also figurative artworks – in increasing in-group entitativity, a notion taken from social psychology. She argues that *culture planning*, particularly by transforming «non-structured inventories into structured *repertoires*» (Even-Zohar), turns out to be a perceptual cue of in-group entitativity.

The two essays that close the volume are both dedicated to more recent periods. Rakefet Sela-Sheffy discusses the rise of German literature in late 18th century adopting a socio-semiotic approach to culture. The core issue raised by the author is that the awakening of a national German sentiment and the rise of a German-language high culture are basically a social process located in the literary field – a process centred on reforming the literary profession and controlling the literary market, through transforming and monopolizing literary production and taste.

Jón Karl Helgason's essay discusses the reception of Ludwig Tieck's tale *Der Blonde Eckbert* in Iceland, which was published in Icelandic translation in the journal «Fjölnir» in 1836. Adopting the polysystem theory, the analysis is based on a close reading of a comment written by an anonymous reader from the Eastern Fjords to the editorial board of «Fjölnir» and on the reply of the editor to the reader. From the correspondent's comment, describing public opinion from a certain distance, one is able to reconstruct his impression of the literary norms of early 19th-century Iceland – norms that the translation in «Fjölnir» was clearly violating. The editors' reply, appearing in the fourth issue in 1838, gives a different perspective on the matter, highlighting how translations of unusual works may be purposely designed to introduce new ideas and aesthetics into a literary scene.

We hope that the ideas and reflections collected in this volume will contribute towards promoting further discussion on the role of textual production in the development of societies across the centuries.[1]

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1. We wish to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their insightful suggestions and comments on all essays in this volume.

Textual Efflorescence and Social Resources
Notes on Mediaeval Iceland[1]

Itamar Even-Zohar

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The overt double function of culture traits and products, namely instrumentality and symbolicity, which may be explicit in some elements, often remains hidden for other ones. Cars as practical vehicles and signs of status may appear as an obvious case that does not need much explanation. In contrast, texts, especially those considered to be non-practical, seem to be a less obvious case. What useful or practical purposes can non-practical texts serve, and in what sense and to what extent may they become valuable possessions? These questions have been discussed in various scholarly traditions in a variety of ways, but somehow the operation of texts as a major factor in the creation of social resources and energy has not yet become a high priority issue on the agenda of whatever related disciplines. In this paper, I will attempt to draw attention to the relation between textual activity and social energy in connection mostly with the puzzling case of mediaeval Iceland.

Status, Symbolicity and Instrumentality of Texts

The overt double function of culture traits and products, namely instrumentality and symbolicity, which may be explicit in some elements, often remains hidden for other ones. Cars as practical vehicles and signs of status may appear as an obvious case that does not need much explanation. In contrast, texts, especially those considered to be non-practical, seem to be a less obvious case. What useful or practical purposes can non-practical texts serve, and in what sense and to what extent may they become valuable possessions? These questions have been discussed in

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«Textual symbolicity» means that the possession of texts *per se* is a symbol of prestige and status, thus allowing possessors to assume more privileges in any relevant context – an inner circle, a whole society, or a group of different societies – thus playing a role in the competition between individuals and groups. As I argued elsewhere (EVEN-ZOHAR 2002), shifting has been taking place along history between individual (power-holders) and common possession (an entire group). In periods when the very existence of a group has become contingent upon solidarity and cohesion among its members, common possessions have become indispensable. In such instances, language and texts were often pushed to the top of priorities for their easy diffusion and immediate consumability, in contradistinction to immovable objects (though even such objects could be diffused for sharing via language and texts).

The notion of «texts» should not be restricted to written ones only, though ever since the invention of writing, roughly by the end of the 4th millennium BCE in Mesopotamia, written texts tended to assume continually higher values than oral ones. However, oral texts persevered along history as natural production of everyday speech, as peripheral products of low status or dissident and subversive groups, or as the very opposite, that is, as the epitome of high authority and exclusive knowledge. Many texts of high status, which have become enduring items of institutionalized canons, were produced orally, *or presented as such*, before eventually making their way to script. Texts like the Gilgamesh epic, the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, the Quran, the Mahabharata, the Iliad, the Talmud, the Kalevala are all just few examples of this long-lasting tradition. It is accepted that the texts of the evangelists, for example, had to be perpetuated orally and partly in subversion before Christianity assumed power to become able to freely spread its gospel. The Talmud, on the other hand, was written down as a planned project when it was feared that the texts rehearsed by generations (from 200 to 500 CE) could no longer be safely maintained orally.

In Iceland, the Law remained an oral text until the very end of the Commonwealth era, its reciting being the major obligation of the Law-Speaker (*lǫgsǫgumaðr*) at the *Alþingi* («General Assembly») several centuries after the dominance of textual writing in the country. Thus,

Snorri Sturluson, a proliferous author of prominent historical and narrative texts, remained loyal to oral textuality in his long and repeated tenures as law-speaker, in spite of the fact that a written compilation of laws (the now lost *Hafliðaskrá*) had already existed since 1117-1118 as a consequence of the *Alþingi*'s decision. As Gísli Sigurðsson (2004a, p. 57) puts it, «[the law-speaker's] power and prestige was based not on a book, as happened within the Church, but on knowledge that the lawspeaker had had to acquire from the lips of other wise men». Quoting a passage from *Grágás*, Gísli comments:

it [i.e., the quoted passage] gives an idea of the power this lack of a book to consult on points of dispute put into the hands of a small group of legal experts who were able to decide among themselves on what was law and what was not. In light of what is said later about Hafliði Masson's connections with the episcopal sees of Skálholt and Hólar, the writing up of the law at Breiðabólstaður in the winter of 1117-8 may be viewed as the first step in a movement led by the allies of the Church to encroach upon the secular domain of the lawspeakers, a domain in which the Church was later to exercise considerable influence (SIGURÐSSON 2004a, p. 58).[2]

Consequently, there is no reason to assume that the law-speakers «necessarily have found it a great relief to their overtaxed memories to have the law fixed in writing – as modern scholars seem to assume when they express astonishment that the law was not put into writing earlier» (p. 59), which finally leads Sigurðsson to the conclusion that «there is in fact *no* compelling reason to suppose that it came as a relief to the lawspeakers to have the law in written form. On the contrary, they may well have been proud of their knowledge and looked upon the oral exercise and learning of the law as an essential part in the training of young lawmen» (p. 60; see also KJARTANSSON 2009).

The oral or written state of the so-called Icelandic sagas, on the other hand, seems to be less clearly settled, with evidence pro and con alternately propounded through the last two hundred years, though it seems that no one contests the plausibility of oral traditions at the basis of at least some of the family sagas, and Gísli Sigurðsson's strong advocation in his significant book (2004a [Icelandic: 2002]) for dropping the controversy altogether to benefit from the advantages of oral traits analysis is very appealing.

Both oral and written texts could thus get and confer power, status and prestige. The ability to produce or have produced them as well as

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2. This view was propounded by Gísli Sigurðsson already in SIGURÐSSON 1994.

materially possess them has become a matter of value. Groups with a rich canon could look down upon groups with a poor or no canon at all, and the possession, whether symbolic (like «we have got Shakespeare») or material (like «we have got the original manuscripts of the sagas») conferred better competitive positions, which in turn could serve as legitimation for all sorts of actions and claims over territories and resources. For example, even though Iceland declared its independence in 1944, it was only in 1971, when the agreement with Denmark on the return of the manuscripts was signed, that «the final confirmation that Iceland had gained its independence from Denmark» was received (SIGURÐSSON 1996, pp. 60-61).[3] An opposite case, which I find to be rare evidence of the frustration of the non-possessors, was delivered by the Ukrainian writer Oksana Zabuzhko, who claimed that «if at the time Lesya Ukrainka and Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi had been known in the world to the extent Tolstoy and Dostoevsky are, our country need not have given up its nuclear weapons. And this is not just a metaphor» (ZABUZHKO 2007). In contradistinction to the failure of the Ukraine, in her view the USSR gained success even in its darkest terror days on the basis of the reputation of the Russian literary texts:

Let's not forget: over a hundred years Tolstoy and Dostoevsky have been Russia's trademark, and to a large extent all of the Bolshevik revolution was mediated in the consciousness of western political and intellectual elite through Tolstoy and Dostoevsky as the «guides» to the «mysterious Russian soul». Lenin, Bolsheviks, even Chekists headed by Dzerzhinsky were perceived from behind the iron curtain not as political criminals, who were liquidating every living soul, including the «Russian» one, but as heroes from Russian classics, anxious to «save the world» – and this had the most direct impact on the international success of Stalinist politics (ZABUZHKO 2007).

According to the rule of canon (SELA-SHEFFY 2002), prestigious texts need not be at the same time texts in circulation as working tools (EVEN-ZOHAR 2002). Tokens of status, whether material or semiotic, may shift between direct and indirect instrumental states. Thus, a text that is no longer directly active as such may be recycled or «revived» to become one at some point. On the whole, it is not always clear which the major

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3. Jón Karl Helgason discusses a previous repatriation attempt, the transfer of the national poet Jónas Hallgrímsson's bones from Denmark to Iceland in 1946 (HELGASON 2003, 2011), but the initiative in that act was a private matter, it did not involve any animosities between Denmark and Iceland, and above all, as Helgason describes in detail, it did not create a spirit of national unification like the later repatriation of the sagas. However, it might have inspired the Icelandic government to initiate its more audacious project of «bringing the sagas home».

function is in a given case, thus allowing us to think of a given situation of textual activity as potentially always doubly functional. Actually, the distinction may become important not for periods when texts are directly active, but when they cease to be so and yet keep maintaining their impact via the market of valued goods.

By «directly active» I am referring to texts consumed by their contents. As such, they may become «tools» for a large range of tasks, the major ones being a source for interpreting the world as well as for acting within it. In other words, they function as loci of cultural repertoires, where solutions for the management of life that are known implicitly through cultural practices become explicitly formulated. As written grammars have made people conscious of the ways they use language and served as tools for teaching new generations how to maintain the language of their ancestors, so did texts deliver sets of options for managing life. This applies to all kinds of texts, direct and indirect, practical and non-practical. Since antiquity, we have got direct explicit sets of instructions, like compilations of laws and manuals. The Laws of Hammurabi (HARPER 1904; DRIVER, MILES 1952-1955), or Kikkuli's ancient Hittite manual for the training and treatment of chariot horses used in warfare[4] are certainly ones of the most prominent in world history. Certainly most people would not find it conceptually difficult to think of such texts as directly instrumental.[5] The question would arise for texts that seem to serve no instrumental purpose whatsoever. The *Gilgamesh epic*, for example, may appear a puzzling case because it is difficult for us to understand what purpose it might have served in the context of societies so remote to our own, since thinking of it in terms of «literature», an institution already taken for granted nowadays, would be extremely anachronistic. However, no doubt it served an important purpose in view of the fact that it has been repeatedly copied all over the Fertile Crescent for several centuries and kept in royal libraries, quite

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4. This text, found in the royal archive of the Hittite capital Ḫattuša (now Boğazkale in Turkey), is a 13th century BCE Neo-Hittite rendition of the original. According to some scholars, this redaction corrects the non-proficient use of Hittite in previous redactions (from the later 15th and 14th centuries), a feature I find to reinforce the practical nature of the original redactions, and possibly evidence of the high standing of the latest one (known in Hittitology as CTH 284; see RAULWING 2006 for a detailed discussion, and RAULWING 2006, p. 62, for discussion of the level of linguistic mastery).

5. The Laws of Hammurabi contain not only laws, but also self-praises where Hammurabi describes himself as someone who has come to rule under the aegis of the gods, and made laws «to cause justice to prevail in the land, to destroy the wicked and the evil, to prevent the strong from oppressing the weak, [...] to enlighten the land and to further the welfare of the people» (HARPER 1904, p. 3, p. 99).

like the Kikkuli manual, as well as almost verbatim embedded in texts produced by other groups.[6]

The instrumental function of non-practical texts must then be acknowledged in view of their production and consumption by so many human societies along history. There is of course a well-known argument which explains their existence by the primeval human proclivity for telling stories as pastime entertainment. It is believed to have been permeating the life of human societies to such a degree that groups that lack this trait are therefore often considered to be exceptional rather than typical.[7] Whether this is true or not, beyond entertainment, or perhaps as its very *raison d'être*, these texts may function like the overtly practical sets of instructions, or even more powerfully than the latter, since indirectness may often work more efficiently than directness. Telling a story about a poor peasant robbed on his way to the town market, but then compensated by the local governor as a gesture of *Mâat* (justice; see ASSMANN 1989) may be a more powerful promotion for the advantages of the state than some abstract law that stipulates such a treatment (like Hammurabi's Law, §23).[8] By not instructing but providing representations of possible situations, such texts may thus better function as models for matters allowed, possible or prohibited. As such, they have been able to serve along history variegated purposes of human and societal control, obviously also playing for power and domination. We may therefore conceive of them not as some secondary type, one that may have emerged as it were in the history of humankind when people got some free time from more urgent tasks (such as training horses or regulating traffic), but as a primary one that may have emerged prior to or in parallel with practical texts.

In short, while urgent tasks of regulation must often be addressed by overt and explicit instructions, persuasion and cohesion can better be achieved indirectly through what might be taken as credible life-illustrations in the form of parables and stories. A commonly accepted

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6. For example, the main story and certain phrases in the history of the flood in the book of Genesis are fully identical to those in the *Gilgamesh epic*, though the narrative framework and the names of the protagonists are different. Another reincarnation surfaces in *Landnámabók* in the story of Flóki (see CLEWORTH 2009 with further bibliography).

7. For example, Daniel Everett (2011) considers the Pirahã people in the Amazonas to be such a case.

8. «If the brigand be not captured, the man who has been robbed, shall, in the presence of god, make an itemized statement of his loss, and the city and the governor, in whose province and jurisdiction the robbery was committed, shall compensate him for whatever was lost» (Hammurabi's Law, §23, HARPER 1904, p. 19).

«legitimizing discourse, a mode of persuasion which would secure consent» (Lawrence 1996, p. 59) turns out to be a profitable investment. Clearly, when at unsettled states, namely either emergent, in the process of getting organized, or in crisis, a group is in critical need to create agreements for regulating the relations among its members, such as tell each other who is who, that is, who has got more rights and who must obey, who can claim possessions and who cannot, and so on. This is why we often find textual efflorescence to be more intense at such moments and perhaps more so within small rather than large entities. Although this requires much more historical scrutiny, it seems that the governing principle here is the degree of establishedness. The more established the power, the less efflorescence takes place. The more there is need for justification, legitimation and creating consent, the more likely it is for texts to multiply.

Societies in flux obviously need to establish themselves rather intensely. Flux situations may arise under diverse conditions, such as migration, loss of political control, forced or voluntary unification, secession, and more. Establishing agreements, setting up a system of trust (Fukuyama 1995), or otherwise accumulating social capital (Lin 1995, 2010) become an urgent task both on the collective and individual levels. It concerns the group as well as each single one of its individual members, since the chances of both to survive and proceed for better positions in the internal and external competition networks depend on the amount of social capital eventually accumulated.

Icelandic Textual Efflorescence

The case of mediaeval Iceland perfectly suits these conditions at several historical points. The long-perpetuated puzzlement as to how we can explain the fact that more texts have been produced in Iceland than in almost any other territory in Europe may get one more answer added to the stock of extant ones. Indeed, if one thinks in terms of large and small, or central and peripheral societies, one could have expected to find such textual efflorescence rather elsewhere, that is, anywhere in Scandinavia or Europe between the Black Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. However, it is precisely because such countries as Denmark, Norway or Sweden are relatively established entities in the 11th century, and because their population has been sedentary, their basic cultural – including socio-political and economic – agreements accepted, there is no wonder why no major efforts had to be invested there in creating or diffusing what seems to have been basically resolved. In contradistinction,

Icelanders had to deal with their origins, create genealogies to legitimize their possession of lands or make explicit their relations with the other members of society, establish their system of government, and invest much energy in regulating their language – all in order to make life possible in the new territory they had come to occupy. Like the ancient Israelites they probably memorized their genealogies for several centuries before these were written down, described who has taken which territory (*Landnámabók*, «The Book of Settlement»), put forth histories of the Nordic past, Norway, Iceland and Greenland, the Faroe Islands and even went back to telling about mythical times (*Íslendingabók*, «The Book of the Icelanders», *Heimskringla*, «The History of the Norwegian Kings», and more). They wrote stories that served for all of the above, combining genealogies with the histories of prominent families involved in struggles over a large range of various claims.

What should not be overlooked in this context, although too often taken for granted, is the fact that all this activity took place in the vernacular, which became comparatively standardized in terms of the times. Icelandic thus was not marginalized as most vernaculars in other parts of the Latinized Europe. On the contrary, the adoption of the Roman alphabet has given it its very operational fundament. It soon developed as a language sufficiently distinct from the other Nordic languages, including Norwegian.[9] This is strong evidence of domestic rather than «international» targeting, in sharp contrast with the rest of mediaeval Christendom. Just for illustration, in contrast with *Landnámabók*, *Íslendingabók* and *Heimskringla*, texts written in Latin like *Gesta Hungarorum* (see note 15 below) that eventually played a formative role in 19th century Hungarian nationalism, were targeted towards Italy and other parts of civilized Europe and hardly had any significance for the contemporary local population.[10]

The Israelites wrote down the story about their exodus from Egypt and their occupation of the Land of Canaan. If this was a true account

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9. See Stefán Karlsson's extensive discussion (1979) of the difference between Icelandic and Norwegian, in particular the characteristically Norwegian traits («norvagismer») in the manuscripts imported from Iceland to Norway. «The divide between the languages increased in the thirteenth and still more in the fourteenth century» (KARLSSON 2004, p. 9), when even norwegianized Icelandic could no longer be understood in Norway.

10. «[…] the work was originally commissioned for propagandists purposes, specifically with a view to an Italian audience. […] The whole structure of the work is influenced by the intention to demonstrate that Hungary was always a lawful polity, in which even its Hunnish predecessors lived and were ruled *Romano more*, and where the workings of government as well as the relations between free and servile elements were based on customary and statute law» (VESZPRÉMY, SCHAER 1999, p. XX).

of their history, they had to explain to themselves where they had come from and in what right they had taken the land from other groups who lived there. If this was not a true account, as maintained by some modern archaeologists (see FINKELSTEIN ET AL. 2007), then they had to invent those stories in order to legitimize their separate identity. The Icelanders, a similarly immigrant group, created the story of their exodus from Norway and told the story about how the land they discovered was empty and hospitable. This story, too, does not appear to be fully credible. Various testimonies in the Icelandic sources themselves mention the Celtic origins of Icelanders. Some thoughts by revisionist historians based on carbon tests and other materials,[11] and the Icelandic genome project that has revealed that «63% of Icelandic female settlers were of Celtic origin and had ancestral lines traceable to the British Isles» (*The Origins of the Icelanders* 2010; see also HELGASON 2004) now reinforce the view that the mediaeval narrative was created within the framework of a propagated historical image. Nevertheless, no doubt the fact that most males indeed derived from Norway had its impact on both self-image and actual relations between Iceland and Norway, eventually leading to Norwegian claims over Iceland, which were fully realized in the 13th century by the Icelanders' acceptance of Norwegian sovereignty. This could not have occurred without the long-held treatment of Norway as the mother homeland of Iceland, a position that had allowed the Norwegian kings to meddle between settlers (at least according to Hauk's version of *Landnámabók*), enforce Christianity around 1000, and otherwise interfere in Icelandic politics and trade during the Commonwealth era.

The idea that the Icelandic texts emerged and proliferated for concrete purposes of self-promotion, political and social gains has been expressed time and again by many, especially Icelandic, scholars often in connection with particular texts. Jakob Benediksson's (1978) and Sveinbjörn Rafnsson's (1974; 2001) argument that *Landnámabók* «manipulates genealogical and historical traditions to legitimate twelfth- and thirteenth-century elite families' claims to property and prerogative» (SMITH 1995, p. 320) are well known. Lönnroth, who extensively supports the idea that *Njál's Saga* was written «from the standpoint of the Svinfelling family» (1976, p. 178) to promote the family's status claims, acknowledges Barði Guðmundsson as probably the first to have raised this hypothesis (GUÐMUNDSSON 1937; 1958). Another well-known example is the case of *Erik's Saga*, succinctly summarized by Birgitta Wallace:

11. An account of some of these studies is given by SMITH 1995. For some later studies see WALLACE 2003 and 2009.

Scholars have shown that *Erik's Saga* was written to support the canoniza-tion of Bishop Björn Gílsson, who died in 1162 [...]. An account of illustrious and exceptional ancestors was expected to accompany any petition for beatification and Bishop Björn was a direct descendant of Thorfinn Karlsefni and Gudrid Thorbjarnardóttir. Furthermore, Law Speaker Hauk Erlendsson, who edited the *Hauk's Book* version of *Erik's Saga*, was himself also a direct descendant of Thorfinn and Gudrid, removed from them by nine generations. Hence, the roles of Thorfinn Karlsefni and Gudrid were greatly magnified and embellished, while those of Leif Eriksson and his family almost vanished altogether (WAL-LACE 2003, p. 10).

Similar assertions have been expressed in connection with various other sagas. In general terms, it has been suggested by major scholars of the saga texts, like Hallberg, Durrenberger and Hastrup, that «these texts were written to preserve a sense of cultural unity when Icelandic independence was crumbling or to create a sense of identity when the society was developing» (SMITH 1995, p. 320).

Quite recently, however, a more comprehensive position was power-fully propounded by Axel Kristinsson in a number of works (KRISTINSSON 2003; 2004; 2010, esp. pp. 211-228), where he made a connection be-tween 13th century text production and the *political division* of Iceland. In contradistinction to other mediaeval societies, where similar texts may have served the same purpose,[12] Axel Kristinsson believes that Iceland produced more saga texts simply because «it was divided into a large number of autonomous political units, all requiring some means to help them survive in a hostile environment» (KRISTINSSON 2003, p. 2). He thus accepts the idea that the need for self-promotion grows where the environment is hostile, while a relatively peaceful environ-ment that is free of conflicts might not have necessitated the release of such energies.

Kristinsson's convincing argument (substantiated by a detailed dis-cussion of the relevant texts) has the advantage of being concretely linked to more specific conditions of the 13th century than hitherto suggested. My argument, in contrast, is less concrete and thus may

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12. For example, Ström believes that in the 10th century «the struggle for power, last-ing through several generations, between the Norwegian royal house and the dynasty of the jarls of Northern Norway» (1988, p. 456) produced a plethora of skaldic poetry that overwhelmingly supported the case of the *jarls*, in particular Hákon Jarl's (937-995) case against Ólafr Tryggvason and Ólafr Haraldsson. However, I would like to recall that when the struggle eventually terminated with the victory of the royal dynasty, these skaldic texts were no longer preserved in Norway, probably because no longer necessary and certainly because grossly at clash with the now dominating Christianity. The texts are mostly known to us from the Icelandic compilations, in particular Snorri's *Edda*.

seem weaker in the sense that it does not refer to concrete relations between specific texts and specific power-holders. However, beyond the matters of defending by verbal products the positions of particular power-holders in conflict with their peers, my contention is that the texts eventually created, even if not intended to do so, *social agreements* and consequently *increased social capital*.[13] While there is no contradiction between the arguments, they do present somewhat different perspectives. In Kristinsson's view *each division* had to make an utmost effort to produce self-images for self-legitimation. My contention is that the *totality* of the production may have helped create the overall balance of power which is basically what we normally call «social pacts» without which society as a whole, and not just certain of its members, would not survive. In other words, my argument is that the accumulated «noise» generated by those texts actually produced social energy, meaning access to resources and a network of sustained interactions.

A support for this view as a whole I dare say to have found in an exceptional insight – by some sort of a closer insider – about the relation between textual efflorescence and textual decline in connection with status and power struggles. I am referring to the 19th century Jón Espolin, «Bailiff of the Skagarfjord County», who made a heroic effort to revive historical records mostly for the periods when there was no longer interest in continuing the records or anything like the older texts. In his preface to the second volume of his monumental *Íslands árbækur í söguformi* («Iceland's Annals in a Narrative Form»), he briefly expressed the view that security in power makes texts and records dispensable. In his view, the fact that after the death of so many people in the plague of 1402-1404 wealth accumulated at the hands of so few made these very few so secure in their social positions that they no longer had to toil for keeping it against competitors.[14] Actually, this may also be a correct de-

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13. As for the function of this kind of industry in generating cultural capital, see TULINIUS 2004, esp. pp. 8-12.

14. «Enn í hinni xvdu öndverdri kom plágann mikla, féll þá allr forn dugnadr, ok allt atferli af fólksfæd, enn sumir menn urdu sva audugir, at þeirra gætti einna samann í landinu, ok þurftu ei at ástunda fornra manna yðun, þó mannfolkid fjölgadi nokkuð aptr, þvi féd vann fyrir. Við þat aflagðist allr áhugi til annars frama enn auds, ok giördist vanþekkíng mikil um allt þat er ádr var, ok hyrduleysi á þvi at terkna upp þat er á þeirra dögum skedi, ok hverskyns lærdomsléysi, enn rostr urdu þat at eins, er rikismönnum, fraendum eda mágum bar samann um fiár edr arfadeilr, ok efldust þær því meira, sem þeir fiölgudu meira, ok urdu fiærskyldari» (ESPOLIN 1823, «Formáli» [no page number]; the quotation is brought here in its original spelling). «But during the first half of the 15th century a great plague struck, consequently all earlier vigor disappeared, but some men became so wealthy that they were the only ones of significance in the country, and did not have to work as people did in the earlier days, even if the population grew again, since the capital worked for them.

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scription of the situation that had prevailed during the first generations after the settlement.

According to the accepted dating of the Icelandic texts, they did not emerge immediately at the early time of the settlement, but at a much later time, in the 12th century and onwards. Social arrangements also took some time to crystallize. The most significant event in the emergence of social order, the foundation of the *Alþingi*, did not take place until 930, which is more than 60 years after the believed first colonization. A comparison with other societies, from the deepest antiquity to much later periods, shows that this is by no means unique. Even in such cases presented as organized mass migration and conquests, like the exodus of the Israelites and their conquest of the Land of Canaan, or the Magyars' exodus to conquer the Basin of Pannonia (896-900),[15] social arrangements and text production took several generations to crystallize. I believe that Birgitta Wallace's phrasing would be perfect here: «A colony is not created overnight. […] Developing further settlement and freeing up labor for new enterprises takes time, especially in a hitherto uninhabited area» (WALLACE 2009, p. 116).

If we adopt the current hypothesis that proposes a relation between competition and the need to make socio-cultural arrangements, then clearly the first settlers may not have got involved in fierce competition because there was sufficient arable land for all, a situation that unavoidably changed in subsequent generations, when large land properties had to be divided between many offspring, border conflicts intensified and clashes of interests grew wildly. In addition, although writing was known in the runic alphabet, only the decision to become part of the Christian world – thus entering into relations of comparison, competition and interaction with various centers in Europe (like Paris, Rome or Hamburg) – enabled the Icelanders, as well as actually pressured them,

Consequently, (people) were only interested in wealth, and became very ignorant about how things were before, and uninterested in reporting (?) what happened in their own times, and lacked education, but (life) became ferocious as officials, cousins or brothers-in-law disputed over cash or inheritance, and (these classes) were more fierce as they grew in number and the parties were more distant relatives». (I am grateful to Jón Karl Helgason for the translation of this passage).

15. Hungarian historiography names the Magyar conquest of Pannonia «Land-taking» (*Honfoglalás*, «the settlement in the fatherland», literally: «the taking of the home»). It is not a mediaeval notion but rather a modern coinage, probably on the basis of the German *Landnahme* (RÓNA-TAS 1999, p. xviii), though others contest that (I am grateful to Görgy Kálmán for this communication). The first historical works, notably Simon of Keza's *Gesta Hungarorum*, were produced in Hungary in the 13th century (VESZPRÉMY, SCHAER 1999), that is, about three hundred years after the settlement.

to engage in written textual production. The need to go through all of the procedures to establish themselves (as described above) thus did not prevail until roughly the 12th century, when history and other stories were consequently written in accordance with the contemporary views and priorities.

Some scholars, such as Callow (2006), raise doubts about the acceptability of the dating of the texts discussed above. In his view, some texts may have been produced earlier than thought. On the other hand, as mentioned above, others no longer accept the canonical history of Icelandic settlement propounded by the canonized texts. In their view, the group that originally settled in Iceland may not have been the one that eventually created order and imposed its memory through its texts. Whatever might be the case, growing rivalry and conflagration of clashing interests gradually paved the way for the creation of hegemonic versions about origins and about families. These were designed to eliminate all other voices, whether those of the possibly original descendants of the first settlers, or more plausibly those of the other contemporary contenders.

While an emerging society may quickly need to establish agreements, if, on the other hand, dominant agents immediately take the lead without the others' ability to contest, then those agents do not need to account for their actions. It is only when society proliferates and disagreement grows as a result of a larger population and larger density combined with diminishing resources (like land, water, and pastures) that the need for agreements begins to be pressuring. This process in Iceland was slow (KRISTINSSON 2010, p. 219), but around 1200 there was a «rather sudden breakthrough of elitization [...] when the level of wealth among the richest men increased about tenfold in just a few decades, [which] seems to have been the result of a positive feedback loop between the concentration of wealth and the concentration of power» (p. 219).

However, since the leaders have not been able, or had no interest, to devise a central power state like the Scandinavian ones, the need for persuading and demonstrating one's prominence, including by verbalism that appeals to peoples' imagination and emotions, must have been bigger than elsewhere. «Without central power to execute law and order, true power rested with networks of kinship and allegiance. Social and political survival depended on the number of allies that could be mustered in times of conflict» (VÉSTEINSSON ET AL. 2002, p. 19).

FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS?
BY WHOM AND HOW THE TEXTS WERE CONSUMED

The discussion of texts quite often stops at the level of production (and producers' intentions). The type of questions raised in this paper does not allow contending with text consumption taken for granted. The very essence of my argument has been that the Icelandic texts served for communal and public purposes, even when motivated by individual or group interests. Without «target audience» it would make no sense to support such an argument, as it would *ipso facto* become void of any meaning. I do not pretend that this is an easy question to answer. After all, generations of scholars have been engaged with this question for a large variety of text productions all over the globe. However, I believe that it simply cannot be ignored. What is meant by «consumption», however, should not be confounded with literary scholarship ideas about «reception» (as in Vodička's *reception history*[16] or Hans-Robert Jauss's later *Rezeptionsästhetik*). There are no «texts» here to be «read» as «literary works of art» by individual «readers» but stories to be communicated, through reading or in various degrees of oral performance, to sought after groups and individuals whose consent and support are solicited.

Assertions about the purpose of texts to confer legitimacy, and hence justify often dubious actions, permeate not only literary but also historical and philological scholarship. These texts are thus explained in the light of their assumed purpose. For example, «The entire Ögödei story is a later interpolation which served purely the legitimacy of the Tolui branch»,[17] explains Róna-Tas (1999, pp. 417-418) in his discussion of the story of the puzzling ascent to power of Genghis Khan's second son Ögödei instead of his elder brother, who supposedly ceded his primogeniture. However, Róna-Tas, as so many others, typically finds it unnecessary to explain who the people are from whom consent to this act as legitimate is solicited. Although the story appears in a passage in the rather obscure 13th century *Secret History of the Mongols*, it seems that the question of the sought after target group and the conjectured ways by which it has been reached to be convinced does not constitute a problem that calls for some elucidation. This example could be multiplied, and it therefore seems to me imperative to try and avoid falling into the same trap with our hypotheses about textual efflorescence.

16. See Galan's illuminating discussion (GALAN 1982).

17. This refers to the family of Tolui, the youngest son of Genghis Khan, whose line ruled Outer and Inner Mongolia from 1251 to 1635, and Outer Mongolia until 1691.

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The methods often used for checking the use of texts rely on various sorts of evidence. One method is accumulating recorded written testimonies about the ways texts have been consumed. Another one is the existence of a significant number of copies. If the relevant texts were copied in schools as part of the curriculum (as is the case in the Sumerian, Egyptian or Akkadian and Babylonian schools), this may be taken as evidence of their high consumption. The physical condition of texts can also render some information about their use: in every library there is wear and tear of the books massively loaned and read. In Jewish tradition, texts that have reached a state of complete wear have not been thrown away but buried in the ground or cached in an attic.[18] A criterion that deserves to be explored, particularly in the Icelandic context, is Driscoll's suggestion (2004) about writings on the margins of manuscripts, recently vividly expounded by Schott (2010).

In the case of the Icelandic texts, we have got indeed some glimpses about habits of reading. Everyone knows the passage from *The Saga of the Sturlungs* about Þorgils Skarði who is asked by his host what kind of entertainment (*gaman*) he would prefer to have in the evening: «stories or dance». Þorgils chooses to hear the story about Thomas of Canterbury, and «var þá lesin sagan» (the story was read) to him (*Sturlungasaga*, Vigfússon's edition 1878, p. 245, ch. 314). However, the enthusiasm with which this passage has been repeatedly quoted has long been toned down (notably PÁLSSON 1962). In some views, however, it is not without value as it can be supported by what some scholars describe as a long continuity in Icelandic society to justify such conclusions.[19]

18. The most famous example is the invaluable treasure of some 280,000 fragments of medieval texts that was found in the attic of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo around 1896; many of them were books of unquestionably high circulation.

19. «Manuscripts were read out loud in the Middle Ages, and as book ownership became more common in later centuries this custom continued, even after printing had begun. In his description of Iceland from 1590, Oddur Einarsson says that farmers in Iceland entertained and delighted their guests by reading for them for hours from the sagas. In the eighteenth century it was still the main form of leisure in the evenings to read the old Icelandic Sagas and recite ballads, a custom which continued into the twentieth century» (SIGURÐSSON 2004b, p. 8). In Jón Karl Helgason's opinion, «[t]he contemporary documentation of how these texts were utilized between 1300 and 1600 is scarce, but as Pálsson [1962] has convincingly illustrated, we may suppose that semi-public readings of family sagas and various forms of non-secular literature were a favourite pastime on Icelandic farms in this period. [...] This tradition of reading, which continued into the twentieth century, reveals how the typical Icelandic audience of the ancient sagas initially received these narratives in oral form. And just as individual scribes rewrote the manuscripts they were transcribing – adding and omitting words, sentences, verses and even passages – so one can imagine that each reading (or performance) of a particular manuscript would be different from another» (HELGASON 2008, pp. 65-66).

As for copying, there is «likelihood that more medieval manuscripts have been lost than preserved» (ÓLASON 2004, p. 32), not to mention the disastrous Copenhagen fire of 1728 that destroyed a number of manuscripts (though the major part of Árni Magnússon's collection survived intact or in paper copies). The current state of copies thus cannot be interpreted as a safe indication of consumption. It might not be insignificant that there are more copies of certain sagas, such as *Njál's Saga*, than of other texts. This possibly points to its higher popularity than other texts for which we have got only one copy. On the other hand, of a formative text like *Landnámabók* only five copies are extant today, and only two of them are full versions, though in 18th century paper copies. This criterion need thus also be handled very cautiously.

Finally we can plausibly infer much from the physical condition of the Icelandic manuscripts. Most of them, like the Cairo *Genizah* texts, are quite worn: the vellum is inflexible and the page tends to be dark. The text is not always easily legible either, because the characters are blurred or faded. All historians of the manuscripts have interpreted that as evidence of much use, and also because the manuscripts were «kept in sooty, damp turf-built farm-houses» (GUÐMUNDSDÓTTIR, GUÐNADÓTTIR 2004, p. 46), though other explanations have been suggested. This is normally contrasted with the current good condition of the Norwegian royal manuscripts, as well as the Icelandic manuscripts kept in Norway that have remained more flexible and lighter, plausibly because they were less frequently taken to be read, and at any rate used under much better conditions and by fewer individuals. Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind that we cannot know anything about the condition of the manuscripts in periods closer to their making, i.e., between the 12th and the 15th centuries. Their condition might have worsened even without connection with their use as reading material, since towards the end of the 18th century, when Árni Magnússon began collecting them, many of them were simply dumped in some unused storage. The revered precautions taken with the vellums are recent. 19th century saga philologists did not hesitate to try and read difficult lines with a wet finger, and even more technologically advanced methods like quartz lamps used in the 1940s by such a prominent saga scholar as Einar Ólafur Sveinsson are now considered harmful. In short, while the state of the vellums can be interpreted as evidence of their ample use in the last seven hundred years or so, it is not at all inferable that at the time discussed here their condition was so deteriorated.

It goes without saying that the popularity of texts need not be interpreted in terms of silent reading. Since antiquity, relatively few people

could read texts by themselves, and therefore these had to be read aloud to them (GITAY 1980, p. 191; REDFORD 1992, p. 66; SILVERMAN 1990; NIDITCH 1996): «even solitary readers, reading only to themselves, read aloud. […] Reading was therefore oral performance whenever it occurred and in whatever circumstances. Late antiquity knew nothing of the 'silent, solitary reader'» (ACHTEMEIER 1990, p. 16). Texts that were of particular importance to power-holders would be distributed publicly by such loud reading. This method could also better guarantee more attention and certainly more control over the audience. Obviously people need not really listen if coerced to attend such reading events, but few would stand temptation if the text happens to tell an attractive story, full of adventure, conflicts, hatred, love, and humor.

When Nehemiah, assisted by the priest Ezra, re-built – or some would say invented – the Jewish nation after the return from Babylonian exile, they set up public reading of the scriptures:

And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose […]. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up. […] [and] all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law (*Neh.*, 8, 4-9, King James Version).

One could say that in the above description, the Israelites that were summoned to the congregation became captive audience of the reading performance. What possible parallel could be conceived for the diffusion of the stories of the sagas?

If the texts indeed had to play a role and achieve some results (as clearly is the situation surmised by Axel Kristinsson) then one should need to reach interested listeners. Can we even entertain the idea that a hostile clan might wish to listen to stories about some rival clan with whom they have some feud? I believe that this is highly unlikely. I also believe that we must exclude the possibility that in the period discussed here the texts travelled freely, like modern books, around the country, with some mediaeval colporteur as it were or a travelling entertainer. Although some texts may have circulated in such ways, and some have found their way to remote countries, like Norway (KARLSSON 1979), we must recognize that the suggested propaganda or promotion was meant primarily not for adversaries but for *actual or potential allies and friends*. It was meant to reinforce their loyalty or at least gain their acquiescence, along the same lines that national texts began to play a role in creating cohesion and consent through massive diffusion by the modern European states since the end of the

18th century.[20] In Iceland, it was the power-holder who probably not only made it financially possible for someone to write, compile or copy texts, as well as provide the necessary expensive materials (vellum and ink), but also had the means to gather people for reading sessions.

Such sessions were often taking place in connection with feasts and banquets. «Feasting was a central part of the chiefly societies of the North-Atlantic, a means to cement bonds of friendship and dependence and to impress competitors, and reflects the prestige-based social economy of the settlement age» (VÉSTEINSSON ET AL. 2002, p. 19). In the banquets, many good dishes were served «that included sea fish, eggs, milk, cheese, lamb, beef and even some beer» (p. 19). I would like to add to the list of «sea fish, eggs, milk, cheese, lamb, beef and even some beer» also another important ingredient that has long been acknowledged – text performance. This is not to say that it was the most important component of the party, but it must have been a unique occasion to tempt people to listening.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

This study is not about the literary nature of texts, but rather an attempt to draw attention to their major function in the creation of social resources. Without such resources, human groups, whether large or small, cannot manage efficiently. Theories of social capital have suggested that in want of such capital there is more likelihood for a general failure in terms of survival and adaptation. Icelandic society between the 12th and the 14th centuries managed to generate complex socio-cultural arrangements under the tough conditions of absence of enforcement governance and growingly wild rivalry between local power-holders. It is the modern tradition of viewing texts and their production almost exclusively in the context of «literature» that often impedes understanding what powerful role they may have had in various crucial moments in human history. And Iceland had definitely one of such moments in the specified centuries. What happens with these texts in later centuries, the emergence of text compilations as precious goods, their recycling since the late 18th century for purposes of achieving prestige, and their use for the project of nation building are of course different historical chapters.

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20. See EVEN-ZOHAR 1996 on the function of texts in the making of the new European nations.

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ITAMAR EVEN-ZOHAR

Writing Strategies

Romance and the Creation of a New Genre in Medieval Iceland

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In this paper, the double risk is taken of assuming that «Egils saga» was written by Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241) or a close collaborator, and that this saga founded the short-lived but successful genre of the «Íslendingasögur». Using Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, Kevin J. Wanner has recently proposed that Snorri composed his «Edda» to promote the cultural value of skaldic poetry at a time when courtly literature was spreading to the Norwegian court, a development actively encouraged by the young king Hákon Hákonarson, who seems to have ordered their translation. Wanner's theory will be discussed and evaluated. Building on this, an attempt will be made to describe how the new and unlikely genre of the «Íslendingasögur» (saga about early Icelanders) may have appeared as a reaction to the arrival of romance in the Nordic sphere via translations at the royal court. Developing the tradition of royal biography (king's sagas), as well as exploring the persona of the practitioner of skaldic poetry, the saga also betrays a knowledge and understanding of at least one of the French romances, «Le Chevalier au lion», and probably of Thomas of Britain's «Tristan». Being the first of the sagas about early Icelanders, «Egils saga» was an innovation that should be understood in light of the complex generic, sociological and literary contexts in which it appeared.

The problem of the relationship between the appearance of the *Íslendingasögur* or «sagas about early Icelanders» as I prefer to call this group of sagas in English (Andersson 2000, p. 306), and the arrival of continental romance in Norway and Iceland in the first half of the 13th century is a fascinating one. First put forward by Paul Rubow (1936), the idea of a direct influence was bravely taken up by Bjarni Einarsson (1961) over half a century ago but has been more or less dismissed subsequently (Finlay 2001). The time has come for a fresh look at this problem. Indeed, recent work inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's sociology has thrown new light on the dynamics of literary production in medieval Iceland, not the least in its connection to the Norwegian court; in addi-

tion, Even-Zohar's polysystem theory can help to understand how new genres may appear as a reaction to the introduction or translation of foreign works of literature.

The title of my paper is based on certain assumptions that many would challenge. The first assumption is that the sagas about early Icelanders (or *Íslendingasögur*) were written works rather than representing an oral tradition and therefore can be said to be the results of «writing strategies». While nobody denies that they owe much to oral tales told about the first generations of Icelanders, scholars have, however, collected considerable evidence over the years that demonstrates that much of what was previously believed to be based on such an oral tradition is actually borrowed more or less openly from other works of literature, autochthonous or foreign (EINARSSON 1975; HAFSTAÐ 1995).

The second assumption is that *Egils saga* is the earliest of the *Íslendingasögur* or saga about early Icelanders and that it is the founding saga of a genre. This is an idea that was defended by Jónas Kristjánsson (1990) but although he makes a strong case, it cannot be said that there is scholarly consensus about it (ANDERSSON 2008). However, the saga is most probably one of the earliest representatives of this group of sagas. If it was not the progenitor of the genre, it is quite likely its first great text and it can therefore be said to have consolidated the genre as a meaningful medium in which to work.

The final assumption is that the saga was composed by Snorri Sturluson, who died in 1241. Here again, scholars are far from being of one mind. However, no one denies that the saga is older than its earliest manuscript fragment, dated to 1250, and is a copy of an earlier manuscript. Nor does anybody doubt that the saga was composed by someone in Snorri's milieu, i.e. the poetry-loving dominant class in Western Iceland in the first half of the 13th century (CAPPELLE, KRAMARZ-BEIN 2001).

By using the word «strategy», it can be implied that the composition of a saga such as *Egils saga* was socially meaningful, that there was a clear connection between the power-seeking activities of chieftains such as Snorri and his family and their literary work. No one has gone as far in attempting to show this connection than Kevin J. Wanner (2008). Wanner uses the conceptual tools of Pierre Bourdieu, especially the idea that different types of capital – economic, symbolic and cultural – can be converted from one to the other, in order to take on what has seemed to many scholars throughout the years to be a contradiction in Snorri's behaviour. On the one hand, Snorri devoted his considerable energy and talent – both of which were recognized by his contemporaries – to increasing his political power and his wealth. On the other, he – or at least his milieu – is credited with some of the most significant literary works of

medieval Iceland: the *Edda*, a handbook of skaldic poetry; *Heimskringla*, a history of the Norwegian dynasty from its mythical origins to Snorri's times; and finally, *Egils saga*, the earliest and one of the greatest representatives of the *Íslendingasögur* genre.

Sigurður Nordal attempted a psychological explanation, arguing that Snorri was a specific type of personality, brilliant and artistic, but lacking the unity of mind necessary for prolonged success in the spheres of power (NORDAL 1920, pp. 57-59). I do not feel that the evidence we have about Snorri is sufficient for us to determine what kind of personality type he possessed. Claims about his indecisiveness or lack of courage have been based on one or two examples of behaviour that could be interpreted differently. A sociological approach such as the one undertaken by Wanner in his book seems to be more trustworthy.

Indeed, in the first years of this century, we both found, independently and without knowing about each other's work, inspiration in the theories of Pierre Bourdieu when trying to understand Snorri and his trajectory in Icelandic and Norwegian society. Using **Bourdieu's concepts of capi**tal, habitus, field and illusio, we both developed separate readings of Snorri's behaviour and the context in which it took place (WANNER 2008; TULINIUS 2001; TULINIUS 2004; TULINIUS 2009). My work focussed more on the idea of «virðing» or «respect». When Snorri's «virðing» is said to be at its highest around 1215, it means that he has accumulated a great deal of the different types of capital (economic, symbolic and cultural) available to an Icelandic chieftain in that period (TULINIUS 2001). I also put Bourdieu's concept of «field» to use, i.e. different compartments of social space in which actors compete for the specific types of capital that are relevant in this particular field. It allowed me to understand better Snorri's, and other chieftains, relationships to different actors or institutions in society – for example their friends and supporters among the free landholders or *bændr*, or in the sphere of religion (i.e. the Church), or the Norwegian court and the institution of monarchy. Like many chieftains, Snorri was playing in all these fields and that can help explain his behaviour. I also proposed the idea that a special literary field had evolved in Iceland, centred on the literary activities of lay persons, another concept borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu (TULINIUS 2009). I will come back to this later, because it is relevant for my discussion of *Egils saga*.

It comes as no surprise that Wanner and I agree on many things, for example that Snorri's success as a courtier in Norway, which his brothers seem not to have striven for, must have been connected with the fact that he had been brought up at Oddi by a grandson of a Norwegian king. At Oddi, Snorri acquired a certain habitus, i.e. a way of thinking

and ascribing value to things, which gave him an advantage over his father or elder brothers (Tulinius 2004, p. 145; Wanner 2008, p. 40).

However, Wanner has paid much more attention than I ever did to Snorri's Norwegian activities. Indeed, Snorri seems to have devoted a considerable amount of his energy to endearing himself to Norwegian rulers by composing court poetry, most of which is lost. Though King Sverrir Sigurðarson died in 1202 when Snorri was in his early twenties, Snorri is said to have been one of that king's skalds. He also is known to have composed skaldic panegyrics to his successors, King Ingi Bárðarson, and the jarl Hákon galinn. The latter rewarded him handsomely with the gift of a sword, a shield and a mail coat, which were sent to Iceland. Later, Snorri travelled to Norway and made friends with other important Norwegians by composing poetry in their honour: these included the regent, Duke Skúli Bárðarson, and the young king, Hákon Hákonarson (Wanner 2008, pp. 70-73).

There is probably a complex relationship between Snorri's poetic activity and the great honours that were bestowed upon him by the Norwegian rulers. Indeed, he was made a «lendr maðr», a sort of baron, a position no Icelander had attained before him at the Norwegian court. His poetic talent may have been a sort of token of exchange in a game of power, i.e. a form of ritual of gift and reward, while the real reason the Norwegian rulers were willing to ensure Snorri's rise was that they counted on him to promote the cause of Norwegian sovereignty over Iceland.

Wanner is well aware of this and uses the Bourdieuian notion of «conversion» of one type of capital to another. Snorri's cultural capital, which gives him the skill and talent to compose the skaldic encomia, is converted into symbolic capital, i.e. the favour he receives from the rulers (Wanner 2008, pp. 49-52).

We come now here to an aspect of Wanner's belief that the introduction of translated romance at the instigation of King Hákon Hákonarson, which seems to have been a significant cultural development in Snorri's life time, threatened the position that skaldic poetry and its «laudatory, propagandistic, and historiographical functions» had had until then (Wanner 2008, pp. 80-87).

Norway had been in a state of civil war more or less continuously since the early 12th century, with illegitimate sons competing with nephews or grandsons of kings from their mother's side for power in the country. Often, several kings reigned over the land simultaneously (Helle 2003). King Hákon grew up in this atmosphere and was himself an illegitimate son. The final act of the civil war period was his repression of the uprising of Duke Skúli, Snorri's patron, who was killed on this occasion. After

this, Hákon's reign was undisputed and he worked on consolidating his control over the country by strengthening his ties with the Church, and by introducing – or perhaps rather intensifying – cultural practices from the French and English courts to and within his own court. This can be seen in the composition of the *Speculum Regale* or *Konungs skuggsjá*, which is believed to have taken place during his reign. It is a handbook for courtiers which presents the theological and ideological fundamentals of monarchy. This preoccupation with courtliness is even more obvious in the considerable translation activity undertaken under Hákon's reign. Indeed, not only does it seem certain that a number of chivalric romances were translated from French into Norse-Icelandic during this period, but also that their text was adapted in order to be more didactic and less ironic about the ideology of chivalry which played such an important part in strengthening the royal state in Western Europe in the 13th century (Barnes 2000; Chauou 2001).

These new literary practices, combined with the fact that the king received legitimacy from bishops, cardinals and even the pope, and therefore did not need skalds to confer it to him, threatened the position of the skalds, and therefore people like Snorri who had used skaldic poetry as a path to influence within the spheres of power in Norway. Wanner believes that Snorri composed the panegyric *Háttatal* as an introduction to skaldic poetry for the young King Hákon, and then later the other parts of *The Prose Edda* in order to make *Háttatal* more accessible to Hákon and his courtiers. This aspect of Snorri's literary endeavours is thus the result of his efforts to preserve the position of skaldic poetry in Norway and thereby an attempt to convert cultural capital into symbolic or economic capital in that country (Wanner 2008, pp. 53-73).

It is here that I believe that Professor Even-Zohar's polysystem theory can be of use. Indeed, since the Danish critic Paul Rubow first proposed the idea that the sagas about early Icelanders or *Íslendingasögur* appeared on account of influence from the romances, this notion has, ghost-like, returned to haunt those who do not accept it but who have been incapable of driving it away for good (Rubow 1936).

The Icelandic scholar Bjarni Einarsson wrote an important book on the subject (Bjarni Einarsson 1961). His main point was that Icelandic authors writing in the 13th century fictionalized the lives of skalds of old, sometimes even composing poetry in their name themselves, on the model of troubadour «vidas». More or less ignored in Iceland, his theories have been debated by scholars abroad, amongst others by Theodore M. Andersson who engaged in an exchange with Bjarni in two articles in the journal «Medieval Scandinavia», and more recently Alison Finlay (Andersson 1969; Einarsson 1971; Finlay 2001). Bjarni's

method is based on the philological principles of textual borrowings and influences. It is therefore quite easy to demonstrate that the works he is studying, i.e. the group of *Íslendingasögur* which have a skald as their main character, do not borrow directly either from troubadour lyric, or from the Tristan stories. The particular character of the skaldic poetry is too different from that of the troubadours and the sagas are too rooted in Icelandic reality.

There does not seem to be any evidence of a connection with the troubadour biographies or «vidas» and it seems much more likely that the sagas about skalds evolved out of the tradition attested early in the 12th century of inserting short tales of Icelanders at the Norwegian court into royal biographies, or kings' sagas. Indeed, many of these Icelanders were poets, such as the lovesick Ívarr Ingimundarson, a poet and retainer of King Eysteinn in the early 12th century (*Morkinskinna* 1867, pp. 167-168).

It is therefore of interest to note an undisputable borrowing in the biography of the most famous skald of all, *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, from one of the late 12th-century chivalric romances by Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain ou le Chevalier au Lion* (ROQUES 1983). In the 12th-century French romance, the hero Yvain is a knight who has conquered the hand of the beautiful Laudine, whom he marries. However, he has not yet had enough of the life of the knight errant, travelling from tournament to tournament to prove his valour. Laudine gives Yvain leave for a year but once the twelve months have passed, he forgets to return. She sends him a message, banishing him forever from her love. Yvain loses his mind and spends some time in the forest as a wild man; he is saved by some women who find him sleeping and take pity on him, rubbing his naked body enthusiastically with a magic balm. This restores his reason and he spends the next part of his life redeeming himself as a knight, but this time devoting his talents to doing good. On his way to saving a damsel in distress, the young Lunete, he comes to a manor where he is welcomed with great joy and hospitality. The mistress of the house is the sister of Gawain, paragon of chivalry and Yvain's good friend. Despite the hospitality they show their guest, the family members cannot hide their grief, especially the daughter of the family. Before taking leave of them the next morning, Yvain enquires about their troubles. An uncouth giant, Harpin de la Montagne, will attack their manor unless the young girl's brother defeats him in a duel. The young man is obviously not up to it, so Yvain undertakes to defend the honour of his friend's family (vv. 3797-4256).

Exactly the same situation is described in chapter 65 of *Egils saga*. Egill is back in Norway, shortly after his great friend Arinbjörn, the most excellent of Norwegian aristocrats, has saved him from a deserved

execution by King Eiríkr Blood-Axe whose son Egill has killed. Egill is on his way to try to recover some of his property that had been confiscated by Eiríkr, when he comes to the farm of Arinbjörn's sister, Gyða. He is treated with the utmost hospitality but he notices that his hosts are in a state of dejection. In the morning, before departing, he asks the daughter of the house: «Hvat grætr þú mær? Ek sé þig aldri káta», «Why are you crying, maiden? I never see you in good spirits». The family tells Egill that a terrible berserk, Ljótr inn bleiki, has challenged the girl's young brother to a duel. If he wins, he will take the young woman. Egill offers to fight in the young man's place. The duel between the two is a piece of narrative bravura, Egill punctuating his blows with well-wrought skaldic stanzas that add insult to the injuries he inflicts on the hapless brute.

The narrative and poetic skill of the author of this episode in *Egils saga* must not deflect our attention away from the fact that he has borrowed it from the older French romance. A German scholar working a century ago, E. Sattler (1911), first noticed this, and the borrowing was also discussed by Odd Nordland in his book on the Head-ransom episode in *Egils saga* (NORDLAND 1956). Bjarni Einarsson, in his 1975 doctoral dissertation on *Egils saga*, demonstrates how the *Egils saga* author pilfers bits and pieces from a variety of pre-existing texts to craft this chapter, and also that the main structure comes from Chrétien's *Yvain* (EINARSSON 1975, pp. 181-186).

In my recent book on *Egils saga*, I take this a little bit further, showing that not only was the saga's author borrowing from the French trouvère, but that he also understood the deeper meaning of Yvain's adventure, i.e. that his ordeal leads him to pursue a more meaningful life as a knight than he had had before by helping others rather than pursuing glory in tournaments. This understanding is confirmed by an allusion to the Bible, at *John*, 20, 13, where the angels ask the women waiting beside the empty tomb of Jesus why they are crying: this is a common scriptural basis for the entry of Charity into the world with the Resurrection of Christ (TULINIUS 2004, pp. 99-101).

The transformation of Egill after the Head-ransom episode may perhaps not seem obvious but if one looks at his subsequent adventures, especially the trip to Värmland, it is signified not only by the fact that Egill undertakes a mission for the Norwegian king to collect taxes, but that on the way, he does deeds of charity, especially curing a young girl who has seizures just as Jesus did on his travels when he cured the daughter of Jairus (EINARSSON 1975, p. 260). The fact that Egill is a royal emissary is supported by one more allusion to Scripture, to chapter 25 of the First Book of Samuel, where the Ármóðr skegg episode is modelled

on David's encounter with Nabal and Abigail in the mountains of Carmel (TULINIUS 2004, pp. 85-90).

The saga seems to be presenting the skald Egill as a royal retainer, or at least as a potential one, giving him a position parallel to that of the knight in royal service in the 12th-century romances. It is here that we must call to mind the statement made by the saga's author much earlier in the saga, at chapter 8, on how much King Harald Finehair prized his skalds, seating them closest to him in the great hall, not unlike the knights and their relationship with the King as played out in Arthurian romance.

It is therefore tempting to infer from this, as well as from all that has been said above, that *Egils saga* represents an attempt to cast the figure of the Icelandic poet of old in a role similar to that of the knight of the chivalrous romance, the main protagonist of an adventure tale which focuses on him, and not the king. At the same time it fits Wanner's theory that the proponents of skaldic poetry were fighting a battle for its continuing cultural prestige in 13th-century Norway. Just as the *Edda* was designed to enhance the understanding and favour the practice of this poetry, the saga was a way to enshrine beautiful poetry in an absorbing narrative that was likely to excite the imagination and at the same time could promote the *skáld* as an alternative but similar cultural model to the knight of the romances.

There are of course many objections to this theory. An important one would be the pervasive anti-royalist feeling in the saga, which does not make it likely to have been successful as a propaganda piece at the Norwegian court (ANDERSSON 2006, pp. 115-116). Another objection could be that *Egils saga* is not the oldest of the sagas about early Icelanders and its author was not inventing a genre, since earlier sagas already existed portraying Icelanders from the same period (ANDERSSON 2009).

Both objections could be answered by arguing that the saga was composed for local consumption. In my 2004 book on the saga I propose that the anti-royalist feelings expressed in *Egils saga*, as well as its special brand of humour and playfulness with meaning, may have especially suited the taste of Snorri Sturluson and his followers in the last years of Snorri's life, when he was in open conflict with King Hákon (TULINIUS 2004, pp. 115-125). Indeed, I believe that Bourdieu's field theory can be applied more specifically to the practice of literature in 13th-century Iceland, especially to aficionados of skaldic poetry. There is a certain amount of evidence for what could be called a «literary field» existing in Iceland in Snorri's times, i.e. a part of social space where the actors were not competing for the kind of capital available at court or within the spheres of power in Iceland (TULINIUS 2009). Within the literary field what matters is literary value and playing with already known and

established forms. The intricacy of the use of intertextuality in the saga, among which one can include that of the borrowing from *Yvain*, fits well with the taste for word play and multiple meanings one finds there. The pre-existence of a saga about an early Icelander, such as *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* (ANDERSSON 2008) could very well have been part of the literature the author of *Egils saga* was working from.

Whether this is true or not, it seems evident that the translations of romances in Snorri's time did change the literary polysystem in medieval Iceland. The case of *Egils saga* seems to confirm Itamar Even-Zohar's claim that « translated literature […] participates actively in shaping the center of the polysystem ». It is « an integral part of innovatory forces, and as such likely to be identified with major events in literary history » (EVEN-ZOHAR 1990, p. 46).

The translations of the French romances changed the Norse-Icelandic polysystem by threatening the formerly central position of the skaldic poetry. The evidence brought together here also indicates that it helped engender a new form, at least in Iceland, enriching therefore the polysystem by creating a new and especially interesting genre. What is that but a « major event in literary history »?

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The Change in Position of Translated *Riddarasögur* within Old Norse Literary Polysystems

A Case Study of *Elíss saga ok Rósamundar*

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This article discusses the position of Old Norse translated « riddarasögur », and the change in this position within Old Norse literary polysystems, in the period between the mid 13th and the mid 15th century. The discussion is exemplified by a study of « Elíss saga ok Rósamundar », which is a translation of an Old French « chanson de geste », « Elye de Saint Gille ». It will be here argued that there was a change in position of the translated « riddarasögur » from 13th-century Norway to 15th-century Iceland: from having a central position in the polysystem in 13th-century Norway, translations of « riddarasögur » may seem to have become not peripheral, but rather internalized and undistinguishable from indigenous compositions in 15th-century Iceland.

This article will discuss the position of Old Norse translated *riddarasögur*, and the change in this position within Old Norse literary polysystems, in the period between the mid 13th and the mid 15th century. The discussion will be exemplified by a study of *Elíss saga ok Rósamundar* which is a translation of an Old French *chanson de geste*, *Elye de Saint Gille*. The saga exists in one Norwegian manuscript, DG 4-7 fol. (c. 1270), and three Icelandic manuscripts: Holm Perg 6 4to (c. 1400-1425), Holm Perg 7 fol. (c. 1450-1475) and AM 579 4to (c. 1450-1475).[1] Since the saga is preserved in both a 13th-century Norwegian manuscript, which is very close in dating and provenance to the actual translation, and in several younger Icelandic rewritings, it makes an excellent source for studying the change in the position of translated literature through time. I will discuss whether *Elíss saga*, as a translation of an Old French *chanson de geste*, had the same position within the polysystems of 13th-century Norway and of 15th-century Iceland, by studying how the dif-

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1. ONP *Registre*, København 1989.

ferent versions of the saga relate to other translated and original texts within the two polysystems.

There are very few translations which are preserved in manuscripts from 13th-century Norway and 14th/15th-century Iceland. A small fragment of *Karlamagnúss saga* from c. 1250-1275 is still extant (NRA 61, 1r-2v), in addition to the 14th- and 15th-century manuscripts. *Barlaams saga* appears in a Norwegian manuscript from c. 1275 and two 14th-century manuscripts, among others. *Tiódels saga* is a younger Icelandic rewriting of *Bisclaretz ljóð*, which appears in DG 4-7 fol. *Guimars lioð*, also in DG 4-7, seems to have appeared in two younger medieval manuscripts as well, but these are no longer extant. In addition, it appears in several 18th- and 19th-century paper copies, which do not however seem to have derived from DG 4-7 (KALINKE 1979, p. 108). The scarcity of material preserved in manuscripts from the two temporal and geographical contexts legitimizes the attention given to *Elíss saga* in this study.

Even-Zohar (1990; 2000) argues that translated literature should be regarded as part of the literary polysystem in which it appears, and the link is determined by: (1) the way the source texts are selected; (2) the content of the polysystem; and (3) the correspondence to other target texts in the polysystem. The central or peripheral position of translated literature also depends on the character and the content of the polysystem itself. If translated literature has a primary or central position it actively influences the rest of the polysystem, and is regarded as equal in status to original compositions. Translations tend to occupy such central positions when the polysystem is young and is in the process of being established, when a literature is peripheral to a greater polysystem (for example Old Norse vs Latin and other vernaculars), and when there is a turning point, crisis or a literary vacuum in the polysystem. In such cases, the translations would often be adequate, in the sense that they will be seeking to keep the patterns and character of the source text, even if that leads to disruption of the norms in the target culture. If translated literature has a peripheral or secondary position, on the other hand, it has little influence on the rest of the polysystem, and it tends to be an arena for conservatism and for non-adequate and adapting translating strategy. It is also distinguished from originally composed literature to a greater extent. Even-Zohar also points out that the position of some translations may change from primary to secondary with time, a comment which is particularly important to keep in mind when discussing the position of translated *riddarasögur*.

Even-Zohar further asserts that the position of translations within the polysystem conditions the practice of translating, and that the nature

of this relationship is dynamic. An intended function for a translation, for example, may condition the translating strategy and thus condition the position of translations within the polysystem. This new polysystem will, in turn, possibly be in need of new type of translations, performed according to a different translating strategy, and possibly changing anew the position of translations in the polysystem.[2] The dynamic relationship between numerous factors, such as the intended function, the process of translation, the main features of the product itself, the competence of the translator, the position of the translation within the polysystem, the form, and character of the polysystem itself, and its position in greater polysystems should therefore be kept in mind if the status of translations is to be discussed.

In order to comment on the position of translations and the change of this position, as many of these factors as possible should be mapped out. Translations will in this context be represented by various versions of *Elíss saga*. Because of limitations on space, I choose to focus on three manuscript versions: DG 4-7 fol., Holm Perg 6 4to, and Holm Perg 7 fol. The latter two will be seen as representing one and the same polysystem, but possibly two different subsystems, because of the differences between them. In the following I will account for:

- The status and position of the source text. How and why was it translated into Old Norse?
- The two main polysystems. What texts are preserved in contemporary manuscripts – translations or original compositions? What texts are preserved in the same manuscript?
- How do the different versions of *Elíss saga* relate to these polysystems? Are they conservative and faithful, or innovative? If new aspects are introduced, what are these, and are they the same in the three cases?

By commenting on the nature of the polysystem and the relationship between the different versions and their respective polysystems, I aim to throw light, even if only partially, on the position of translations in the three polysystems, and the change in those positions. It has to be pointed out that even though I relate and compare the positions of the various versions of the story about Elye, these are not directly related. Studying the positions and status of these versions within their respective polysystems methodologically justifies such a comparison.

2. The link between function, process and product is a main premise in Descriptive Translation Studies. For further discussion, see TOURY 1995, pp. 13-14.

As Even-Zohar clarifies, a polysystem is a relative concept, it can vary in size, can comprise different numbers of subsystems, which in their own turn may function as polysystems. In this paper, I will define a polysystem on two levels – the manuscript context, within which each of the versions appears, and the literary context, defined by a range of contemporary manuscripts. Further, when studying the relationship between a translation and the polysystem, I will here focus on the materiality of *Elíss saga* and the manuscripts in which it appears. By materiality I mean *mise en livre* (the composition of the manuscript itself), *mise en page* (the graphical layout of the page) and *mise en texte* (abbreviations, punctuation, etc.).

STATUS OF SOURCE TEXT

The status and position of the source text within its own polysystem is emphasized by Even-Zohar as an important factor for the position of translations. The source text, in this context, is the Old French *chanson Elye de Saint-Gille*. It was probably composed in the 12th century, but is preserved in one Old French manuscript only, fr. 25516 from c. 1280 from Northern France.

The story of Elye is closely related to the French contemporary literary tradition, represented by other *chansons de geste* and romances. *Elye* and the poem following in the manuscript, *Aiol*, formed a cycle geste and were well-known and respected works in the medieval period. *Aiol* is mentioned in contemporary chronicles and was translated into Flemish and Dutch in the early 13th century and into Italian and Spanish in the 14th and 15th century. *Elye* was translated into Flemish and Old Norse (MALICOTE 2006, p. 78).

The manuscript contains in total four texts: *Boeve de Haumtone*, *Elye*, *Aiol*, and *Robert le Diable*. All four stories have been related to historical events and persons in different ways, which gives the impression of a manuscript with an intended didactic and educative role.[3] The parallels between literary and historical events concern the overtaking and Christianizing of Saracen lands and peoples, and correspond to the active role the counts of Flanders had in the Crusades.[4] On a literary level, and by

3. See MALICOTE 1999; 2006. Her argument is that the textual and illustration programme of the manuscript might have been intended to educate young aristocrats at the Court of Flanders.

4. A major part of an attack on Constantinople on 13 April 1204 was played by the counts of Flanders. It was Pope Innocent III who called upon Christian forces for the Fourth

means of literary parallels, the four texts may be related to romances such as Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval* (the literary figures of Aiol and Perceval) and *Le Chevalier au lion* (the herbal ointment which saves the hero's life). There are numerous allusions and links to other *chansons de geste*, such as *Le Couronnement de Louis* (the groom leaving his bride at the end), *Prise d'Orage* (the «paradise» room which becomes an earthly imprisonment for love and pleasure) and others from the cycle about William of Orange. In addition, it has to be emphasized that the poem is written according to well-established Latin academic principles, making use of writing techniques such as *intellectio*, *disjunctio*, *abbreviatio*, and parallels/contrasts. Thus, *Elye* is a poem which builds extensively on vernacular literary culture and tradition, and at the same time on Latin academic writing principles.[5] Keeping in mind its possible allusions and links to the historical past of the commissioner(s) and audience, *Elye* appears as, if not a central text in the polysystem, at least closely related to its literary and historical core.

How and why *Elye* was chosen to be translated into Old Norse is not certain. It is possible that it found its way to Norway through England and the Anglo-Norman court. Still, it is unknown whether *Elye* was chosen to be translated because of its moral and philosophical affinities or just because it was available to the right person at the right moment.

The Polysystem of 13th-Century Norway

The 13th-century Norwegian version of *Elíss saga* appears in the manuscript DG 4-7 fol., from c. 1270.[6] The manuscript consists of two parts which did not constitute one manuscript originally, but were possibly written at the same scribal center. The first part includes a fragment of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, an Old Norse translation of a lost Latin work by Oddr Snorrason. The second part includes, besides *Elíss saga*, frag-

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Crusade, which presumably was originally intended to support the Byzantine Empire at Constantinople against Muslim powers. It resulted, however, in the sack of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204 (MORRIS 2001, pp. 233-234). With the fall of the Greek empire, Baldwin of Flanders was declared emperor of the Latin Empire of Constantinople (FOSSIER 1997, p. 275). This attack has been claimed to be depicted in *Aiol*, the text-witness following *Elye* in the manuscript (NORMAND, RAYNAUD 1877).

5. For a more detailed discussion of the issue see MALOCITE 1999 and 2006, and OBERGFELL 1996.

6. For a thorough description of the manuscript, see TVEITANE 1972, COOK, TVEITANE 1979, HOLM-OLSEN 1940.

ments of three other translations: (1) *Pamphilus*, a translation of the Latin *Pamphilus de amore*, a popular text drawing on classical literary tradition, very popular in the Middle Ages. The Latin text was translated into many vernacular languages which testify to its high status within the broad European literary polysystem. (2) A fragment from a dialogue between Courage and Fear, a translation of *Moralium Dogma Philoso-phorum*, which may have been written by William of Conches.[7] *Moralium Dogma* was written in the middle of the 12th century and was a very popular work in the whole of medieval Europe up to the Reformation. (3) *Elíss saga*. And (4) *Strengleikar*, a collection of short stories, some of which are translations of Marie de France's *lais*, some of anonymous Old French *lais*, and some without known Old French source texts. Marie de France is one of the best known medieval writers, which gives the source text a relatively high status and a central position within the European polysystem. Within this manuscript, *Elíss saga* as a translation is closely related to translations of central and popular texts from Latin classical and Old French vernacular literary traditions. As the manuscript includes four translations, it seems that the person(s) responsible for combining these texts together in one manuscript, the scribes or a commissioner, were aware of their status as translations. DG 4-7, as a whole, is thus a hermeneutical, interpretative *translatio* of Latin and Old French texts and culture. As such, the manuscript and the Old Norse translations within it claim a position in the European polysystem, and also constitute a certain position for translations within the Old Norse literary system.

Judging from the preserved 13th-century Norwegian manuscripts, the main types of texts written at that time were laws, religious writings, such as the *Old Norse Homily Book*, and a fair number of translations, such as *Þiðreks saga* and *Barlaams saga*. Other works, such as Chrétien's romances, may have been translated at the same time, even though we have no preserved copies. Other texts, such as *Konungs Skuggsjá* and the Old Norse Homily Book, may be considered as rewritings, building extensively on, contesting and appropriating Latin literary tradition and thus promoting Old Norse vernacularity to an even greater extent. The Old Norse polysystem in 13th-century Norway is thus, to a large degree, constituted by translations. Such a situation would suggest a central position of translations, possibly because of the youth of the Old Norse literary tradition itself, it being in a phase of establishment and defining

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7. The authorship of *Moralium Dogma* has been greatly debated, and in addition to William of Conches, scholars have suggested Walter of Chatillon (GAUTHIER 1951) and Alan of Lille (GLORIEUX 1948).

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its own status within the European polysystem, as it was suggested for the manuscript DG 4-7.

On a theoretical level, it was pointed out that, if translations have central position in the polysystem, they would function as a means to present innovations and new models that would influence original compositions produced in this subsystem. This hypothesis is confirmed by my comparison of *Elíss saga* in DG 4-7 with a range of contemporary background manuscripts containing *Þiðreks saga* (Holm Perg 4 fol.), *Barlaams saga* (Holm Perg 6 fol.), *Konungs Skuggsjá* (AM 243), the Homily Book (AM 619 4to), a sample of law texts (*Codex Rantzovianus*), *The Legendary Olav's saga* (DG 8 II) and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (AM 310 4to) (see ERIKSEN 2010). The comparison indicated that many aspects of DG 4-7 conformed well to the polysystem as described, as for example when it comes to the structure of the manuscript, the emphasis placed on Old Norse language, the way the text is structured by means of rubrics, initials, majuscules and punctuation, rhetorical devices used at the beginning and ends of chapters, principles of abbreviations, word clusters, and corrections. On the other hand, there are some aspects of DG 4-7 and *Elíss saga* which make it stand out from and introduce innovations to the target polysystem.

First, *Elíss saga* appears in a collection which, even though planned as a coherent entity, appears as a miscellany. All the other background manuscripts include only one text. Manuscripts including several «genres» of texts and written by several scribes start to appear in France at the beginning of the 13th century. Such manuscripts may be exemplified by, for instance, BnF, fr. 12576, containing Chrétien's *Conte del Graal* with its continuations, two didactic religious poems, an anonymous poem about the death of a local nobleman and some contemporary notes; BnF, fr. 1450 containing Chrétien's romances, Wace's *Brut*, and other classical romances like *Eneas* and *Roman de Troie*. Even though we do not know whether these miscellanies were compiled with a specific owner in mind, they exemplify the increasing tendency of miscellaneous manuscripts. Keith Busby (2002, p. 17) relates this development to commercial book production, which would have conditioned a private book market and ownership. Thus, the miscellaneous content of manuscripts may be related to change in the nature of reception and ownership of books. Whether or not the appearance of such miscellanies in Scandinavia brought with it commercial book production and a new mode of book reception and ownership may be discussed, but it is not implausible. DG 4-7 may have been intended as a private mini-library, commissioned by a Norwegian aristocrat, who had the economic and cultural capital to appreciate such texts. This may be supported by a note of ownership

which appears in the *Óláfs saga* fragment of DG 4-7: *herra Snara Aslaksson a mik* (TVEITANE 1972, p. 13). Snara Aslaksson was one of the leading men under King Hákon Magnússon (1299-1319). It is uncertain, however, whether Snara owned the whole manuscript, but it is not improbable that a man of his social and cultural standing did. *Hauksbók* is another more or less contemporary manuscript, which, even though Icelandic, may be seen as an example of that tendency.[8] Miscellaneous collections become more and more common through the 14th and 15th century in Iceland, as will be mentioned below.

Second, the manuscript is written by three different scribes, who cooperated very closely, changing in the middle of a gathering, a text, and once even in the middle of a sentence. This was characteristic, as mentioned above, of miscellanies produced in France in the 13th century, but not characteristic of the background manuscripts for DG 4-7. The only exception is Holm Perg 4 fol. containing *Þiðreks saga*, which was written by five scribes.[9] Note however that the manuscript contains a translation as well and was possibly produced in the Bergen area, just like DG 4-7. The cooperation of several scribes indicates that translated *riddarasögur* were copied at scribal centers of certain size and that they were regarded as worthy enough, both culturally and economically, to be copied at such centers.

Third, certain features of the *mise en page* of *Elíss saga* stand out from the standard in the rest of the manuscript and the polysystem. The layout in DG 4-7 as a whole is not consistent; some texts are structured by rubrics, titles, and initials of various sizes, while others are not. *Elíss saga* is much less visually emphasized than the rest, in the sense that there are no rubrics marking chapters, there are fewer initials, and there is less graphical interruption than in either *Pamphilus* or *Strengleikar*. The reason for that may be the style of the texts: *Pamphilus* is a dialogue and *Strengleikar* is a collection of short stories, both of which give potential for more visual emphasis in relation to the introduction of direct speech and new stories. However, the difference in layout may also indicate a varied reception mode intended for the whole manuscript. If it was commissioned and meant to be a private book, as suggested above, some of the texts may have been intended to be read aloud and collectively, while others may have been intended for more private meditative reading.

8. Haukr Erlendsson and Snara Aslaksson were both king's men and belonged to the same social and cultural class. They are mentioned together in several letters as part of the exclusive elite group of the kings, queens and bishops. See ERIKSEN 2012, pp. 157-159.

9. For a detailed description of the relationship between these hands, see UNGER 1953, pp. xv-xvi.

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The three aspects that distinguished *Elíss saga* and DG 4-7 from its polysystem, namely, varied layout, the cooperation between three scribes and the miscellaneous content of the manuscript, create a link between the professional level and high status of the scribal center, the economic and cultural capital of the commissioner, and the mode of use of the manuscript. DG 4-7 may have been commissioned as a private book by a Norwegian aristocrat, to be used in public and in private – a «fashion» imported from French courts and aristocratic milieus. The introduction of cultural novelties, together with the textual translation, may testify to the central position of the manuscript within the 13th-century Norwegian polysystem.

The Polysystem of 15th-Century Iceland

As mentioned above, *Elíss saga* appears in several 15th-century manuscripts, and in this context I will pay attention to Holm Perg 6 4to from c. 1425[10] and Holm Perg 7 fol. from c. 1475.[11] Both these manuscripts originate from the north of Iceland and are collections of romances, including, what we traditionally designate as Icelandic *riddarasögur*, in addition to the translations. Even though it is always difficult to pinpoint the exact provenance of a manuscript, there are some indications that the two manuscripts originate from two different contexts, one religious/monastic and one secular. Because of that they may be seen as representing two assumed subsystems in the 15th-century Icelandic polysystem, which are not necessarily rigidly separated. Still, it will be interesting to discuss whether translations may have had different positions in these different subsystems.

Holm Perg 6 4to includes today twelve texts of originally more: eight translations, two of which from Latin, the rest from Old French, and four Icelandic romances. The order they appear in today is: *Amícus saga ok Amilíus* (Latin), *Bevers saga* (OF), *Ívents saga* (OF), *Parcevals saga* (OF), *Valvens þáttr* (OF), *Mírmants saga* (IR), *Flóvents saga* (IR), *Elíss saga* (OF), *Konráðs saga* (IR), *þjalar Jóns saga* (IR), *Eiriks saga víðförla* (IR but missing), *Möttuls saga* (OF), and *Clárus saga* (Latin).

Holm Perg 7 fol. includes two translated and nine Icelandic *riddarasögur*. The translated sagas are *Elíss saga* and *Bevers saga*, and the

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10. The provenance, dating and context of Holm Perg 6 4to are discussed by SLAY 1972, KARLSSON 1967, LINDBLAD 1963.

11. The provenance, dating and context of Holm Perg 7 fol. are discussed by SANDERS 2000.

Icelandic ones are *Rémundar saga keisarasonar*, *Sigurðar saga turnara*, *Konraðs saga keisarasonar*, *Ectors saga*, *Gibbons saga*, *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, *Sigurðar saga fóts*, *Partalopa saga*, and *Adonias saga*. Note that *Partalopa saga* is sometimes regarded as a translation.

There are other 15th-century Icelandic manuscripts with similar content, containing both translated and Icelandic *riddarasögur*, such as AM 489 4to, AM 589 4to, AM 471 4to, and AM 343 4to. The fact that the translated and Icelandic *riddarasögur* appear in the same manuscripts may indicate that the 15th-century scribes and audience did not necessarily distinguish between the status and the function of translations vs original compositions. Such an assumption may point in two directions. On the one hand, it may be argued that translations and original compositions were not differentiated, which would imply a central position of translation within the polysystem, as suggested by Even-Zohar on a theoretical level. The translations would have then conditioned and influenced the original compositions, which has indeed been suggested for the relationship between the translated and the Icelandic *riddarasögur*. On the other hand, it may be said that by including translations in the same manuscripts as original compositions, the former were not aligned to, but assimilated in and adapted to the indigenous and productive literary tradition. Translations were a less productive text-generating activity than original compositions in 15th-century Iceland. They had secondary positions and their status as «translations» was simply no longer a relevant characteristic.[12] The second interpretation seems more plausible for 15th-century Iceland, since these translations were not new. They had already been in circulation and in co-existence with original Old Norse literary tradition for several centuries. And while they may have had a primary and conditioning position in the beginning of that process, by the 15th century they would have been incorporated within the local polysystem, and their preservation would rather have been conditioned by the central repertoire and norms. Another argument supporting this hypothesis is that in Icelandic *riddarasögur*, which often are a patchwork of known chivalric and learned motifs combined in a creative and independent way, there are abundant direct references to Latin authors and their works, such as Isidore of Seville, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Vincent de Beauvais, and Honorius Augustodunensis.[13]

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12. Note however that some texts are characterized as translations, but this information is cut out from *Elíss saga* in Holm Perg 6 4to.

13. See for example the discussion of allusions and references to Latin authors in *Kiriljax saga* (DIVJAK 2009).

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Chivalric literature, on the other hand, even though alluded to, is not referred to in the same direct way. The translations thus seem to have been incorporated and internalized within the local polysystem to such a degree that their status as foreign and translated is replaced by a status as inherent repertoire used in the production of new material. Translations of Latin *authoritas* seem, on the other hand, to have had a different and higher status within the polysystem. This accentuates the possibility that translations could have different positions within the polysystem, depending on the status, type, and function of the source texts.

The specific context of the two manuscripts may throw more light on the 15th-century Icelandic polysystem. The provenance of Holm Perg 6 4to is unknown, but it has been suggested that the main scribe of the manuscript also had a main function in the production of Holm Perg 1 fol., also called *Bergsbók* (see Karlsson 1967). *Bergsbók* is one of the youngest examples of grand Icelandic manuscripts of the style of *Flateyjarbók*, and includes *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, *Rekstefja* and *Óláfs drápa Tryggvasonar*, *Lilja*, *Geisli*, and *Óláfs saga Helga*. *Bergsbók* may have been, if not written, then possibly supervised by a monk called Guthorm, who even though known by name, remains anonymous. Judged by the fact that *Bergsbók* was written by six scribes, it may be assumed that the manuscript was written at a scribal center of considerable size, and Munkaþverá has been suggested as a possible place of origin. One monk seems thus to have been responsible for the writing of the two manuscripts, which represent two quite distinct literary systems. While Holm Perg 6 4to contains translated and Icelandic romances, *Bergsbók* contains historical and religious prose and poetry which have a more direct link to the history and culture of the scribes and audience. Thus, even if *Elíss saga* and the other translations are seen as belonging to the literary system defined by the Icelandic romances, both these genres were distinguished from more historical and religiously aspiring works. Judging by the size, layout and style of the manuscripts, *Bergsbók* appears to be more expensive and has a higher status. This may suggest a difference in status of romances vs historical/religious texts, but it may also reflect a difference in the intended function and use of the manuscripts. Holm Perg 6 4to may have been intended as a private book, or a private mini-library, written by a monk for his own use. He was professionally engaged in book production and would have written and supervised the writing of manuscripts at Munkaþverá monastery. If judged by the content, size, and layout of the two manuscripts, translated and Icelandic romances seem more peripheral than the historical and religious works.

Holm Perg 7 fol., on the other hand, is claimed to originate from the secular scribal center at Möðruvellir Fram, a church farm in northern

Iceland. The manuscript is associated with a number of other manuscripts, which contain a great variety of genres and texts. These manuscripts seem to have been written at the same place and reveal the type of texts that would have been worthy of reproduction and interesting for the audience on a secular farm. Some of these manuscripts are AM 81 a fol., also called *Skálholtsbók yngsta* (*Sverris saga, Böglunga saga*, and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*), AM 243a fol. (*Konungs Skuggsjá*), AM 343a 4to (fifteen *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*), AM 579 4to (collection of romances), a fragment of *Egils saga*, and *Svarfdœla saga*. Note that manuscripts including religious texts are lacking. Bearing in mind the content of the manuscripts produced at Möðruvellir Fram, Christopher Sanders (2000, p. 52) concludes: «It could be thought that the local aristocracy of the period had a keen sense of its own identity which it sought to manifest and strengthen through the production of manuscripts». If paraphrased, this statement suggests that translations may have been copied and reproduced in order to «strengthen the Icelandic identity». This reading may be supported by the combination of translations with Icelandic romances and *fornaldarsögur*. Note however that it is not translations that seem to be distinguished as a subsystem, but rather romances in general, as opposed to historical and religious works of various types.

The suggested peripheral position of translated *riddarasögur* within the polysystem would imply, from a theoretical perspective, that they would comply with the norms and standards of the polysystem. In my analysis of the *mise en livre*, *mise en page*, and *mise en texte* of *Elíss saga*, this theoretical hypothesis is indeed confirmed empirically, but to different degrees when it comes to Holm Perg 6 4to and Holm Perg 7 fol. (see ERIKSEN 2010). The relevant polysystem was defined by the following texts and manuscripts: AM 62 fol. (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*), Holm Perg 1 fol. (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, *Rekstefja*, *Óláfs saga*, *Lilja*, *Geisli*, and *Óláfs saga Helga*), Holm Perg 2 fol. (26 saints' sagas), AM 489 4to (collection of translated and Icelandic romances), AM 586 4to (*æfintýri*, romances, late *Íslendingasögur*), AM 81 a fol. (*Sverris saga*, *Böglunga sögur*, *Hákonar saga*). The study of this polysystem indicated tendencies toward the existence of two subsystems: translated and indigenous romances/*fornaldarsögur* and historical/religious writings. This division has already been suggested based on the content of manuscripts, and is thus confirmed when their size, scale, layout and structural organization are studied. The first subgroup appears in smaller 4to manuscripts, structured in one column, written in rougher *cursiva* style, small and tight letters, abundance and great variety of abbreviations. The second subgroup of texts appears in larger folio for-

mats, structured in two columns, and having a more formal graphical appearance over them. Note, however, that the largest quartos are of almost the same size as the smallest folios. In this sense, the two groups are not absolute; this is rather a tendency, which is also confirmed by the exceptions when it comes to content.

Elíss saga in Holm Perg 6 4to complies with the standards in the subgroup of romances within the polysystem, when it comes to all the studied parameters but one. The manuscript contains three animated initials, which are somewhat extraordinary for manuscripts containing romances. 14th- and 15th-century Icelandic manuscripts with illuminations or ornate initials contain mainly laws and religious texts. Even *Íslendingasögur* are not illustrated, with the exception of one version of *Njáls saga* where there are three illuminated initials (see LIEPE 2008). The presence of these animated initials may possibly be explained by the competence of the main scribe, possibly a monk at Munkaþverá. The illuminations do give a somewhat higher status to the manuscript, and the texts within it. Holm Perg 7 fol., on the other hand, stands out from its subgroup when it comes to the scale and style of the manuscript as a whole. It has a folio format and is structured in two columns. In this sense, it resembles the subgroup of historical/religious writings. Despite being in folio format, however, the manuscript is the smallest of all the other folios that I have studied. Translated romances, in combination with indigenous Icelandic ones, are in this case given somewhat greater status. Note that translations of saints' lives also appear in a folio-format manuscript,[14] which may once again indicate that translations should not be regarded as a whole subsystem, but rather may be divided into various groups, depending on the genre, source language and content of the translations.

CONCLUSION

To recapitulate, the aim of this article was to comment on the status of translated *riddarasögur* in two Old Norse polysystems (13th-century Norway and 15th-century Iceland), through a case study of *Elíss saga ok Rósamundar*. My conclusions are based on two-level argumentation: first, accounting for and analyzing the content of the polysystems, and second, studying the relationship between various versions of *Elíss*

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14. Saint's lives appear either in folio-format manuscripts or in 12mo, which were obviously private meditative books.

saga and the respective polysystems. The parameters of comparison, in this case, were the *mise en livre*, *mise en page* and *mise en texte* of the manuscripts. Based on the tendencies revealed by the analysis, I would propose that there was a change in position of translated *riddarasögur* from 13th-century Norway to 15th-century Iceland. From having a central position in the polysystem in 13th-century Norway, translations of *riddarasögur* may seem to have become not peripheral, but rather internalized and undistinguishable from the indigenous Icelandic compositions. They would have been regarded as belonging to the same group as Icelandic romances, *fornaldarsögur*, *æfintýri* and even late *Íslendingasögur*, and their origin as translations may not have been relevant anymore. This was indicated by the content of the manuscripts in which *Elíss saga* appeared, by the content of other manuscripts produced at the same scribal centers, by the nature of other texts from the same polysystem, and by the size, layout, and general appearance of these manuscripts. Note that the status of translations of Latin authoritative texts may have remained more central to the Icelandic polysystem, as indicated by references to Latin authors and also the status of the manuscripts containing saints' lives.

The tentative and hypothetical character of this conclusion has to be emphasized. Generalizing from the transmission of one text to the group of translated *riddarasögur*, as a whole, may be problematic. Moreover, if other aspects of the texts were studied and analyzed, the results may have been different. This hypothesis needs, therefore, to be tested through studies of other translations and other parameters, if a deeper understanding of the status of translations in Old Norse polysystems is to be achieved.

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Literary Activity and Power Struggle

Some Observations on the Medieval Icelandic Polysystem after the *Sturlungaöld*

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This essay proposes some reflections on how the social and political changes that characterise the period of Icelandic history after annexation to Norway (1262-1264) were strictly related to the development of the literary system, especially as regards the nexus between group dynamics and the interaction between saga genres. The core question discussed in his study is whether the growing complexity of the literary polysystem in terms of genres is in any way linked to the fact that competing options were devised by social entities with different backgrounds and different strategies to gain power and enhance their status. At the end of the analysis, two possible ways of approaching the problem are delineated.

The condition of medieval Iceland after annexation to Norway (1262-1264) is interesting in many respects. However, when compared to the wealth of studies dedicated to the so-called Free State period (ca. 930-1262),[1] the 14th and 15th centuries seem to have received considerably less scholarly attention so far.

The present essay aims at proposing some reflections on how the social and political changes that characterise this period of Icelandic history were strictly related to the development of the literary system, especially as regards the nexus between group dynamics and the interaction between genres.

The following analysis rests on the basic premise that the production and consumption of literature in medieval Iceland played a major role as a social organizer, both as a source of entertainment and as a means for the promotion and legitimation of those groups which were, or aspired

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1. This period is also known as *þjóðveldisöld* in Icelandic historiography. Another term that is used in international scholarship is *Commonwealth*.

to be, power holders. To this end, the polysystem theory[2] proves very helpful in many ways, especially since it contributes towards raising relevant questions and devising possible explanations for literary phenomena such as the interaction of genres as mirror of social dynamics, as will be shown below.[3]

Before proceeding with the analysis, a brief overview of the historical and literary contexts of Iceland after the *Sturlungaöld* will be provided.

As is widely known, the political situation leading up to the end of the Free State is marked by fierce internal struggles between a small number of chieftain families (five or six) who fought against each other to gain control over the whole country.[4] This oligarchic structure progressively replaced the traditional, more balanced system based on a larger number of *goðar*, who had limited authority. The annexation of Iceland to Norway in 1262-1264 meant a dramatic reshaping of the social and political structure of the country as well as of its economic architecture. The old system, centred around the ties between chieftains and householders, was replaced by a system with a new repertoire.[5] A major breach with the *þjóðveldi* period occurred when new law-books such as *Járnsíða* (1271) and *Jónsbók* (1281) were adopted (Sigurðsson 1995, p. 156). As a major consequence, the constitution of the Free State was formally abrogated, the Alþing was turned into a law court, and the right to blood vengeance was abolished. In addition, the introduction of a service aristocracy in Iceland changed both the social structure and the very mechanisms by which access to power was regulated. The major representative of the king in Iceland was now the *hirðstjóri* (or *höfuðsmaðr*), while the administration of justice was coordinated by two *lögmenn*. Furthermore, the country was divided into twelve districts (*sýslur*), administered by the *sýslumenn*, who had the right «of public prosecution and executive authority» (Sigurðsson 1995, p. 157).Such new organization of the country called for an expansion of the Icelandic aristocracy, thus bringing new men into the retinue. Upward social mobility was thereby made possible. However, the recruitment was based

2. The polysystem theory is illustrated in Even-Zohar 1990 and Even-Zohar 2005.

3. Some of these hypotheses are based on a preliminary work on the development of the *fornaldarsögur*, which was presented at a conference in Reykjavík in August 2009, and is now published as Bampi 2012.

4. A brief overview of the Age of the Sturlungs (ca. 1220-1264) is offered in Karlsson 2000, pp. 79-86. See also Sigurðsson 1995, pp. 153-156.

5. Even-Zohar (1997, p. 19) defines the repertoire as «the aggregate of rules and materials which govern both the making and handling, or production and consumption, of any given product».

mostly on a genealogical principle, according to which officials were chosen among those descending from good families, i.e. *goðar* families.[6] In addition, people who aspired to become members of the king's retinue should demonstrate to have a sound economy. As Jón Viðar Sigurðsson points out, «the access to the king's service […] was to a large extent socially hereditary» (1995, p. 158). It was certainly in the interest of the Icelandic aristocracy that the officials should be Icelanders descended «from families which gave up their chieftaincies in the past» (p. 158). The relevance attached to the descent from chieftains is probably not only a way to prevent Norwegians from taking up positions of power but also an attempt to stop other Icelanders from doing so. This point is further discussed below. Another major event that must be mentioned is the struggle between the church and the aristocracy over the property of local churches known in Icelandic historiography as *staðamál*. In 1297 the two sides reached a compromise, according to which the bishop got control over the local ecclesiastical institutions (*staðir*), whereas the laymen retained their authority over the other churches (*bændakirkjur*).[7]

The brief overview of the major changes in the organization of Icelandic society and politics after the Free State presented above will now be completed with some considerations on the literary system, especially as regards saga literature. As was mentioned at the outset of this essay, here literature is relevant in its function as generator of options for the organization of social life. In addition to providing entertainment, sagas were used also as a means of accessing power or representing the interests and preoccupations of the dominant circles within the hierarchized society of medieval Iceland, as a number of relevant studies have shown (among others Lönnroth 1976,[8] Tulinius 2002, Tulinius 2008 and Kristinsson 2003).

The literary system encompasses various genres, both in prose and in verse. In the limited scope of this article, the analysis will focus on what happens within the body of saga literature, especially as regards the *fornaldarsögur* («mythic-heroic sagas»), the *riddarasögur* («sagas of knights», both translated and original ones) and the *Íslendingasögur* («sagas of Icelanders»). At roughly the same time as the Icelandic Free State was slowly coming to an end, from the 1220s onwards, the liter-

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6. On *goðar* during the Free State see especially Karlsson 2004.

7. On *staðamál* see Stefánsson 2000.

8. In this seminal study he analyses the composition of *Njála* as a result of Svínfellingar family's attempt at legitimizing its power ambitions as representatives of the Norwegian king in Iceland. See esp. pp. 174-188.

ary system was being innovated, mainly through the introduction of the translated *riddarasögur*, which contributed to the consolidation of a new repertoire imported into Icelandic culture as early as the beginning of the 13th century. Indeed, by 1200 the chieftains at the head of the most powerful families in Iceland «adopted the customs of foreign noblemen in their dress and weaponry, and coveted beautiful objects and luxury goods from abroad» (ÞORLÁKSSON 1992, p. 234). The interest in kingship and courtly ideology that was growing in Norway as well as in Iceland prompted the copying of chivalric texts, mostly of French provenance, which were translated into Old Norwegian at the instigation of king Hákon Hákonarson (1217-1263).[9] This resulted in the *riddarasögur* temporarily occupying the centre of the literary polysystem, thus coming to exert an influence on other genres. In fact, the «chivalric and courtly turn» brought about by the introduction of this new genre into the literary system came to be visible in pre-existing genres such as the sagas of Icelanders and the mythic-heroic sagas, as well as in the new genre of the indigenous *riddarasögur*.[10] Hence, themes, stylemes and motifs from the fictional worlds of knightly adventures came to be included in different ways into these genres. This gave way either to the composition of new works, characterized by a blend of tradition and innovation, or to the rewriting of pre-existing ones. The case of the *fornaldarsögur* is particularly interesting, as I have discussed elsewhere (BAMPI 2012). The younger mythic-heroic sagas, also known as *Abenteuersagas*, were patterned, at least partly, after the model of the chivalric texts translated into Old Norse. Older sagas of the same genre, such as *Völsunga saga*, *Hervarar saga* and *Hrólfs saga kraka*, were given courtly traits, even though their material dated back to a period prior to the import of the literary courtly repertoire, and the matter treated is essentially heroic. The indigenous *riddarasögur* owe much to a variety of sources, especially to the *fornaldarsögur* and to the translated *riddarasögur* as well as to folklore material and to continental literature (DRISCOLL 2005, pp. 197-203). Most interestingly, however, the sagas of Icelanders, which have long been celebrated as the best product of Icelandic storytelling for their realism, did not die out as a genre after the Free State period. On the contrary, a number of younger sagas belonging to this genre were written in the 14th and 15th centuries which display the extent of the influence exerted by the more fantastic genres such as the mythic-

9. In most cases, the Icelandic copies represent the only extant manuscript witnesses of such texts (GLAUSER 2005, pp. 377-378)

10. For an introduction to the indigenous *riddarasögur* (also known as Icelandic *riddarasögur*) see BARNES 2000.

heroic sagas and the chivalric sagas.[11] Furthermore, the *Íslendingasögur* composed during the golden era of saga writing continued to be copied and transmitted in manuscript form, well into the modern era (HEL-GASON 2005). Another major characteristic of the literary polysystem after the *Sturlungaöld* is the increasing number of hybrid texts, i.e. texts in which narrative modes pertaining to different genres are mixed up. A close inspection of the forms of hybridization reveals that the most frequent combinations involve the *fornaldarsögur*, the *riddarasögur* and the *Íslendingasögur*. As has been pointed out by previous studies, cases of liminal texts are rather frequent, especially in this period.[12] Indeed, we have examples of *fornaldarsögur* with features of the sagas of Icelanders (as is the case with *Áns saga bogsveigis*) as well as sagas of Icelanders displaying traits shared with the mythic-heroic sagas (e.g. *Grettis saga*). Furthermore, there are some indigenous *riddarasögur* where a blend of characteristics from both the *fornaldarsögur* and the sagas of Icelanders is present, as is the case with *Samsons saga fagra* and *Vilmundar saga viðutan*. Broadly speaking, the selection of generic features appears to depend, as far as can be judged, mostly on the nature of the fictional world(s) described. Where many such worlds coexist within the same text, multimodality or generic hybridity is very likely to be found (BAMPI 2012).With the literary polysystem growing in complexity in terms of various genres and various narrative models, a larger set of «generic alternatives» is established which is able to guarantee the vitality of the literary polysystem itself.[13]

Now it needs to be shown how the information about the socio-political and the literary systems may be used to devise hypotheses about the very manner in which saga literature after the fall of the Free State developed. To this end, the assumption of an intersection between the hierarchies of different systems as put forward by Even-Zohar[14] is of

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11. *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, *Finnboga saga ramma*, *Flóamanna saga* and *Víglundar saga* are some of the major examples of such younger products of the *Íslendingasaga* genre. On «post-classical» *Íslendingasögur* see ARNOLD 2003.

12. See, among others, ROWE 1993 and TULINIUS 1990.

13. Obviously, the analysis of the literary polysystem as a whole would require taking also other genres into consideration (e.g. the development of poetry and its interaction with prose genres). This, however, would exceed the scope of the present essay, which is focussed on saga literature.

14. «if we assume that the literary system [...] is isomorphic with, say, the social system, its hierarchies can only be conceived of as intersecting with those of the latter. [...] The literary polysystem, like any other socio-cultural system, is conceived of as simultaneously autonomous and heteronomous with all other co-systems» (EVEN-ZOHAR 1990, p. 23).

great interest in this context since it raises a number of relevant questions regarding, for example, the nexus between social groups and literary production and consumption mentioned earlier. As a matter of fact, the dominant circles of Icelandic society, the ones most likely to have represented the canonizing agencies, also patronized literature. It is safe to assert that the conspicuous investment in textual production – either as new compositions or copies of extant texts – bears witness to the importance attached to literature in late medieval Icelandic society. The period after 1262-1264 is marked by a number of new families rising to power and new centres taking over as major economic centres of the country. This was made possible by the fact that the most important source of income was now the *skreið* trade. The richest fishing areas rose to prominence, partly replacing earlier centres of power, and the western parts of Iceland became very important (especially the Western Fjords, the Snæfellsness peninsula and Breiðarfjörður). As a consequence, families based in these regions had an easier access to the resources related to the fishing industry, and hence to the acquisition of different forms of capital.[15] The new names were those of the *Erlendungar* in the south-west, the *Vatnsfirðingar* in the Western Fjords, and the *Skarðverjar*, in Breiðarfjörður (GLAUSER 1983, p. 47). However, such new names were not always completely new. In fact, as observed by Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, although «all the established families from the Free State era disappeared around 1300, the new families that arose generally derived from the old ones» (1995, p. 157). The bonds with the more or less recent past were still extremely relevant. However, although most officials in Iceland came from such prominent families, not all of those who aspired to become part of the social élite could claim such pedigree. This point deserves more attention when approaching the question of who were those who patronized the composition of literary works. As far as can be estimated, the elite that is thought to have favoured the production of literary texts after the end of the Free State was fairly heterogeneous in terms of social and cultural provenance. According to Geraldine Barnes, these are «those successfully engaged in the *skreið* trade and descendants of the former chieftain class co-opted into vice-regale retinue» (2000, p. 269). However, from the sources of

15. The notion of capital is used here following Pierre Bourdieu's definition. According to him, capital can «present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital, [...]; as cultural capital [...] and as social capital, made up of social obligations ('connections')» (BOURDIEU 1997, p. 47). In the field of Old Norse studies, Bourdieu's theories have been profitably employed by TULINIUS 2001 and 2009, and WANNER 2008. For an introduction into Bourdieu's sociology as a whole see CALHOUN 2000.

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the period we know of attempts to keep the administration of the country in the hands of Icelanders as representatives of the Norwegian king (SIGURÐSSON 1995, p. 160). Such attempts have been interpreted both as a means to fight off the competition of Norwegians who were eager to take over such offices in Iceland, but also as a way to ward off the aspirations of upward social mobility of other Icelanders, especially those who became the new rich thanks to the *skreið* trade. If such demands were repeatedly passed on to the king, as evidenced by coeval sources, then such a danger must have been genuine.The Icelandic retinue was characterized by a collective identity, marked, for example, by the fact that its members were under the same banner, that they had to dress in a distinctive way, as established by law (SIGURÐSSON 1995, p. 159), and that the cohesion of the group was at its peak when it had to ward off external pressure (from the Crown) or fight against an adversary, as is the case with the controversy with the Church. However, the possibility of internal competition cannot be ruled out.

Broadly speaking, access to the resources that represented the basis for power was certainly not the same for all components of the social system. It goes without saying that most people were simply excluded from the competition. However, the few who had a chance to count in Icelandic society after 1262-1264 had different backgrounds. Being able to demonstrate descent from a good family and to have a sound economy was an essential part of the tool-kit to acquire prominence in society, i.e. to aspire to leading positions. In this respect, there is no reason to think that literature ceased to play as important a role as that which it most probably had in the Free State period. In fact, since Glauser's seminal study of the Icelandic romances (1983) and Geraldine Barnes' contributions to *riddarasögur* scholarship (1975; 1977; 2000), it is a widely shared opinion that the indigenous *riddarasögur* as a «new» genre are more than simple entertainment, mirroring as they did the ideals and the interests of their patrons. Hence, it would be certainly interesting to ascertain to what extent the competition for inclusion in the elite group suggested by the sources is mirrored in the interaction between different saga genres (and possibly other genres within the body of Old Norse poetry). As a matter of fact, the *fornaldarsögur* and the *riddarasögur*, although showing many points of convergence, differ in how they relate to the past. Whereas the mythic-heroic sagas are still anchored in tradition, i.e. the Scandinavian legendary past, the *riddarasögur* represent a novelty in that they lack the genealogical principle that is at work in the other saga genres. Whether rooted in history, or invented or adapted to given needs, whether explicit or implicit, genealogies represent a safe way of legitimizing itself on the part of the elite of any epoch. Interest-

ingly, the major genres of saga literature are concerned with different chronological segments of Icelandic history and its people. The indigenous *riddarasögur* tell instead of heroes who have hardly anything to do with Scandinavians or Icelanders. Does this break with tradition respond to the intention of establishing a new way of representing itself by the «new men» rather than a simple matter of entertainment? Interestingly, many of the *riddarasögur* manuscripts were produced in the Western part of Iceland, where the Icelandic aristocracy had its manors, which were soon to become the new centres of power (GLAUSER 1983, pp. 71-78). However, both the *fornaldarsögur* and the *Íslendingasögur* continued to be composed and copied into miscellaneous manuscripts well after the Free State period,[16] probably not only for their entertainment value but also because they could be used to demonstrate the ties of the patrons with the past through genealogies and other forms of historiography, thereby enhancing their status and reputation in society and validating their value system. Margaret Clunies Ross has pointed out that the new power holders, i.e. men like Haukr Erlendsson and Jón Hákonarson, «created history out of individual sagas and controlled its production and reproduction», thus being able to influence the development of the repertoire and its canonization:

They seem to have operated rather like modern media barons, who buy up local television stations and regional newspapers in order to build a vast international empire and control the dissemination of information within it. In the case of these medieval Icelanders, however, their control was over regional literary products and their reissue as parts of compilations, with the guarantes of the authenticity of their subject matter based, to a considerable degree, upon assertions of family connection with the local products and their narrative contents (CLUNIES ROSS 1998, p. 114).

What can be said about those not part of the elite but who aspired to be part of it, i.e. those whom the Icelandic aristocracy tried to prevent from taking over prominent positions as representatives of the king? Did they use literature to act in society? Such questions suggest that it would be interesting to explore the possibility that some sagas written after the end of the Free State represented the aspirations and points of view of such a group. Upon close inspection, some clues appear to indicate that this seems to be the case. According to Geraldine Barnes, in the corpus

16. Some major examples of late medieval miscellanies preserving older sagas are AM 765 4to (*Hauksbók*), Gks 1005 fol (*Flateyjarbók*), AM 152 fol, AM 132 fol (also known as *Möðruvallabók*). On *Hauksbók* and *Flateyjarbók* see ROWE 2008 and ROWE 2005 respectively.

of the *riddarasögur* there is space for ironic readings of chivalric and royal idealism. Some sagas such as *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, *Jarlmanna saga ok Hermanns*, *Sigurðar saga fóts* are marked by «comic discrepancy in the account of kingly conduct». Barnes (2000, p. 282) puts forward the hypothesis that the «underlying seam of irreverence towards kingly authority» that one finds in some *riddarasögur* might be a hint of the refusal of Icelanders to be «overawed by the office of royalty».[17] This view is partly in contrast with Glauser's opinion that this saga genre was probably meant to endorse the exercise of royal power (Glauser 1983, pp. 229-233; see Barnes 2000, p. 276). However, such different opinions could be harmonized if the idea that the social complexity of the canonizers as an entity is taken into account. In fact, some sagas could endorse monarchy, whereas others might have been inspired by the intent to mock royal idealism, possibly at the instigation of those who for different reasons did not adhere to such ideology. Obviously, a development across time of the attitude of the Icelanders towards the king (see Boulhosa 2005) must also be taken into consideration, so that not every text mocking this idealism should be considered as originating from «subversive» groups.

Furthermore, some of the younger sagas of Icelanders seem to back up new social ideals as compared to the recent past. As Helgi Þorláksson (1992) has pointed out, *Hænsa-Þóris saga* is a case in point because the main protagonist, Oddr, becomes the «symbol of a new era», in which the profit motive begins to gain respect as opposed to what is known of earlier times, when traders were treated with suspicion and contempt. Proof of the re-evaluation of the profit motive lies in the fact that the Norwegian king used to grant high office to rich people.

If we accept the idea that not all of the major saga genres from after the fall of the Free State necessarily reflect the ideas of one and the same social group, then we could try to establish whether the growing complexity of the literary polysystem in terms of genres is in any way linked to the fact that competing options are devised by social entities with different backgrounds and different strategies to gain power and enhance their status. Alternatively, generic complexity and generic hybridity could also represent the result of an attempt to shape one single repertoire made up of previous ones: for example, the one characterizing the Commonwealth period, with its focus on personal ties and

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17. This marks a clear contrast with the kind of enthusiasm for the Norwegian king found in certain *Íslendingasögur*, e.g. in *Laxdæla saga*. However, other sagas of Icelanders, such as *Egla*, show a more nuanced and conflicted view. On different attitudes to royal authority in *Egils saga* see Tulinius (2002, pp. 238-250).

the acquisition of honour as a major goal in society, and that from after 1262-1264, with its emphasis on trade, profit, and the relation to royalty and its fictional representation. If so, this could mean that the Icelandic aristocracy and the would-be aristocrats may have promoted different saga genres to express different preoccupations and ideals, all of them representing a social group «in motion», striving to adapt to changes affecting the very organization of life.

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Middle Low German Literature: a Polysystem between Polysystems?

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This paper deals with a core issue in the field of medieval Low German literature, namely whether it is possible to speak about «Middle Low German literature». After a survey of the most relevant critical approaches to this issue, the author decides to adopt the theoretical and analytical framework provided by Even-Zohar's «Polysystem Theory», since a systemic approach makes it possible to focus on the distribution and articulation of literary activities in the different social groups and on the different cultural levels which together formed the literary polysystem of Northern Germany during the Late Middle Ages. The author comes to the conclusion that the use of different linguistic varieties in relation to different textual sorts in Northern Germany makes it questionable to speak of «Middle Low German literature», and totally inappropriate to speak of «Middle Low German literary polysystem». More correctly one should speak of a multilingual medieval «Northern German literary polysystem» which includes a plurality of literary activities and products.

A basic uncertainty resides in the very title of my paper: is it possible, in fact, to speak about *Middle Low German literature*? This is not the first time that this definition problem is being dealt with. At the beginning of his presentation on medieval Low German literature, published over three issues of the journal «Niederdeutsches Wort» between 1977 and 1979, Hartmut Beckers wondered whether only original works written in Low German by Northern German writers should be included in his survey, or also works written in High German by Northern German writers and Low German translations of Latin, High German, and Middle Dutch works (Beckers 1977, pp. 3-5). His doubts apparently arose from the very complex cultural and linguistic situation of Northern Germany from the 13th to the 17th centuries, as not only the juxtaposition between the use of Latin and the vernacular persisted, but the choice of variety of the vernacular to adopt largely depended on the intended audience of the work and on the literary genre to which it belonged. Furthermore,

the weakness of the Low German literary production in comparison with the more advanced and established High German and the Dutch literatures caused a relatively intense activity of translation from these literatures into Low German.

The compromise solution adopted by Hartmut Beckers can be considered acceptable from a traditional point of view. He decided not to ignore translated works – at least if they, to some degree, modified their source texts – and to take into consideration also the works written in High German by – presumably – Low German speaking authors.

A much more powerful theoretical and analytical framework for the study of Northern German culture of the Late Middle Ages, however, is provided by the Polysystem Theory. In his seminal article simply entitled *Polysystem Theory*, Itamar Even-Zohar points out that

> The acuteness of heterogeneity in culture is perhaps most «palpable», as it were, in such cases as when a certain society is bi- or multilingual (a state that used to be common in most European communities up to recent times). The polysystem hypothesis, however, is designed precisely to deal with such cases, as well as with the less conspicuous ones (EVEN-ZOHAR 2005a, p. 41).

A systemic approach makes it possible to focus not on the criteria which determine whether to include or not texts and writers in a closed category labelled as «Middle Low German literature», but on the distribution and articulation of literary activities in the different social groups and on the different cultural levels which together formed the literary polysystem of Northern Germany during the Late Middle Ages.

Given the limited space available for this contribution, and, above all, the state of the research on this topic, my aim here is not to give an exhaustive description of the Northern German literary polysystem.[1] Instead, I will confine myself to suggesting some hypotheses about the organization of this system, the dynamics that affected its evolution, and its interrelation with the neighbouring systems of Southern Germany, the Netherlands, and East Scandinavia.

Two different, but interconnected explanations have been given to the problem posed by the use of both Low German and High German in the literary production of Northern Germany during the Late Middle Ages. On the one hand, it has been pointed out that the first influential texts produced in Middle Low German, the *Sachsenspiegel* and the *Sächsische Weltchronik*, belonged to textual genres – collections of laws and

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1. For a discussion on this topic see also FERRARI 2011.

universal chronicles in prose – which had no antecedent in the High German production. The Northern German writers, thus, would have used their native language when no High German model was available (BECKERS 1977, p. 13; PETERS 1985, p. 1216). On the other hand, the choice between Low and High German has been associated with the different social scenes of the court and of the town, High German being the language of courtly literary genres, and Low German the language of texts meeting the needs and tastes of the new urban literate elite (KROGMANN 1971, p. 270; BECKERS 1977, p. 11; HYLDGAARD-JENSEN 1985, p. 1248).

Undoubtedly, both explanations have some validity, and yet they do not account for all the elements of the system. Indeed, the elements that do not find their collocation in this set of explanations could reveal something particularly interesting about the dynamics affecting the system.

In order to formulate a hypothesis about the dynamics of the Northern German literary system, the sorts of texts that were produced, copied and read in this cultural area have to be considered. Quite surprisingly, perhaps, the first recorded literary activity in the area pertains to the production and transmission not of Low German, but of High German texts. The cultural activity at Henry the Lion's court in Braunschweig, and the *Tristram* version of Eilhart von Oberg – most probably one of Henry's *ministeriales* – precede the first known original Low German literary text, **Eberhard's rhyme chronicle of Gandersheim Abbey, conclud**ed in 1218. Courtly literature in High German, in fact, continued to circulate and be produced in Northern Germany throughout the whole period. Indeed, not only were High German courtly romances and songs copied and preserved in the Northern German cultural centres (BECKERS 1977, pp. 10-11, pp. 24-25), but Northern German aristocrats and *ministeriales* such as Berthold von Holle, Otto IV von Brandenburg, and Eberhard von Cersne wrote courtly literature in High German, and noteworthy High German poets such as Frauenlob and «Der Ungelarde» were active at Northern courts (KROGMANN 1971, pp. 268-269; BECKERS 1977, pp. 10-11; BECKERS 1979, pp. 5-6; GLIER 1980; PETERS 1985, pp. 1214-1216). It is thus possible to maintain that the literary activities of Northern German courts formed part of the High German literary system.

Instead, organising the first items of Low German literature into a system is quite difficult. In fact, they appear to have been composed in different social milieus for different purposes. The *Low German Apocalypse*, the first German translation of the Revelation of St. John, clearly originated in religious circles, as well as the *Gardesheimer Reimchronik* – the chronicle of Gardesheim Abbey. The latter, however, was written with a clear political intent, which was to legitimate abbess Mechthild I's defence of the Abbey's privileges against the bishop of Hildesheim.

A religious, perhaps a Franciscan friar, was the author of the *Sächsische Weltchronik* (the «Saxon world chronicle»), the first German world chronicle in prose, whose spread over the whole of Germany is testified by the high number of preserved manuscripts. On the other hand, Eike von Repgow, author of the *Sachsenspiegel*, the collection of Saxon laws dating back to the third decade of the 13th century, was a lay magistrate and a follower of Count Hoyer von Falkenstein. Thus, he was related to the circles of territorial aristocracy. Another legal text, the *Jus Ottonianum*, the charter of city rights of the town of Braunschweig, is among the oldest known Low German texts, having been probably composed only a few years after the *Sachsenspiegel* (HYLDGAARD-JENSEN 1985, pp. 1248-1249; PETERS 1985, p. 1216).

With the spreading of the use of Low German as a written language during the 14th and, especially, the 15th centuries, the outlines of a system become more and more identifiable. The intensification and the diversification in the production of Low German texts follow the growth of the Hanseatic power and of the urban culture in Northern Germany and in the South Baltic area. In this same period Low German acquires a prestigious status as the language of international commerce and administration in Northern Europe. The most productive literary genres which made use of the Low German language were therefore the ones which better met the needs of an urban society and of a bourgeois audience: didactical and scientific literature, religious literature, legal literature, and historiography. Even if, for easily comprehensible reasons, the attention of the historians of literature has focused on the production of secular narrative and lyric texts – i.e. literary texts in the modern meaning of the term – these textual sorts seem to be quite marginal in the whole of Middle Low German literary production.

In order to analyse how the system worked, the relations of the Low German production with the repertoires[2] of neighbouring or coexistent literatures, and the distribution of literary activities in the Northern European area have to be considered. The first relevant observation is that the medieval Low German production strongly depended on the transfer from the more advanced High German and Dutch literature systems. Translated literature plays a most relevant role in the Middle Low German corpus, even in productive genres such as religious and didactic literature (KROGMANN 1971, pp. 281-290; CORDES 1983, p. 357). As to narrative literature, for almost all major Middle Low German narrative works a Dutch or a High German model has been identified. Conversely,

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2. On the concept of «repertoire» see especially EVEN-ZOHAR 2005b and EVEN-ZOHAR 2005c.

original Low German contributions such as the *Sächsische Weltchronik* and the *Sachsenspiegel* enjoyed a broad circulation and were translated and rewritten into High German versions. Middle Low German literature, as a younger and weaker system, appears thus to have been highly receptive to texts and, much more generally, to repertoires belonging to the more advanced neighbouring systems. At the same time, because of the close interconnection between the networks of cultural activities in Northern and Southern Germany, literary innovations produced in the North spread rapidly into the stronger and more established High German system.

Even if I intend to discuss later the relations between Northern German and Eastern Scandinavian literary systems, it is already necessary here to point out that, if on the one hand Low German culture played the role of target culture in its relation to the Dutch and the High German culture, on the other hand it played the role of source culture in its relation to the Danish and Swedish cultural systems. As a matter of fact, the expansion of the Hansa and the use of Low German as the international language of the Baltic trade in the Middle Ages; the use of Low German as the written language of the Livonian part of the State of the Teutonic Order; the settlement of powerful communities of Low German speaking merchants in Stockholm and in Visby; the dynastic and political relations between the Scandinavian courts and the Northern German aristocracy: all these factors strongly contributed to enhancing the prestige of the Low German language, and consequently, of the Northern German culture in the Baltic area in the Late Middle Ages. During this period, Low German was not only the spoken and written language of the Northern German towns, but also the international language of commerce and an elite language in aristocratic Scandinavian circles. For example, it is worth noticing that the medical treatise in verse *Spegel der nature* («The Mirror of Nature») was composed in Low German in 1325 by the Pomeranian physician Eberhard von Wampen for the Swedish court of the child king Magnus Eriksson (CORDES 1983, p. 370). Whilst the Northern German courts chose to produce and read texts in the language of Southern Germany, Low German texts were produced and read in a foreign aristocratic court. The reasons for this remarkable situation are worth investigating, but first it is necessary to better consider the role played by the courts in the Northern German literary system as well as the differences between the aristocratic centres of cultural production in the Low German area.

As mentioned before, production of High German texts and of Low German texts can overlap in the very same region, and the distribution in the use of the two linguistic varieties represents one of the most interest-

ing issues in the study of the Northern German literary system. The city of Braunschweig, as a cultural centre, can provide a clarifying example of such stratification: already during the rule of Henry the Lion, in the second half of the 12th century, Braunschweig was a centre of literary activity in High German, and, presumably, Eilhart von Oberg was active here. Moreover, in Braunschweig during the last decades of the 13th century, a rhyme chronicle was composed in honour of the ruling family of the dukes of Braunschweig-Lüneburg, whose author, most probably a Low German speaking religious, did his best to make use of a refined High German courtly language and of the stylistic devices of High German courtly romances. However, it is also true that one of the older Low German texts, the *Jus ottonianum,* was written in Braunschweig during the second decade of the 13th century. Furthermore, at the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century, in Braunschweig an author called Hermen Bote was very active. He was one of the most prolific and endowed writers of Low German literature, author of two prose chronicles, of satirical and allegorical texts about the social conflicts of his age, and perhaps also of the famous *Till Ulenspiegel* (BECKERS 1978, pp. 22-31; CORDES 1978; CORDES 1983, p. 372).

Although the urban and courtly strata of the system were distinguished not only by different repertoires, but also by the linguistic variety they used, some clues suggest that an interchange took place. The Rhyme Chronicle of **Braunschweig, for example, though composed in High German**, is also preserved in a Low German version contained in a 15th century paper manuscript (information drawn from Handschriftencensus)[3]. Even though the intended audience of this version is not known, the story of the dukes of Braunschweig was apparently interesting also for readers who preferred to read texts in their own native language. This hardly implies that the use of High German was outdated for this textual sort, especially since a High German rhyme chronicle of Mecklemburg was composed by a Low German speaking writer in the last quarter of the 14th century (LISCH 1847).

Other sporadic specimens of Low German versions of courtly literature have been handed down to us: some Low German translations of courtly lyric, for example, have been preserved in the so called fragments of Moser, dated to the beginning of the 15th century (BECKERS 1979, pp. 4-5), and some stanzas of a Low German version of the *Rosengarten zu Worms* («The rose-garden in Worms») have been preserved as well (BECKERS 1977, pp. 21-22). More interesting for this discussion,

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3. http://www.handschriftencensus.de/6695 (2012/05/20).

however, are those translations of which the context of production and/ or of communication can be reconstructed with some certainty. This is the case of the collection of courtly texts in Low German copied by a German merchant in Livonia in the year 1431 (BECKERS 1977, pp. 37-40). Even if it is not sure if the translation was executed in the same social milieu as the transcription, the manuscript evidences the interest of the Northern German bourgeoisie in textual categories originating in aristocratic circles. The same is true at least for some of the few pre-served verse narratives in Middle Low German, though in this case the process of transfer is more complicated. The chivalric romance *Valentin und Namelos*, for example, clearly makes use of motifs and stylistic devices drawn from courtly literature, and about 700 verses have been handed down of the Middle Dutch version from which without any doubt the Low German romance originates (FERRARI 1994; BECKERS 1999). The social and communicative context in which members of the Northern German community «appropriated» the Dutch romance and translated/reworked it into their own culture, however, was surely a bourgeois one, and all historians of literature agree on identifying it with the circle of Hanseatic merchants in the Flemish city of Bruges. This identification is made even more plausible by the fact that one of the two codices that contain the Low German *Valentin* belonged to the Hamburger *Flandernfahrergesellschaft*, the Hamburger society for commercial expeditions to Flanders (DIEPERINK 1939-1940, pp. 107-108; BECKERS 1977, pp. 29-31; CORDES 1983, p. 371). The bourgeois context of transmission and reworking, besides, leaves traces in the textual world of the Low German romance, where several transgressions of courtly rules are manifest.

Thus the translation of courtly texts – or of texts inspired by courtly culture – into Low German demonstrates the spreading of a courtly repertoire at different levels of the Northern German literary system. Nevertheless it is also necessary to consider a few courtly texts that were, in fact, produced in Northern German courtly circles, which seem to contradict the dominance of High German in such social and cultural milieu. Principally we need to deal with three texts or, more correctly, with two texts and a group of texts: the *Schachbuch* («Chess book») of Master Stephan, the courtly poems of Wizlaw von Rügen – handed down and most probably composed in a mixed Low German / High German language (BLECK 2000, pp. 111-153) – and the so-called *Magdeburger Äsop* («The Aesop of Magdeburg»), probably written by a religious con-nected to the court of the counts of Hoya (BECKERS 1978, p. 6). What the three texts have in common is that they were composed in cultural contexts where Low German can be assumed to have enjoyed a high

social prestige. The *Schachbuch* was dedicated by Master Stephan to Johann von Vyffhusen, the bishop of Dorpat (nowadays Tartu) and a member of one of the German aristocratic families of Livonia (BECKERS 1978, pp. 19-21), a cultural area where Low German, as the language of the aristocratic and the bourgeois elite, contrasted with the Finno-Ugric or Baltic idioms of the lower class (PETERS 1985, p. 1212). The compilation, in the same area but in a bourgeois context, of the aforementioned collection of courtly texts of 1431, on the other hand, seems to confirm a high degree of circulation of literary items between the different social groups of the Low German speaking community.

Both Wizlaw's poems and the *Magdeburger Äsop*, instead, were composed in cultural and political contexts connected to Scandinavia. If it is true, as most scholars believe, that the poet Wizlaw von Rügen is the same person as Prince Wizlaw III of Rügen,[4] then he was the brother of Queen Eufemia of Norway, the very same Queen Eufemia who commissioned the translations of the famous *Eufemiavisor*, three courtly romances into Old Swedish and which the queen gave as a present to her son-in-law-to-be, the Swedish Duke Erik, in the first years of the 14th century. As to the *Magdeburger Äsop*, the author himself reveals that he followed his Lord to Denmark in his youth. Furthermore, if the assumption is correct that the text was composed in the first years of the 15th century at the court of the Count of Hoya, the author worked on commission of Count Otto III, whose wife belonged to the family of the Dukes of Braunschweig, and he presumably made his journey to Denmark with Otto's father, Count Gerhard III, the son of Ermengard of Holstein: both the dynasties of Braunschweig and Holstein were deeply involved in the affairs of Swedish and Danish policy.

Both Wizlaw III and the author of the *Magdeburger Äsop* were thus in contact with the Scandinavian cultural area, an area where Low German was the language of the political and economic elite, and of international relations. An area, moreover, where the Northern German culture strongly contributed to the creation of local repertoires. I will briefly focus on the Swedish case, which is, in my opinion, of particular interest. Whereas in Norway the culture planning[5] activity of King Hakon IV and of his successors brought about a synthesis of traditional narrative practices and foreign courtly culture, thus bringing to life an original,

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4. The identity of the poet Wizlaw has been object of much scholarly discussion. In recent times Burghart Wachinger has rejected the identification of the poet with the prince (WACHINGER 1999), whereas this identification has been (in my opinion convincingly) defended by Reinhard Bleck (BLECK 2000, pp. 25-43).

5. On «culture planning» see EVEN-ZOHAR 2005d, 2005e and 2008.

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at least partially, autonomous Norwegian-Icelandic literary system, and while in Denmark the literary production in Latin maintained the central position in the cultural system up to the Reformation, the Swedish repertoire was created, at the beginning of the 14th century, by importing material and semiotic goods (EVEN-ZOHAR 2005c, p. 71) from the Northern German literary system.

Swedish society and the Swedish structures of political power, however, were very different from the Northern German ones, and this largely contributed to bestowing upon the imported elements a new meaning. As seen before, the coexistence of a powerful territorial aristocracy and of an ascending commercial bourgeoisie gave origin, in Northern Germany, to a dynamic cultural system where the courtly sets of values and norms, on the one hand provided the aristocracy with the tools to organize the world and its own life as a meaningful structure (EVEN-ZOHAR 2005c, pp. 69-70), and on the other hand interacted and dialogued with the expressions of the new emerging class. In Sweden, on the contrary, the construction of an up-to-date aristocratic power structure dated only to the 13th century, and was mainly the result of the efforts of King Magnus Ladulås, who also introduced into Sweden chivalry and courtly rituals. Moreover, whereas in the core of the Northern German cultural area High German was the written language of aristocratic circles and Low German was the spoken language of the entire population, in Sweden – as well as in Denmark – Low German was spoken, and read, at court besides the local idiom, and it was the language of economic power, whilst Swedish was spoken by the native aristocracy and by the rural classes.

The social prestige of Northern German culture explains the import into Sweden of literary *goods* such as the manuscript Stockholm Cod. Hol. Vu 73 (GEERAEDTS 1984), a collection of narratives in Low German which in the 15th century belonged to the Swedish nobleman Arend Bengtsson, but it also explains the importation of literary *tools*. Already the metrical structure of the *Eufemiavisorna* showed the transfer of German stylistic devices into the new-born Swedish cultural system, but it is the *Erikskrönikan* that fully reveals the impact of the Northern German literary practices on the new Swedish literature. Evidently inspired by Northern German models such as the *Braunschweiger Reimchronik*, the «Chronicle of Erik» imports a genre which will prove itself to be the most productive in the literary system of medieval Sweden (FERRARI 2008). The continuations to the chronicle prove its early canonization and the vitality of the literary model it introduced into the system. One more remark is necessary as to the import of elements of the Northern German repertoire into Sweden. The difference in the social structure

between Northern Germany and Sweden, in particular the absence of a developed and dynamic Swedish speaking bourgeoisie, entails that the users of the imported literary elements belonged to the aristocracy or to monastic circles. This explains why the above mentioned Codex Holmianus, which contains Low German narratives composed in a bourgeois social milieu, was owned by a Swedish aristocrat, but it also explains why, when one of those narratives – *Valentin und Namelos* – was translated into Swedish, the translator felt it necessary to exclude from the text everything that was in contrast with the courtly set of norms (FERRARI 1994).

To conclude, the use of different linguistic varieties in relation to different textual sorts in Northern Germany makes it questionable to speak of «Middle Low German literature», and totally inappropriate to speak of «Middle Low German literary polysystem». More correctly we should speak of a multilingual medieval «Northern German literary polysystem» which includes a plurality of literary activities and products. The different levels of this system were related to each other, but enjoyed a large autonomy, being connected with different social milieus. Thus, if the adoption of chivalric motifs by bourgeois text producers testifies a certain centrality of the courtly literature, the production of didactic, edifying or scientific urban literature seems to be quite unaffected by courtly models. Moreover, the different levels of the system interact more or less intensively with different neighbouring polysystems. The aristocratic courtly level, for example, appears to be fully integrated into the High German polysystem, while the urban and the religious levels are involved in a constant and unequal exchange both with the High German and with the Dutch polysystems. The inequality of the exchange is reversed in the relationship with the weaker systems of East Scandinavia, and in this case more levels of the Northern German polysystem contributed, though in different measure and at different times, to the export of items of the repertoire.

The dynamics of such processes, that single out a sort of subsystem in the European cultural megasystem of the Middle Ages, are for the most part still to be investigated, the texts have to be reconsidered in relation to their contexts of production and of reception, evidences of literary activities have to be scrutinized, but already now the use of a systemic approach can lead to interesting hypotheses about medieval cultural dynamics, the spreading of literary repertoires and the birth of modern national literatures.

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Beyond the Borders

(In)stability of Group Dynamics and Culture Planning

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Over the past few years, group dynamics have received considerable attention within different theoretical frameworks, namely social science disciplines such as psychology, biology, anthropology and economics, as well as cultural studies. Recent studies in social psychology have shown that the notion of « entitativity » – i.e. « the perceived unity » rather than the group's actual unity – is central for describing and understanding group dynamics. These same studies have also revealed that « in-group entitativity » is associated with a higher level of identification, attribution of intentionality, and perceived security provided by the group itself. From the point of view of cultural studies, a question arises as to the possible role and contribution of cultural products – not only written texts of different kinds, but also figurative artworks – towards increasing in-group entitativity. In this paper the author argues that « culture planning », particularly by transforming « non-structured inventories into structured repertoires » (Even-Zohar), turns out to be a « perceptual cue » of in-group entitativity. The outcomes of this research will cast new light on the cultural products themselves, allowing for an in-depth revisitation of traditional interpretations.
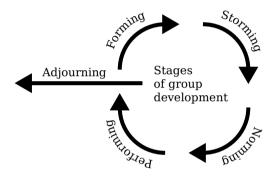
Theoretical Background

Over the past few years, group dynamics have received considerable attention within different theoretical frameworks, namely social science disciplines such as psychology, biology, anthropology and economics, as well as cultural studies. Different approaches have been applied to this broad research field whose premises rely on the evolutionary assumption that those individuals who had the greatest propensity for living in groups had the greatest likelihood of survival and reproduction (van Vugt, Schaller 2008).

Although individuals have a natural affinity for group membership, groups seem to be primarily characterized by an extremely high degree

of *instability*, which goes hand-in-hand with their alteration over time following a predictable pattern as theorized, among others, by Tuckman and Jensen in a seminal work dating back to 1977. The pattern adapted from TUCKMAN, JENSEN 1977 is as follows:

-   *Forming* (i.e., pretending to get along with others);
-   *Storming* (i.e., letting down the politeness barrier and trying to get down to the issues);
-   *Norming* (i.e., getting used to each other and developing trust and productivity);
-   *Performing* (i.e., working in a group towards a common goal on a highly efficient and cooperative basis);
-   *Adjourning* (i.e., the dissolution of the group).

Thus, the «natural» condition of a group, independently of which kind of group one refers to, seems to be *instability*, in that the group continuously moves from one stage to another in the direction indicated by the arrows above. The opposite category, i.e. *stability*, can be best seen as a goal to be reached either in the short or in the long term. Stability has much to do with the capacity to cope with the inevitable process of transformation; since changing over time is an implicit feature of group dynamics, stability represents the pursuing of a further step in the aforementioned pattern – which means that, far from being monolithic, it is on the contrary multifaceted and short-lasting.

As research developed, the paradigm: *stability* vs *instability* proved insufficient to explain group dynamics, mainly due to the fact that it is based on categories which provide an external and often static representation of the relationships between groups. It has therefore been dropped in favour of the more explicative notions of *entitativity* and

essentiality, which have the advantage of including the point of view of the beholder on how unified the group appears to be.[1]

In fact, the first term – coined by the psychologist and sociologist Donald Campbell in 1958 – defines «the perceived unity» rather than the group's actual unity. It has been argued that entitativity can be measured in terms of (1) *interaction*, i.e. the extent to which the people in the group interact with each other; (2) *behavioural influence*, i.e. the degree to which the behaviour of individuals in the group can be controlled or influenced by other people in the group; (3) *norms*, i.e. the degree to which the group has formal and informal rules; (4) *interpersonal bonds*, i.e. the degree to which you think there are strong interpersonal bonds among the people in the group; (5) *shared knowledge*, i.e. the degree to which the members of the group share knowledge and information; (6) *common goals*, i.e. the extent to which the people in the group have common goals (see YZERBYT ET AL. 2004, pp. 1-3).

Essentiality instead – albeit perhaps a less clear-cut and powerful notion, since it refers to intrinsic group properties – can be measured in terms of: (1) *duration*, i.e. the extent to which each group perseveres, whether it is a long-term or a short-term group; (2) *permeability*, which indicates how fluid a group's membership is, i.e. groups that are easy to join and leave are very permeable, whereas groups that are difficult to join and leave are not very permeable; (3) *homogeneity*, i.e. the degree to which the members of the group are likely to possess the same personality traits and abilities (see YZERBYT ET AL. 2004, pp. 3-6).

Recent studies in social psychology have shown that group entitativity is a relational concept, since it largely depends on the context and the relationship between the perceiver and the group. More specifically, *in-group entitativity* is associated with a higher level of identification, attribution of intentionality, and perceived security provided by the group itself. These same studies have also revealed that artificially increasing the perception of in-group entitativity enhances the degree of perceived safety, and reduces the perception of threat from an out-group (SACCHI ET AL. 2009). Members of a group identify more strongly when they are individually self-uncertain but the group is considered highly entitative.[2]

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1. «Even though an aggregation of individuals may not be very cohesive, those who observe the group – and even the member themselves – may believe that the group is a single, unified entity» (FORSYTH 2010, p. 9).

2. «We can speculate that chronic and extreme levels of uncertainty, perhaps associated with personal or widespread life or societal crises, may motivate people to identify strongly, as 'true believers' (HOFFER 1951), with highly entitative groups – a process where people become entrepreneurs of entitativity, working diligently to perceptually, rhetorically, and

Thus, a question arises as to the possible role and contribution of cultural products – not only written texts of different kinds, but also figurative artworks – towards increasing in-group entitativity. More specifically, in this paper I will argue that *culture planning*, particularly by transforming «non-structured *inventories* into structured *repertoires*» (EVEN-ZOHAR 2005, p. 78), becomes a powerful means of manipulating the aforementioned categories of interaction, shared knowledge, behavioural influence, interpersonal bonds and common goals, thus turning out to be a *perceptual cue* of in-group entitativity. This, in turn, casts new light on the cultural products themselves, allowing for an in-depth revisitation of traditional interpretations. Due to my philological background, the examples provided below pertain to the Germanic Middle Ages.

ENHANCING IN-GROUP ENTITATIVITY
THROUGH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A CANON-REPERTOIRE

The case of the Old Saxon poem titled *Hêliand* perfectly serves our purpose. The *Hêliand* is an early 9th-century Old Saxon alliterative reworking of the Gospel which bears – according to the traditional view – a manifest missionizing intent.[3] Most scholars have maintained that it is aimed at persuading the «Saxon peoples»[4] after the aggressive behaviour of the monks of Fulda (who had mercilessly carried out their religious mission by destroying all heathen cult sites) and of Charlemagne himself with his harsh military campaigns against the Saxons.

The assumption that the supposed audience, mainly composed of uneducated peasants, could change their mind and attitude towards

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actually increase their groups entitativity. In extreme cases such groups may have orthodox and ideological belief systems, have powerful leaders and zealous followers, be harsh on marginal members and dissidents, and generally resemble extremist or 'totalist' groups» (HOGG ET AL. 2007, p. 138). See also BARON ET AL. 2003.

3. The text of the poem, about 6,000 lines long, has come down to us in a nearly complete form in two manuscripts: a continental ms M (Munich, preserved at the Bavarian *Staatsbibliothek*) and an English ms C (Cotton Caligula A.vii, preserved by the British Library). Four more fragments transmit short passages of the text: namely V (Codex Palatinus 1447, discovered by K. Zangemeister in 1894 and now housed at the Vatican Library; ll. 1279-1358); P (formerly preserved at the University Library of Prague, now in Berlin; ll. 958b-1006a), S (the Straubing fragment, currently held at the Bavarian *Staatsbibliothek*; ll. 351-722), and – last but not least – the newly discovered Leipzig fragment, found in 2006 (ll. 5823-5870a). On the *Hêliand* see the essays contained in PAKIS 2010.

4. The Saxons are not to be seen as a single people, but rather as a confederation of different tribes set in the Northern Germanic areas of Westphalia, Eastphalia, Engern, and North Albingia.

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Christianity as a result of access to this highly refined masterpiece of cultural synthesis between Christianity and the Germanic warrior society is not entirely convincing. One should consider that it is very difficult to evaluate to what extent the Saxon peoples had real access to the *Hêliand*. In particular, it seems to me too naive a view to assume that Saxon ambivalence toward Christ – caused by the aforementioned forced conversion to Christianity – could be overcome by simply making the Gospel story appealing to the Saxons through a depiction of Christ's life in the poetry of the North, recasting Jesus himself and his followers as belonging to that people. Rather, my assumption goes in a different direction, namely that this poem in the vernacular – quite independently of the real comprehension of the complex underlying religious message on the part of the Saxon peoples – was meant to be part of what we may call in Zoharian terms «a multilayered canon-repertoire» fostered and implemented by the central power, i.e. ultimately the Frankish kings and possibly some co-opted Saxon leaders after the Westphalian Duke Widukind **submitted to baptism (785), in order to consolidate their po**litical strength and promote cohesion to broaden their consensus. This canon-repertoire included not only «literary» texts, but also other textual and cultural productions: think, for example, of the law known as *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae* that came into force on October 28, 797, in which, among other things, it was stipulated that only the Christian king Charlemagne could convene a Saxon assembly, and the attendance of mass, the hearing of sermons as well as the building of new churches were made obligatory. The canon-repertoire as a whole was meant to promote the Christian cause, carrying out different strategies, ranging from imposition to spurs to integration.

The *Hêliand* – composed some forty years after Widukind's baptism – was likely to act as a trigger for enhancing in-group entitativity, which was pursued not through generic persuasion, but rather by promoting a higher level of perceived security through identification as part of the (dominant) Christian world. Time was ripe for the Saxon peoples – whose level of social uncertainty was extremely high as a result of a long period of wars and social turmoil – to identify with a group (i.e. the Christian leading class) seen as healthier and stronger. In so doing, the Saxons would increase their perceived safety, and reduce the perception of threat from potentially dangerous out-groups. A different choice from accepting the dominant Christian view would imply becoming regarded as marginal members or even dissidents within the leading group. This response to the historical and social context can be included in the category of *behavioural integration* as postulated by Moreland in 1987 (esp. pp. 87-96). Behavioural integration involves mutual interdependence in

order to satisfy individual needs, since these needs are met more easily through interaction (cf. YZERBYT ET AL. 2004, p. 421). Within this model, texts become «cultural shared archives» that may contain and re-launch functional patterns of common living (see LÁSZLÓ 1997; 2003).[5]

CULTURE PLANNING, IN-GROUP ENTITATIVITY AND SUBVERSIVE GROUPS: HOW TO BECOME STRONGER APPEARING WEAKER

Culture planning and the construction of canon-repertoires can proceed on more than one level: in case of subversive groups, in fact, the planners may want to make their groups seem less real to the established authorities than they actually are. On the other hand, they need to present themselves as healthy to the community that supports them. The real trick for such groups is to avoid attracting the attention of the authorities while not losing the community's interest and potential support.

An example of this kind can perhaps be seen in an Old English Chronicle poem (in both alliterative and rhymed verses) from the year 1036. The poem is known as *The death of Alfred* and tells of a very dreadful deed perpetrated upon the Etheling Alfred, son of king Æthelred «the Unready», who was imprisoned in the monastery of Ely where he eventually died. The Chronicle reports the event in two different redactions. Ms C puts the blame of the incident on Earl Godwine, while in ms D the original version is altered by substituting the name of Godwine at the beginning of the poem with the pronoun *he* «he» (BUZZONI 2010, p. 138):

C-Redaction
M·XXXVI

[Her com Ælfred, se unsceððiga æþeling, Æþelrædes sunu cinges, hider inn 7 wolde to his meder, þe on Wincestre sæt, ac hit him ne geþafode Godwine eorl, ne ec oþre men þe mycel mihton wealdan, forðan hit hleoðrode þa swiðe toward Haraldes, þeh hit unriht wære.]

1 Ac **Godwine** hine þa gelette   7 hine on hæft sette,
   7 his geferan he todraf,   7 sume mislice ofsloh;
   sume hi man wið feo sealde,   sume hreowlice acwealde,
   sume hi man bende,   sume he man blende,

5. This perspective is coherent with the notion of «instrumental function of non-instrumental texts» developed by Itamar Even-Zohar in this volume («The instrumental function of non-practical texts must then be acknowledged in view of their production and consumption by so many human societies along history»).

D-Redaction
M̄·XXXVI·

[Her com Ælfred, se unsceðði ˋg´a æþeling, Æþelrædes sunu cynges, hider inn 7 wolde to his modor, þe on Wincestre sæt, ac þ̄ ne geþafodon þa þe mycel weoldon on þisan lande, forþan hit hleoþrade þa swiðe to Harolde, þeah hit unriht wære.]

1 Ða let **he** hine on hæft settan,
   7 his geferan he eac fordraf,   7 sume mislice ofsloh;
   sume hi man wið feo sealde,   sume hreowlice acwealde,
   sume hi man bende,   7 eac sume blende.

The scribe of D grammatically makes Harold – the putative king from the time of Cnut's death – the author of all the criminal deeds that followed. One should not forget that at that time in England there was a strong Godwinist party, the same party that fostered the queen-mother Emma of whom Godwine was the right-hand man. D's alteration is not so strong as to attract the attention of the authority that had produced the official version C – which means that culture planners of the «subversive» party had chosen a low profile to make their group seem less real to the established authority; at the same time D's reading is sufficiently biased as to provide an alternative interpretation of the death of Alfred, in which the supporters of the Emma-Godwine party could recognize themselves – which means that the planners aimed at enhancing in-group entitativity through the establishment of stronger interpersonal bonds among supporters who came to share the same opinion on the reported events and eventually struggled to accomplish the same goal.[6] History proved that the attempt to impose this originally minority standpoint ended in success. On Harold's death, in March 1040, Emma's son by Cnut, Harthacnut, was invited to England and peacefully ascended the throne.[7] The fact that the throne was «offered» to him seems to confirm that by that time the minority party had become the most influential one, following the pattern of *social integration*, which Moreland (1987) proposed as a prerequisite for group formation and performance. This, in turn, confirms the general hypothesis that the most successful groups are those that can manage their entitativity effectively: groups that give

6. The Latin *Encomium Emmae Reginae* (1041 or 1042), commissioned by Queen Emma herself, seems to have served a similar purpose: it puts the blame for Alfred's murder squarely on Harold, and portrays Harthacnut in as positive a light as possible.

7. «1040. Here King Harold died. Then they sent to Bruges for Harthacnut – it was supposed that they did well – and then before midsummer he came here with 60 ships [...]» (SWANTON 1998, p. 160).

the impression of seeming more real «are likely to become more real through such processes as labelling and reflection» (YZERBYT ET AL. 2004, p. 313). In this respect, entitativity proves to be a vehicle of essentiality.

Theoderic as «Ambassador» for His People: Investigating the Failure of a Political Model

The last case-study to be presented is more complex as far as group dynamics are concerned, since it deals with group dissolution, rather than forming, norming and performing as seen above. The example pivots on the historical figure of Theoderic the Great, who in Cassiodorus' *Variæ* is depicted as a sovereign who firmly believed the Western Empire to be continued in his person (*Cassiodori Senatoris Variae* 1894). The numerous intermarriages between his family and the royal families of other Germanic kingdoms were undoubtedly intended to prepare the way for the predominance of his dynasty in the West. Using a more up-to-date terminology, we could maintain that Theoderic played the role of the «ambassador» for his people, since he acted in such a way as to «sell» his group so that in principle it would receive more resources. Yet, his supremacy was a divided one: to the Goths he was the king; to the Romans only a patrician. While tolerating the Catholic Church and the Jews too, Theoderic considered himself the protector of Arianism; accordingly he sought to intervene diplomatically in favour of the Arians who were being persecuted by Justinian I. Furthermore, he acted as planner to establish what might be called an «Arian multilayered cultural repertoire», which included monuments (real buildings like the Arian Baptistery and Church in Ravenna) as well as literary products (e.g. the renowned *Codex Argenteus* – Uppsala, Universitetsbiblioteket, D.G. 1 –, the most important witness to the text of the Gothic Bible). Compared to the Roman, the Arian repertoire can be considered as an «alternative repertoire», induced not only by resistance against the culturally prevailing Roman group but also by Arian in-group membership. Theoderic's ultimate aim was, in fact, to enhance group identification by increasing the perception of in-group entitativity, as well as to make this group appear healthy to the outside. Yet, no struggle for repertoire replacement ever took place among the Romans during Theodoric's reign – the alternative repertoire was seen as parallel rather than in competition with the canon repertoire. Theoderic, in fact, allowed complete freedom to the Catholic Church, at least so far as dogma was concerned (probably because the Romans were felt as too strong and too large a group to embark on such an enterprise).

Now a question arises as to why the reconciling policy carried out by Theodoric ended in blood and tragedy, since it stirred a revolt against the Gothic rule, which – in turn – caused bitter cruelty on the part of Theodoric himself. A possible answer may come from social psychological research: the proclamation of the equality of cultures is not an innocent practice and bears many risks. It has in fact been shown that, if no real integration is pursued,[8] the unintended side-effect of multiculturalism, its psychological fallout, is suspicion. It is precisely by accentuating the preservation of the original culture that the otherness of the «migrants» is accentuated in the eye of host society (see, among others, GIJSBERTS ET AL. 2004). One might claim that the political use of Arianism perpetrated by Theodoric through the creation and implementation of an alternative cultural repertoire parallel to, and not integrated with, the official one triggered suspicion at a socio-psychological level which, in turn, triggered violence thus causing the weaker group – i.e. the group which was numerically inferior and not able to manage its entitativity effectively – to succumb.[9]

THE DURATION OF A CULTURAL REPERTOIRE

These observations lead to a final issue, regarding whether cultural repertoires have a chance at survival over time, or rather follow an inevitable pattern of rise, plateau and decline. Since culture planning needs a power base,[10] in principle culture repertoires should follow the fate of the power-holders who promote them. An exception occurs when repertoires are totally or partially included in other repertoires, thus gaining new life and surviving in new forms, which can be offered to the potential market. This may happen, for example, when entrepreneurs seek to build images of the historical progress of their own culture to be used as a currency of comparison towards other cultures: it has been documented that there exists a tendency for people to portray their own cultures as characterized by endogenous historical development, but to represent out-groups as frozen in time, as «peoples without history»

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8. Either environmental or behavioural or cognitive and affective integration (MORELAND 1987).

9. On the degeneration of dynamism leading to disorder and failure (rather than to the creation of new interational options) see EVEN-ZOHAR 2000, pp. 49-50.

10. «What thus matters for planning are its prospects of being successfully implemented. Accordingly, planners must have the power, get the power, or obtain the endorsement of those who possess power» (EVEN-ZOHAR 2005, p. 87).

(WOLF 1982). The tendency to treat history as a form of national possession or «capital» (BOURDIEU 1997) correlates with a push towards creating a sort of «heritage» repertoire which would include references to the continued possession of both material and symbolic traces of a now-transcended past. In this light, one may account for some manifestations of the so-called «Gothic revival» that took place during the Carolingian renaissance: when Charlemagne returned home from his coronation in Rome, he seemed to have ordered the transfer of a now lost equestrian statue of the Ostrogoth king Theoderic from Ravenna to the Carolingian palace complex at Aachen;[11] he imposed the name «Theoderic» upon one of his sons born after 800; he promoted the study of Gothic history and (perhaps) also language as attested by two copies of Jordanes' *Getica* housed at two monasteries of Northern France (Saint-Riquier and St-Aman-les-Eaux) and by the manuscripts known as *Gotica Carolina* (*vindobonensia* and *parisina*) which transmit Gothic alphabetical series along with pronunciation norms and some very short extracts from the Gothic Bible.[12] In other words, Charlemagne incorporated a renewed Gothic repertoire into the Frankish one, thus giving new light to the former, and at the same time enhancing the Frankish in-group entitativity by incorporating images of continuity of Germanic culture over time. In this perspective, the annexation of Italy could easily be propagandised as the legitimate recapture of a territory that had belonged to their ancestors.[13]

CONCLUDING REMARKS

To sum up and conclude: the establishment of canon-repertoires through culture planning can be seen as one of the strongest perceptual cues of in-group entitativity, mainly because it leads perceivers to evoke the existence of an underlying set of deep features common to all group members. The characterization of a social group as being based on some deep underlying characteristics orients outsiders and insiders alike to amplify the resemblance between group members.

11. The episode is reported by Agnello Ravennate in his *Liber Pontificalis Ecclesiae Revennatis* (9th c.). See *Agnelli qui et Andreas liber pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis* 1878, pp. 337-338.

12. On these subjects see ZIRONI 2009.

13. «I Goti sono per Carlo Magno il legame che permette, attraverso un'operazione storiografica di tipo genealogico, di connettere i Franchi con i dominatori dell'Italia e, di conseguenza, di giustificare la conquista dell'Italia sottratta ai Longobardi» (ZIRONI 2009, p. 69).

The case-studies presented in this paper show that culture planning plays a crucial role also in promoting behavioural (see above, section 2) and, more generally, social integration (see above, section 3) – cues that affect how real a group seems to people –, with further implications for both intergroup and intragroup relations. The strength or weakness of groups depends largely on how they manage their entitativity; the success or failure of this process is largely in the hands of the culture planners who are responsible for the establishment and spreading of cultural repertoires that may help or hinder integration (see above, section 4).

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The Remodeling of the Literary Profession
and Its Role in the Making of Modern German Culture
in Late 18th Century

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This essay discusses the rise of German literature in late 18th century adopting a socio-semiotic approach to culture. The core issue raised by the author is that the awakening of a national German sentiment and the rise of a German-language high culture are basically a social process located in the literary field – a process centred on reforming the literary profession and controlling the literary market, through transforming and monopolizing literary production and taste.

The six decades between the 1770s and the 1830s are viewed as the Golden Age of German *Kultur*: an era of unrivalled achievement and a formative breakthrough of a Romantic-oriented national German culture. In the course of these decades, textual and specifically literary practices were assigned a central role, and, consequently, became the most sanctioned representatives of German *Kultur*. While the endeavour to produce a German-written high culture was already central to earlier intellectual pursuits throughout the 18th century (Grimm 1983), before the 1770s German literature was hardly an entity in its own right, let alone a match for contemporary cultural superpowers such as the French and the English. And yet by the turn of the century it is said to have reached its peak: its canon had been formed, and for the first time German literature gained international recognition (Hohendahl 1989). Moreover, having previously focussed predominantly on importing and translating texts, the German-speaking literary community began to yield its own original literary output which was translated into other languages, and its leading figures were subsequently accepted into the global-European pantheon.

This unprecedented blossoming of German-written literature at the turn of the century occurred long before a unified German *socio-political* entity had been envisioned. In fact, German-written literature believed

to have been the cultural basis on which a united modern German state was conceived and consolidated throughout the 19th century.[1] True, as claimed by Peter U. Hohendahl, in his *Building a National Literature* (1989), it was not before 1835, after Goethe and Hegel had passed away, that a sense of having reached a cultural crest was acknowledged, and a canon of German classics was formed. Clearly, though, this was the culmination of a process that had begun decades earlier. While preceding generations of German intellectuals were unable to anticipate their standing in the future German canon, they nevertheless were very active in negotiating it – by struggling to establish new forms of cultural capital (BOURDIEU 1985; GUILLORY 1993), and changing the power structure in the cultural arenas in which they were active.

As the ongoing canon debate tells us, this kind of process is always the outcome of social struggles of underprivileged groups fighting for recognition and access to leadership positions (GATES 1992; GUILLORY 1993). However, the problem with the canon debate seems to be that it often takes for granted the presence of explicit ideologies and worldviews, assuming a straightforward nexus between such ideologies and literary dynamics (SELA-SHEFFY 2002). Evidently, the meteoric rise of German literature in late 18th century had everything to do with the then-burgeoning German national sentiment. However, this linkage was by no means straightforward. Proceeding from a socio-semiotic approach to culture, and in line with practice theories (notably Bourdieu; also SWIDLER 1986), I view literary production (or any other kind of culture production) not simply as reflecting a *Zeitgeist*, but rather as constrained and generated by cultural repertoires, which are available sets of options for action at given points in time and space (EVEN-ZOHAR 1997; SWIDLER 1986). As such, these options serve as common pools of resources on which people draw in all areas of life.

From this perspective, two points should be stressed in perceiving literature as a cultural institution. First, the preeminence of literary activity in fuelling socio-cultural change is by no means self-evident. Rather, it is just one among many other cultural activities, through which, depending on the specific circumstances, social groups may organize themselves, and claim recognition and status. Second, literary activity consists of not only producing texts (typically viewed as its ultimate goal), but also of a whole repertoire of practices – from reading

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1. The pivotal force of a preceding unified German national *culture* has long been observed, for instance, with the observation that «Bismarck would have never been able to create the political unity, had our classical writers not founded prior to it the spiritual unity» (GOLDSTEIN 1912, p. 20; my translation).

habits and other uses of texts, through social- and market-networking, to patterns of personal conduct, lifestyles and career trajectories.

Proceeding from this theoretical framework, in this article I examine the socio-cultural conditions that gave rise, at this historical momento, to such forceful energies in the German literary field – which consequently came to be central in establishing a new social figuration (ELIAS 1978). Let me state my argument in advance: at this particular time and place the awakening of a national German sentiment and the rise of a German-language high culture were basically a *social process located in the literary field* – a process that centred on reforming the literary profession and controlling the literary market, through transforming and monopolizing literary production and taste.

Within this heterogeneous and transient cultural space two groups in particular have attracted the attention of critics and historians (HOHENDAHL 1988): there were the Early Romantics, clustered around the Schlegel brothers, who became prominent leaders of literary fashion at the turn of the century (HEINE, *The Romantic School*). However, they were preceded, between the 1770s and the 1780s, by a group of young intellectuals known as the *Sturm und Drang*, who are held to have brought about the German cultural revolution (VAUGHAHN 1985; PASCAL 1953). By far the most dominant and prolific figure linking these two acclaimed phases of the German literary upheaval, is that of Johann Wolfgang Goethe, whose name, in fact, was conferred on this era (the *Goethezeit*; BOYLE 1991). Focusing on the earlier phase of this process, and bearing heavily on Goethe's own documentation of it in his autobiography (GOETHE, *Autobiography*), I enquire into the great appeal of the literary occupation at the time that made the Germans invest so much energy in it, and the structural transformation within the literary field which was conducive to their becoming agents of social change.

THE GERMAN SOCIO-CULTURAL SPACE IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 18TH CENTURY

1   Class Structure

The emergence of a national German culture during the 18th century is usually perceived within the context of the tension between an ascending bourgeoisie and a declining aristocracy. For this analysis I follow the cultural approach of Norbert Elias (1978) and Henri Brunschwig (1974), who argued that during the 18th century, textual activities in general – and literary pursuits in particular – had become central op-

tions of social mobilization for the German middle class. According to Elias, the so-called German revolution, in contrast to the French, was essentially a *literary movement,* since the class tension was not played out as a fully-fledged *political* struggle (also Bruford 1965). Because of a sharp class division, with an impoverished aristocracy intent on preserving its privileges, the German bourgeoisie was excluded from all political activities, and practically barred from those channels of class mobility that were available to other Western bourgeoisies (Sheehan 1989; Vierhaus 1988). At the same time, however, in the wake of the Enlightenment, there rose an educated German-speaking middle-class, whose services in the growing bureaucratic and educational systems soon became indispensable (Blackbourn 1991; Elias 1978; La Vopa 1988). Thus, bourgeois elements became principal to everything connected with written culture, qua clergymen, lawyers, clerks, teachers and professors, as well as publishers and book dealers. The text-writing expertise of the latter consequently became their major social resource. According to Elias, these people, who were scattered throughout the German-speaking territories, were able to gain collective consciousness and self-assurance as a social force only in terms of *the profession of letters*: «at most» he writes «they could 'think and write' independently; they could not act independently» (Elias 1978, p. 18).

From 1770 onwards, younger middle-class generations were increasingly inclined to rely on their educational skills for social mobility. This was mainly the privilege of the learned bourgeoisie, mostly those operating in the field of law and in the civil service, as well as university professors and professionals (Brunschwig 1974; La Vopa 1988). However, educational skills were also a means to social ascent for lower-middle-class business and craftspeople. A well-known example is that of Kaspar Goethe, father of Johann Wolfgang, who was the son of a *nouveau riche* tailor and an innkeeper's widow who inherited her late husband's money (Boyle 1991). Within the time span of one generation, thanks to his academic education in Law, and subsequently through the adoption of certain highbrow cultural manners (including a journey to Italy and holding a respectable collection of books), Kaspar Goethe was able to marry into an upper-class family in Frankfurt am Main, and even had some prospects for a political career (ultimately blocked by internal politics). Similarly, although Johann Wolfgang Goethe was born into an already-bourgeois family with prospects for an educated career and a «good» life, the self-same sense of opportunity for negotiating one's own trajectory and improving one's status was not alien to him as a young person. In his autobiography, he describes his home-town friends, who

were not exactly of a low, but of an ordinary, type. [...] I listened to them with pleasure when they spoke of the manifold ways and means by which one could gain a living: above all they loved to tell of people, now very rich, who had begun with nothing. Others to whom they referred had, as poor clerks, rendered themselves indispensable to their employers, and had finally risen to be their son-in-law; [...] We all liked to hear this; and each one fancied himself somebody [...] (GOETHE, *Autobiography*, Book V, p. 181).

Eventually, such aspirations were also nurtured by «poor students» of the lower strata (LA VOPA 1988), who were able to build on writing-related occupations as clergymen, teachers and tutors, scribes or translators. In describing his young companions, Goethe is especially fascinated by the kind of resourcefulness displayed by one of them, by the name of Pylades:

The circumstances of his parents would not allow him to go to universities; but he endeavoured to acquire a fine handwriting, a knowledge of accounts and the modern languages, and would now do his best in hopes to attaining that domestic felicity (GOETHE, *Autobiography*, Book V, p. 181).

The life trajectory of the *Sturm und Drang* writers, Johann Heinrich Jung (known as Jung-Stilling; 1740-1817) and Friedrich Maximilian Klinger (1752-1831), to mention but two, are typical examples of such dramatic ascent of self made personalities: Jung-Stilling, a son of a poor peasant family, who worked as a tailor, and served at a very young age as an elementary school teacher and a tutor, was able to study medicine, during which period his livelihood was never secured. He later became a respectable citizen thanks to his liberal profession and his marriage to a woman of standing and property, and, no less importantly, thanks to his literary and intellectual connections. Klinger was the son of a poor widowed laundry woman in Frankfurt am Main, and was fortunate enough to have access to academic education thanks to a generous patron in Giessen, which eventually led to a brilliant literary career as well as a military one (BRUNSCHWIG 1947, pp. 29, 40, 139, 215; GOETHE, *Autobiography*, Vol. I, Book IX, pp. 402-404; Vol. II, Book XIV, pp. 237-239).

Yet the other side of these new opportunities for social mobility that opened up to the young generation was, according to Brunschwig, the sense of living in limbo, lacking both solid career paths and desired life-trajectories. Despite some success stories of the lucky few, by and large, the limited offer of jobs and the meagre earnings attached hardly enabled members of this younger generation to comply with their high demands and expectations. Brunschwig portrays a bleak picture of the cultural situation in Prussia in the last third of the 18th century, where

large numbers of ambitious students, mainly of lower class origin, had little chance to pursue a proper career with decent pay, and were unable to break through the twilight zone of their undervalued, temporary occupations (notably as private tutors).[2] The result was constant sense of insecurity, disorientation and ongoing changes in educational as well as occupational tracks, which, in Brunschwig's view, was a symptom of the Enlightenment crisis. These young intellectuals lacked «any very definite notion of the sort of occupation likely to suit them: officials, soldier, merchant, it is all one to them» (BRUNSCHWIG 1947, p. 147). This situation, he concludes, fostered fertile ground for the return of irrationality as a prevailing mentality and lifestyle, namely, the cult of spontaneity, impulsiveness and lack of rules – or what Brunschwig calls a belief in «the miraculous» in all areas of life, expressed in an endless quest for the lucky strike: «They will do anything whatever to satisfy their hunger for fame; the sole exception is that they will have nothing whatever to do with the occupation to which they seemed destined from birth» (BRUNSCHWIG 1947, p. 147). In this context he also sees the appeal of the literary world for the young generations, that is, in offering the faster short-cut, if only as a fantasy, not only to earnings but mainly to status, bypassing the obstacles in the extant hierarchical trajectories.

2   Cultural Repertoire

However, while in Brunschwig's historical-psychological analysis the formation of this malleable mentality was a direct response to a socio-economic crisis, his view lacks insight into the constraints of cultural resources, namely, the behavioural and emotional repertoire imposed on these young people in the social spheres in which they were moving. It should be remembered that well into the middle of the 18th century, in Germany «culture» means a cross-European court culture, centrally modelled on that prevalent in France (BRUDFORD 1965; ELIAS 1978). This upper-class sphere was a typical example of cultural provincialism; the «civilized» language, taste and manners were all French, as was the dominant neoclassicist literature. The court of the Prussian king, Friedrich II, was an epitome of such French-oriented provincialism. The king's hostility towards the German language and literature is well-known. Not only did he ignore this culture's achievements, as

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2. German private tutors were apparently in the most humble situation, and were certainly inferior to the imported French ones (VAUGHAN 1985, p. 70).

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required of an elegant «man of culture», he also claimed to be unable to speak the German language properly (WARD 1974, p. 124). This typically provincial genteel culture was the environment which gave rise to the German-speaking bourgeois intelligentsia. Although these culturally provincialised individuals aspired to become part of the Frenchfied high culture, their access to its required standards was ultimately limited. Despite of the fact that, as educated bourgeois, many of them were fairly well acquainted with civilized taste and the French-Latin lore, they were doomed to social inferiority, and remained forever on the receiving end, with no prospect for full integration into this culture, let alone for taking a lead in it. Goethe describes his encounter with this cultural conservatism and snobbery, as he saw it, experienced as a social barrier for a young law student in Leipzig, the citadel of the German Polite Society at the time:

For the student of any wealth and standing had every reason to show himself attentive to the mercantile class and to be the more solicitous about the proper external forms, as the colony[3] exhibited a model of French manners. [...] and many subject of the state, educated at the government schools or other gymnasia, and hoping for preferment, did not venture to throw off the traditional customs. [...] At first this kind of life was not repugnant to me, [...] but [...] I was soon forced to feel that the company had much to find fault with in me, and that, after dressing myself in their fashion, I must now talk according to their tongue also; faults in me [...] (GOETHE, *Autobiography*, Vol. I, Book VI, p. 272).

Following Elias' argument, it so happened that the sense of an alternative *German*-based identity emerged from social frustration in the face of the kind of civilized dread of the then-ruling class and their exclusion of those who were «almost there» but were finally unable to break through. German *literati*, so the argument goes, were disposed to capitalize on their German language knowledge and skills in creating their own space of distinction.

As it is often the case with peripheral, yet resourceful, cultural groups, at first their default strategy was that of imitation (SHEFFY 1999). Paradoxical though it may appear, the passion for a distinct *German-language* high culture first originated, as Gunter Grimm argues (1983), precisely from conformity with what was taken to be the cosmopolitan, French-Latin oriented canonical culture as their frame of reference, rather than from any sort of «primordial nationalism», as it were. It was, accord-

3. This is how Leipzig was called «because a large and influential portion of its citizens were sprung from a colony of Huguenots» (note in the original text; GOETHE 1969, Vol. I, Book VI, p. 272).

ing to Grimm, the attempt, already initiated in the previous century, to cultivate a domestic version of the very same classicist repertoire, with an aspiration to matching its achievements and finesse. The numerous German reading clubs and language societies which mushroomed throughout the 17th and 18th centuries (GRIMM 1983; VAN-DÜLMEN 1992) were engaged in an effort to create a parallel version of the same neoclassicist literary style and poetical language in German. Along these lines, Eric Blackall (1959) describes the literary debates during the first half of the 18th century, which revolved around questions of imitation and generic classifications, and which were for the most part rooted in the neoclassicist polemics on which they drew for legitimation.

This prevailing strategy of imitation began to change only in the last third of the 18th century, when growing circles of young Germans became more confident in the value of their educational expertise, and more responsive to cultural influences other than mainstream French Classicism. A major alternative source of literary inspiration and legitimation became available to them through English poetry and its trends of primitivism and sentimentalism, increasingly translated into German.[4] In the 1770s, the German-speaking intellectual and literary field was already prolific and stratified enough to give rise to an avant-garde movement such as the *Sturm und Drang*.[5] At the time, young German intellectuals were asserting their reputations by overtly rejecting the tyranny of Frenchified high culture, evoking instead their allegedly indigenous cultural coarseness, turning this stigmatic property into an asset. According to his recollections, Goethe's disillusion with the German Classicism project had actually begun a few years earlier, during his experience as a student of law and literature in Leipzig. Taking the stance of a young inexperienced lad speaking an Upper-German dialect (GOETHE, *Autobiography*, Vol. I, Book VI, p. 268), he reports a sense of awkwardness and distaste towards what he calls an affected, dogmatic intellectual atmosphere, devoid of any authentic spiritual

4. See Goethe's description of the influence of English literature on his milieu: «[…] such gloomy contemplations, which lead him who has resigned himself to them into the infinite, could not have developed themselves so decidedly in the minds of the German youths, has not an outward occasion existed and furthered them in this dismal business. This was cased by English literature, especially the poetical part, the great beauties of which are accompanied by an earnest melancholy» (GOETHE, *Autobiography*, Vol. II, Book XIII).

5. The term initially came from the title of a play by Friedrich Maximilian Klinger (1776). Earlier formative texts were an anonymously published pamphlet entitled *Von deutscher Art und Kunst* (1773) which held three essays by Herder, Möser and Goethe; Goethe's revolutionary play *Götz von Berlichingen* (1773) and his *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774).

merit. He then voices a call for «unaffected Germanhood» as a powerful justification, at least in retrospect, for German students like himself to discredit the authority of the then prevailing proponents of German Neoclassicism, who controlled the academic as well as the public sphere. He accentuates this sentiment through a sarcastic account of the legacy of Johann Christoph Gottsched, the eminent literary critic and university professor in Leipzig, whom he sees as the embodiment of cultural falseness and vacuousness:

The Gottsched waters had inundated the German world with a true deluge, which threatened to rise up, even over the highest mountains. It takes a long time for such a flood to subside again, for the mire to dry away; and as in any epoch there are numberless aping poets, so the imitation of the flat and watery produced a chaos, of which now scarcely a notion remains. To find out that trash was trash was hence the greatest sport, yea, the triumph of the critics of those days. Whoever had only a little common sense, was superficially acquainted with the ancients, and was somewhat more familiar with the moderns, thought himself provided with a standard scale which he could everywhere apply (GOETHE, *Autobiography*, Vol. I, Book VI, p. 273).

Now, it was by no means accidental that what is regarded as the pioneering genuinely-German literary movement emerged precisely from an ensemble of young German-born students in the border city of Strasbourg (PASCAL 1953; VAUGHAHN 1985). Away from home, their direct encounter with the French language and manners intensified their sense of inferiority and exclusion vis-à-vis this culture. Indulging in an outsider position, they were freer to seek an alternative source for their in-group pride and solidarity – by stressing feeling over reason and assigning to it the extra spiritual value of an «untamed Germanhood» cultural code. «[…] what, more than all, forcibly alienated us from the French», Goethe writes with reference to his Strasbourg group,

[w]as the unpolite opinion, repeatedly maintained, that the Germans in general, as well as the king, who was striving after French cultivation, were deficient in taste. With regard to this kind of talk, which followed every judgment like a burden, we endeavoured to solace ourselves with contempt […]. Already earlier and not just once we turned to Nature, which taught us not to accept anything but the truth and sincerity of feeling, the strong and direct expression of which were our maxim and watchword with which our little academic gang use to recognize and encourage each other (GOETHE, *Autobiography*, Vol. II, Book XI, p. 100).

It was thus hardly a literary agenda *per se* which gave rise to the legendary literary movement of the *Stürmer*. It was a clustering of young Germans, who in 1770 were between the ages of 18 (Klinger) and 26

(Herder),[6] all of whom, with the exception of Goethe, came from the working and lower-middle class intelligentsia in the German provinces. Their academic training was diverse, from theology, to law and medicine. Literary writing and intellectual conversations were their leisure practices, but beyond sharing aspects of common taste and certain vague ideas, they never did come up with a clear literary theory; their poetical production was sporadic, and «the authors [were] more fervent and well-intentioned than talented», says Brunschwig (1974, p. 92). Nor did they have a well-defined political agenda. As Roy Pascal (1953) points out, their scorn for the aristocracy was a sheer provocation of taste and life-style. Typically, Goethe's best-seller novel *The Sorrow of Young Werther* (1774), which became an icon of his age, is a manifesto of emotionalism against the societal code of restrictions («Einschränkung»), without an explicit demand for changing the extant class system. The bond among the members of this group – that lasted no more than a decade – was based primarily on personal ties and a sense of shared identity and aspirations, which triggered *cultural* friction with neither a clearly defined program, nor specific achievements.

And yet this coterie was seen from the outset as heralding a revolutionary movement, and provoked extreme reaction from the literary establishment at the time. For **Friedrich Nicolai, the influential En**lightenment publisher and critic and great literary authority (Selwyn 2000), its members were the enemy. He was harshly critical of their obscure sentimentalism (his parody of Goethe's *Werther* is a notorious example, see Goethe, *Autobiography*, Book XIII), and accused them of ignorance, bad taste and sectarianism in the way they allegedly wrote for one another, disregarding the potentially broader German reading public (Berghahn 1988, pp. 23, 67). Nicolai's strong reaction attests to the enormous threat this group posed, despite its alleged immaturity, to the existing literary world, and to its role as source of change for the literary profession.

The Structure of the Literary Field

By that time, literary activity had become a central arena for socio-cultural change. This energy generated – and was encouraged by – a structural transformation of the literary space as a field of cultural production.

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6. However, it is impossible to identify them as a generational group, since elder people were often also associated with this group (Pascal 1953; Goethe, *Autobiography*, Book IX; Brunschwig 1974, p. 92).

In the second half of the 18th century, a growing division emerged in the German-written literary production: on the one hand, the neoclassicist tradition of canonical poetical genres still prevailed, promoted as an exclusive business for experts. At the same time, there arose and prospered a large-scale literary market of journals and almanacs and volumes of prose-fiction, with thriving book fairs and loan-libraries (BÜRGER 1980; KIESEL, MÜNCH 1977; NORTH 2008; SCHENDA 1977). The latter dimension of literary activity was only partly prescribed by the canonical tradition, facilitating the promotion of other types of literary goods not recognized by that tradition, notably the popular novel (*Trivialroman*; BEAUJEAN 1964; HADLEY 1973; see SHEFFY 1992), discredited by canonical criticism and perceived as trash.

Between these two poles, the practice of literature held an ambivalent status as an occupation, which was thankless both in terms of profit and prestige. At the canonical end, poetically-valued writing was a leisure practice mainly for men of standing. It was hardly a means of earning a living, except for novel writers who wrote for the mass market, evidently without any claim to social recognition (they often published under pseudonyms; to be called a *Romanist* was an insult; WARD 1974, p. 25), or occasional poets, such as students who wrote celebration rhymes to finance their education. Even court poets (a humble occupation that had practically vanished by the middle of the century) were forced to have additional means of livelihood (WARD 1974). Paradoxically, then, the more literature was regarded as a stand-alone, paid profession, the less prestige it was ascribed; it was an additional symbolic resource only for those whose social standing was already secured. «[…] the German poets», Goethe laments,

[…] did not enjoy the smallest advantage among their fellow citizens. They had neither support, standing, nor respectability, except in so far as their other position was favorable to them; and therefore it was a matter of mere chance whether talent was born to honour or to disgrace. A poor son of earth, with a consciousness of mind and faculties, was forced to crawl along painfully through life, and, from the pressure of monetary necessities to squander the gifts which perchance he had received from the Muses. Occasional poems, the first and most genuine of all kinds of poetry, had become despicable to such a degree, that the nation even now cannot attain a conception of their high value: and a poet, […] appeared in the world in the most melancholy state of subserviency, as a jester and parasite […]. If, on the contrary, the Muse associated herself with men of respectability, these received thereby a lustre which was reflected back to the donor. Noblemen well versed in life, like Hagedorn; dignified citizens, like Brockes; distinguished men of science, like Haller, – appeared among the first in the nation, to be equal with the most eminent and the most prized (GOETHE, *Autobiography*, Vol. II, Book X, pp. 3-4).

At the same time, the rising market of popular novels made the business of writing increasingly attractive. The growth of this market in the second half of the century has been studied and described at length (BÜRGER 1980; KIESEL, MÜNCH 1977; SCHENDA 1977; SELWYN 2000; WARD 1974). Critical discourse on the *Trivialroman* of this period focused primarily on demonizing an alleged epidemic of «trash reading» by an ever-growing readership (BÜRGER ET AL. 1982). As I have tried to show elsewhere (SHEFFY 1992, 1999), this panic about mass novel *reading* was by far exaggerated beyond its actual proportions. It was, in fact, a reaction on behalf of the literary orthodoxy – the old-style gate-keepers – to the threat of opening up the business of literature to lower-class writers, expressed in the form of cultural snobbery vis-à-vis an undefined «popular» readership. Still, there is no doubt that at the *producing* end, the second half of the 18th century witnessed an unprecedented growth in the production and circulation of books. According to reports of contemporaries, while in 1773 there were over 3,000 books in Germany, at the turn of the century their number reached 10,600, and in 1790 their ratio in the population was 1 book per every 4,000 people (WARD 1974). Naturally, the figures differ from one German state to the other. Moreover, it is assumed that there were many more *writers* than those documented (WARD 1974). Therefore, in spite of an unprotected market, with belated publishing regulations and royalties (KIESEL, MÜNCH 1977; WARD 1974, pp. 93-96), the chance of success was enticing, and even if only few were lucky, many young people were attracted to this field.

TRANSFORMATION IN THE LITERARY FIELD

Given this situation, it appears that the *Sturm und Drang* movement marked the first effective attempt to translate social frustration into literary action, by using the flourishing literary market as a social force. The enormous popularity of Goethe's *The Sorrow of Young Werther* became a platform for redefining the rules of literary writing as well as for claiming an overall change in cultural norms. This was basically a process of autonomization, to use the Bourdieusian conceptualization (1985; 1996), in the sense that the field of *German* literature had developed an independent evaluation system, accompanied by an internal struggle over its control. This process entailed a twofold effect: on the one hand, it promoted *cultural democratization* – by introducing a new type of cultural prestige as a stand-alone resource, unconstrained by social status as a resource that endowed a poet in whatever social class with symbolic capital intended to surpass that of old-time hegemonic

culture. Yet at the same time, this process also created an *alternative dynamics of exclusiveness* that still guaranteed the accumulation of symbolic capital, albeit now of a different type, in the hands of selected few. In other words, this process generated new, different cultural elite.

In practice, autonomization was achieved first and foremost through a mystification of the literary rules, that is, by obscuring the norms of literary writing and standards of criticism (Sheffy 1992, 1999). As Bourdieu (1985) suggests, this is the ultimate strategy for evading existing authority and establishing new sources thereof in a field of cultural production that obeys «the rules of art» (Bourdieu 1996). In this particular case, this strategy had its most forceful expression when the novel – which until then was considered a lesser popular artefact and had absolutely no place on the list of literary genres (Vosskamp 1973) – was canonized as an art form (Sheffy 1992, 1999). It was precisely the combination of the novel's popularity on the one hand, and its borderline status as a literary form, on the other, which made it the most fitting catalyst for promoting the sense of the «enigma of poetry», on which the German Romantic notion of literature, at the turn of the century, was based (Schulte-Sasse 1988). The same vocabulary of naturalness and authenticity was employed here. Thinking of the novel as «the essence of poetry in prose form» provided the most feasible literary option in defiance of classical rules. It thus served, by the end of the century, the kernel for the literary theory of the Early Romantics (Behler 1978; Blackwell 1983), which crowned the novel as the highest literary form. A purposely vague, fragmented and tautological theory, it coined the notion of the novel as a «natural, universal form», an all-embracing hypothetical genre which, apart from sporadic experiments, was detached from the actual mass-production of prose-fiction at the time: «the Romantic» Friedrich Schlegel wrote «is not so much a literary genre as an element of poetry which may be more or less dominant or recessive, but never entirely absent» (Schlegel, *Dialogue*, p. 101). Its extreme abstractedness and detachment, however, were precisely what made this theory a powerful means of legitimation for the structural transformation in the literary field.

However, all this was the culmination of a process which had begun twenty years earlier with the mystification of the notion of literary *competence*. The real revolution of the *Sturm und Drang* lay in creating and legitimizing a new literary ethos. Their message entailed changing the literary practice from a conventionalized profession with an open code and clear normative guidelines, to an undefined vocation, wholly dependent on the personal flair and particular temperament of the extraordinary individual poet. In this context, the cult of the «natural genius» became widely fashionable to the extent that it lost conceptual precision,

since it was functional in framing this new ethos.[7] It provided spiritual justification for the failure of young intellectuals to make a decent career and follow normative trajectories. Economic instability and a contempt for worldly matters and rationally calculated lifestyles, the veneration of whimsical temperament, a retreat to solitude, melancholy, and even sickness – all these elements, which until that time had hardly been considered as virtues, became fashionable, signalling the poet's innate spirituality and burning emotional world. The impact of this fashion is readily appreciated upon reading Goethe's *Werther*, where all of these elements are heavily reflected upon.

True, this «natural genius» was a hypothetical image more than an actual life model. As much as the *Stürmer und Dränger* were effective in revolutionizing their intellectual field, the personality model they envisioned hardly had an immediate effect on the lives of its proponents. The group soon dissipated and each of its members found their own way into society, accepting the still-existing court-oriented cultural configuration. Some of them, like Friedrich Klinger or Heinrich Jung-Stilling, not to mention Wolfgang Goethe himself, had succeeded more than well in gaining higher positions along with acquiring literary fame. Whoever failed to fit into the scheme, like Jacob Lenz, to mention one outstanding example, remained painfully awkward in their eyes. Unlike the rest of the young men who participated in this formative circle, it was Lenz alone who fully implemented the new model of the poet's mental disposition, or in fact was the victim of it, in the context of his real life (Madland 1994; Goethe, *Autobiography*, Vol. ii, Book xiv, pp. 230-234). By contrast to the others, he was portrayed by his contemporaries as a mentally disturbed person, incapable of persisting in any career.

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7. Goethe reflects, not without sarcasm, on the «genius craze» that swept German culture at the time: «Natural gifts of every kind can the least be denied; and yet, by the phraseology common in those times, genius was ascribed to the poet alone. But another world seemed all at once to rise up: genius was looked for in the physician, in the general, in the statesman, and before long in all men who thought to make themselves eminent either in theory or practice. [...] the word *genius* became a universal symbol [...]. When anybody rushed into the world on foot, without exactly knowing why or wither, it was called a pass of genius; and when any one undertook an aimless and useless absurdity, it was a stroke of genius. Young men, of vivacious and true talents, too often lost themselves in the limitless [...]. With a strange rapidity, words, epithets, and phrases, which have once been cleverly employed to disparage the highest intellectual gifts, spread by a sort of mechanical repetition among the multitude; and in a short time they are to be heard everywhere, even in common life, and in the mouths of the most uneducated; in-deed, before long they even creep into dictionaries. In this way the word genius had suffered so much from mis-representation, that it was almost desired to banish it entirely from the German language» (Goethe, *Autobiography*, Vol. ii, Book xix, pp. 404-405).

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Although, according to Madland, «[h]is enormous productivity during the few years in Strasbourg, [...] demonstrates that he spent his days reading, writing, discussing, and finding publishers more successfully than many others in his immediate circle» (MADLAND 1994, p. 28), she nevertheless agrees that

Lenz himself is responsible for this image of the suffering and alienated young artist, the incompetent Wertherian individual at odds with society, an image which began to emerge already during his lifetime and accelerated to such a degree during the nineteenth century that it overshadowed his works (MADLAND 1994, p. 28).

Having apparently taken the sentimental tone of his age too seriously, Lenz is said to have indulged himself in audacious expressions of emotionalism and mental instability, like attempting suicide or falling in hopeless love with unattainable or fictional women. Yet, evidence shows that he was not unaware of the hazardous dissonance between his emotions and reality, turning, in fact, the tyranny of uncontrolled feelings, and the resulting agony, into a life program: «All, the most unbearable state is when I am free of suffering» he writes (cited from a letter to Lavater, 1775, in PASCAL 1953, p. 33). But this is an extreme example of how the cultural options of the time were misrecognized. While today Lenz may well have been applauded as a bohemian artist, in the eyes of his contemporaries he was perceived as an eccentric loser.

And still, even if that cohort of writers did not fully implement this life model in reality, they undoubtedly promoted it as their ideal biography, at least in fantasy. Goethe's *Werther* may be viewed as an idealized shared autobiography of the new generation. All the reality materials in this novel are taken from different figures and events in Goethe's real life (GOETHE, *Autobiography*, Vol. II, Book XIII), yet they are constructed as a mythical life-course identified, but never really followed, by the young Goethe himself. Moreover, although Goethe insists that this novel did not create a cultural trend but was merely a reflection of his *Zeitgeist* (Vol. II, Book XIII), it certainly promoted the fashioning of the Romantic Self for future generations.

Furthermore, the construction of this new archetype of the German Poet demanded precedents. This is the logic behind the glorification of Johann Christian Günther (1695-1723), an early 18th-century poet of humble origins who led a scandalous life and died young and penniless, after failing to receive the position offered to him as a court poet. Goethe selects him in retrospect as an icon of the authentic tradition of German Poets, whose natural creativity and uncompromising emotionality allegedly clashed by definition with socio-economic constraints:

When one considers closely what was wanting in the German poetry, it was a material, and that, too, a national one: there was never a lack of talent. Here we make mention only of Günther, who may be called a poet in the full sense of the word. A decided talent, endowed with sensuousness, imagination, memory, the gifts of conception and representation, productive in the highest degree, ready at rhythm, ingenious, witty, and of varied information besides, – he possessed, in short, all the requisites for creating, by means of poetry, a second life within life, even within common real life. We admire the great facility with which, in his occasional poems, he elevates all circumstances by the feelings, and embellishes them with suitable sentiments, images, and historical and fabulous traditions. Their roughness and wildness belong to his time, his mode of life, and especially to his character, or, if one would have it so, his want of fixed character. He did not know how to curb himself; and so his life, like his poetry, melted away from him (GOETHE, *Autobiography*, Vol. I, Book VII, p. 284).

Finally, for the Early Romantics, at the turn of the century, this new type of rule-defying, non-conventionalized literary competence, as it were, was already a paradigm, in the context of which the very ability to produce and understand «real poetry» was seen as a rare property of the fittest few. A new mechanism of exclusion, based on a new literary repertoire, had thus been established. The prime authority was now the individual eccentric poet. Accordingly, literary evaluation measures became obscure, revealed only to those few recognized as endowed with talent.[8]

Undoubtedly, this new literary ethos was used successfully in the Romantics' jousting against their contemporary rivals, by blurring the criteria for winning the literary game. The dynamics governing the literary arena in which they jockeyed for position had radically changed from that which prevailed three decades earlier. As Klaus Berghahn maintains (1988), even as late as the 1770s the cultivation and public distribution of taste for literature was still a central concern of literary critics, who profited from the ever prospering book market and educational system. However, at the turn of the century, an alternative,

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8. Schlegel's Fragment no. 116, one of the celebrated manifestos of German Romantic Poetry, summarizes this ethos in a nutshell: «The Romantic kind of poetry is still in the state of becoming; indeed, this is the essence of its being, that it can always be but in an eternal process of becoming and never be completed. It cannot be exhaustively rendered by any theory, and only a divinatory critique may dare to try and characterize its ideal. Only it alone is infinite, for only it is free and sees as its prime rule the poet's free will which acknowledges no other law above it. The romantic poetical kind is unique in being more than just kind, and to a certain extent it is the art of poetry itself, because to certain extent, all poetry is Romantic, or should be so in the first place» (Fragment 116 from «Athenäum»; SCHLEGEL, *Charakteristiken*, pp. 182-183; my translation).

exclusive German intellectual milieu had already become the ultimate authority in defining the canon of German culture. And since the appeal of commercial popular literature eventually jeopardized the prerogative of this small-scale elitist field of literary production to act as a cultural regulator, the result was the Romantic retreat into ever-growing sectarian aestheticism and abstractedness (SCHULTE-SASSE 1988). They promoted a distinction ethos which defied any mundane considerations of readership or economic constraints, and which, in Elias' view, has since become the hallmark of the German *Kultur* (ELIAS 1978). «Everyday life – economy» Schlegel writes «is the necessary supplement of all people who aren't absolutely universal [that is, who only foster their selfish interests]. Often talent and education are lost entirely in the process» (SCHLEGEL, *Charakteristiken*, p. 243; my translation). And in reply to Nicolai's lament cited above, he reveals his cards: «[The readers] are always complaining that German authors write for such a small circle, and even sometimes just for themselves. That's how it should be. This is how German literature will gain more and more spirit and character» (*Lucinde*, p. 201).

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Der Blonde Eckbert in an Alien Polysystem

The Reception of Tieck's «skröksaga» in 19th-Century Iceland

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This essay discusses the reception of L. Tieck's tale «Der Blonde Eckbert» in Iceland, which was published in Icelandic translation in the journal «Fjölnir» in 1836. Adopting the polysystem theory, the analysis is based on a close reading of a comment written by an anonymous reader from the Eastern Fjords to the editorial board of «Fjölnir» and on the reply of the editor to the reader. From the correspondent's comment, describing public opinion from a certain distance, one is able to reconstruct his impression of the literary norms of early 19th-century Iceland – norms that the translation was clearly violating. The editors' reply, appearing in the fourth issue in 1838, gives a different perspective on the matter, highlighting how translations of unusual works may be purposely designed to introduce new ideas and aesthetics into a literary scene.

I think, however, that *Ævintíríð af Eggérti glóa* [«Der Blonde Eckbert»], and other tales of the same sort, account for little with *most* Icelanders; they have hardly much taste, and even less use, for such tales. At least, I have heard much reproach, and disgust, toward such *skröksögur* [untrue stories], of which they don't know the meaning. I think neat poems, plausible stories and things of that kind, would go better with the general public's appreciation, and be of more use (*Úr brjefi af Austfjörðum* 1836, p. 40).

This comment on the Icelandic translation of Ludwig Tieck's *Der Blonde Eckbert* appeared in the second volume of the Icelandic periodical «Fjölnir» in 1836. It is a passage from a long excerpt from a letter written to the editorial board by an anonymous reader living in the eastern part of Iceland. The first half of the excerpt is a favourable review of the first issue of «Fjölnir»; the correspondent is, in fact, inclined to praise every item in the new periodical except Tieck's tale. Such a negative response to *Ævintír af Eggérti glóa* was by no means unusual. A number of «Fjölnir»'s readers wrote to the editorial board or to the monthly newspaper «Sunnanpósturinn», expressing their dissatisfac-

tion with the tale (cf. SENNER 1985, pp. 122-123). In terms of literary history this negative response is of great interest. From the correspondent's comment, describing public opinion from a certain distance, one is able to reconstruct his impression of the literary norms of early 19th-century Iceland – norms which the translation in «Fjölnir» was clearly violating. The editors' reply, appearing in the fourth issue in 1838, gives a different perspective on the matter, highlighting how translations of unusual works may be purposely designed to introduce new ideas and aesthetics into a literary scene. Here, the reception of Tieck's tale in Iceland will instigate certain reflections on the literary scene in Iceland during this period.

READER'S POINT OF VIEW

«Fjölnir» was founded and published in Denmark by a group of four young Icelanders: Brynjólfur Pétursson (1810-1851), Jónas Hallgrímsson (1807-1845), Konráð Gíslason (1808-1891), and Tómas Sæmundsson (1807-1841). Originally students at the University of Copenhagen, their idea was to use the publication to expose their countrymen at home to contemporary currents in European literature and politics. In analysing the content of «Fjölnir», literary critics and historians have noted a combination of Enlightenment and Romanticism in the ideas of the four editors. In the preface to the first volume they claim that «Fjölnir» wants to promote what is useful, beautiful, and true, and strengthen what can be considered good and moral, but in their discussion about poetry they often emphasize that beauty creates truth, not the other way around. To some degree, this mixture of ideas can be traced to an ideological difference between the editors, especially between the pragmatic reverend Sæmundsson, on the one hand, and the poet and naturalist Hallgrímsson and the philologist Gíslason on the other. In an article on Hallgrímsson, Dagný Kristjánsdóttir (1989, pp. 176-77) characterizes him and Gíslason as having «radical and perfectly aesthetic view on life. [...] Their contribution for the first volume was to introduce the fashionable Romantic poets Tieck and Heine – but one can doubt how 'useful' these poets were». Kristjánsdóttir's analysis of Hallgrímson's poetics and poetry agrees nonetheless with the common notion that, along with various Romantic ideas, we find in him a strong sense of the neoclassicist requirements for unity, clarity, discipline, and balance in every work of art. I do not intend to analyse or resolve these complicated differences here, but refer instead to «Fjölnir» as an entity. Even if it is generally believed that the translation of Tieck's tale was done by Hallgrímsson

with some assistance from Gíslason, while the preface to the fourth issue of «Fjölnir» was probably written mainly by the latter, both texts appear as part of an editorial agenda. In discussing that agenda, I will avoid the use of historical terms like Enlightenment and Romanticism. Instead, I rely on the framework which polysystem theory has established in discussing literary history, suggesting that literary systems are governed by opposition between primary and secondary patterns. This description suits well the view that the correspondent gives us of the Icelandic literary scene in the 1830s.

It is interesting that, in his repudiation of *Ævintír af Eggérti glóa*, the correspondent neither refers directly to his own literary taste nor to any universal aesthetics, but to his notion of a general reader, designated by the concepts «*most* Icelanders», «many», and «the general public». This general audience likes neat poems and plausible stories, the correspondent maintains, and hence he advises the editors of «Fjölnir» to translate and publish literature that meets those specifications. The correspondent's viewpoint is, however, more complex, since he does not identify himself with the general public. He is, on the contrary, trying to appear detached from his topic, analysing the literary scene from a distance. With the term «*most* Icelanders» he indicates that there exists a minority audience in Iceland which is different from the public, insofar as it possibly has a taste for Tieck's tale. Taste (Icel. *gáning*), in this context, does not refer so much to liking or preference, as to the skill to appreciate and understand. The apparent implication is that the general audience's dislike of so-called «skröksögur» (untrue tales) stems from its inability to understand the genre.

Similar views of the general public's limited comprehension can be found in several places in the letter. Treating Hallgrímsson's article, *On the Nature and the Origin of the Earth*, the correspondent states for example that «apart from Plato's idea, which is the needle-eye, which the public's insight, as yet, is too limited to comprehend, the article contains easily understood knowledge on the subject, which I have noticed everyone enjoys reading» (*Úr brjefi af Austfjörðum* 1836, pp. 40-41). The correspondent is apparently marking the places in «Fjölnir» where the implied reader does not coincide with the typical Icelandic reader. The remark «as yet», suggests, however, that the «public's insight» does not have to be a static entity. His overall praise for «Fjölnir» does, in fact, derive from the publishers' aim to «instigate the life-stream» of Icelandic nation. This aim, the correspondent adds, should «be welcomed by all true Icelanders, as none of them will deny that this life-stream has become very stagnant» (*Úr brjefi af Austfjörðum* 1836, p. 38). It is in view of the possible advancement of the general reader and the stagnant

Icelandic culture, that the correspondent discusses the possible uses of Tieck's tale. Not only does he repudiate *Ævintír af Eggérti glóa* because it violates public taste, but also because it does not have any effective value in educating the public. However, he keeps it ambiguous whether he believes that this intransitivity is due to the «distance» between the audience's taste/abilities and the requirements of the tale, or that «skröksögur» do not serve any useful purpose in general.

In the latter half of the excerpt, the correspondent discusses the practical value of critical reviews, which, in his opinion, «keep the sciences alive in every country». In Iceland, he adds, there has been a complete lack of such writing:

> The main reason for this is that many men here have such a bad sense of what is beautiful or ugly, in poetry for example, and that there is so little happening here in literature; because even though Icelanders do not have a duller or poorer instinct for beauty and excellence than other people, one can only expect their senses to become gradually stupefied, since there are few people who keep them sharp, but many who ruin and damage them (*Úr brjefi af Austfjörðum* 1836, pp. 41-42).

The correspondent takes the «rímur» (epic narrative poems) of Sigurður Breiðfjörð as an example of literature that spoils good taste – «people buy this as easily, and practice it much more, than Paradise Lost and Der Messias» (*Úr brjefi af Austfjörðum* 1836, p. 42). Instead of the contrast of plausible tales vs «skröksögur», discussed in relation to the translation of Tieck, we are here introduced to the opposition of Icelandic popular literature of poor aesthetic value vs religious literature in translation.

At this point, I want to introduce into the discussion some concepts of polysystem theory, as developed by Itamar Even-Zohar. Rooted in the semiotic traditions of the Russian Formalists and the Czech Structuralists, Even-Zohar (1990, p. 21) explains how his theory conceives of literature as a stratified whole, a polysystem, governed by an opposition between primary and secondary patterns:

> The primary vs. secondary opposition is that of innovativeness vs. conservatism in the repertoire. When the repertoire is established and all derivative models pertaining to it are constructed in full accordance with what it allows, we are faced with a conservative repertoire (and system). Every individual product (utterance, text) of it will then be highly predictable, and any deviation will be considered outrageous. Products of such a state I label «secondary». On the other hand, the augmentation and restructuration of a repertoire by the introduction of new elements, as a result of which each product is less predictable, are expressions of an innovatory repertoire (and system).

Even-Zohar suggests that we can dichotomize the literary polysystem into centre vs periphery, canonized vs non-canonized literature, and also, in view of aesthetic values and audience, into high-brow vs low-brow literature, adult vs children's literature, etc. He also discusses the contact between various literatures or polysystems, and the significance of translated literature within a polysystem.

According to the correspondent, *Ævintír af Eggérti glóa* as a «skröksaga» is bound to be on the periphery of the Icelandic literary system, whereas plausible stories and neat poems form its centre. This state of the art seems to be correlated to the distinction the correspondent makes between two kinds of audiences: a few sophisticated readers and a large unsophisticated public, the latter being incapable of enjoying Tieck's tale. In his discussion of the role of criticism, the correspondent further defines the centre of the Icelandic system, making a distinction between the high-brow, canonized (we could add educating/useful) religious literature of Pope and Klopstock, vs the low-brow, non-canonized «rímur». It should be noted in this context that sacred writing (Bible translations, psalms, sermons, etc.) had virtually monopolized literary publication in Iceland in the preceding centuries. As Senner (1985, p. 57) notes, «religious literature was one of the few remaining cultural links between 18th-century Iceland and its rich and ancient literary heritage». It is also of some interest that after discussing the usefulness of the literary reviews in «Fjölnir», the correspondent devotes the latter half of his excerpt to harsh criticism of a recent book of psalms.

In discussing the role of translated literature within a polysystem, Even-Zohar (1990, p. 46) distinguishes between systems that are independent vs dependent, strong vs weak, dominant vs dominated but he also discusses how the source texts of translated works «are selected by the target literature, the principles of selection never being uncorrelatable with the home co-system of the target literature». By placing translated literature (Pope and Klopstock) in the canon at the centre of the literary scene in Iceland, the correspondent certainly betrays the Icelandic polysystem as weak and dependent. His words about the dull aesthetic instinct of the Icelanders imply, furthermore, that translated literature is selected from dominant source cultures (the English and the German) as models to emulate.

Editors' Point of View

In a footnote to the correspondent's discussion of *Ævintír af Eggérti Glóa*, the editors of «Fjölnir» make the following observation:

It is strange that so many Icelanders have such a low opinion of *Ævintír af Egg-érti glóa*. It is not possible, at this point, to show how excellently it is composed, or where its beauty comes from, but it would be desirable if some Icelander would compose a fairy-tale, of no less merit, because it would then suffice to translate that tale into other languages in order to have all the nations in Northern Europe say to themselves: «one can surely count this Icelander among the best poets of the century!» (*Úr brjefi af Austfjörðum* 1836, p. 40).

This passage is interesting for several reasons, but for my current purposes I want to highlight the distinction that is made here between the Icelandic polysystem and the literary systems of other nations in Northern Europe.[1] According to the editors of «Fjölnir», *Der Blonde Eckbert* and other fairy-tales «of no less merit» hold a central position in the canon of the dominant literatures of Europe. The poor reception of the tale in Iceland only proves that there is something wrong with the Icelandic audience.

The claim about the secondary position of Icelandic culture in relation to the culture of other European nations is made more explicit in the preface to the fourth issue of «Fjölnir», where a serious attempt is made to show how «excellently Tieck's tale is composed, and where its beauty comes from». In approaching the topic, the editors emphasize the necessity for people to «get to know other countries, the ways and situation of other civilized nations, and the thoughts and speech of those who are considered to be the most intelligent and accomplished in the world» («Fjölnir» 1838, p. 8). An education of this kind is best obtained through the reading of literature, the editors add, and that is the reason the translations of Tieck, Heine, and others have appeared in the first three volumes. Consequently, it should be «easily understood that one should not adapt such books in accordance with Iceland [Icelandic norms]. One must take them as they are» (p. 8). On this point, the editors disagree with the correspondent, who recommends that publishers select literature for translation in accordance with the canon/centre of the Icelandic system. One of the editors' reasons for giving the Icelandic readership examples from the canon/centre of other systems is to show the very differences that exist between the two. The fact that the Icelandic public does not like these works, the editors continue, «only proves that our taste is different from the taste of other nations; and

1. The quotation reveals that the editors find it more effective to appeal to the vanity of the Icelanders (their preoccupation with foreign opinion) than to discuss the tale's «aesthetic» qualities. This emphasis might also be telling us something about the personality of the editors; their disappointment with the Icelandic reception of «Fjölnir»; and their desire to make a name for themselves (or Icelandic culture) abroad.

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when this difference is considerable, it raises the suspicion that our taste and education fall short; because we should not assume that our judgement is the only correct one and all the others are mistaken» (p. 8). The centre of the Icelandic system is, in other words, a secondary periphery of the extended polysystem of Europe. Treating *Der Blonde Eckbert* more specifically, the editors argue for Tieck's centralized, canonized position in Europe by referring to the volume of his work, his reputation and the tale's popularity: **Tieck is considered to be «one of the great**est contemporary poets; he has written a great deal, and more than 20 volumes have been published of the works that he has composed and edited. People prefer his fairy-tales, but for obvious reasons this one is considered to be one of the best» (pp. 8-9). But because Icelanders «do not have enough appreciation for poetry, and base their judgement in these matters on 'rímur' and other 'bad poetry', the fact is that few have understood the fairy-tale, its purpose, and its merits» (p. 9).

This description of the literary scene in Iceland echoes in many respects Hallgrímsson's (1837) harsh criticism of the «rímur»-poet Sigurður Breiðfjörð in «Fjölnir» the previous year. It also coincides with the correspondent's letter, both in its labelling of the «rímur» as a central but low-brow (non-canonical) form of literature within the Icelandic system, and in making a distinction between a small and sophisticated vs a big and unsophisticated readership. But whereas the correspondent is content to see secondary (conservative) translations of religious poetry forming the «Icelandic» canon, the editors of «Fjölnir» want to place translations in a primary position, participating «actively in modelling the centre of the polysystem» as Even-Zohar (1990, pp. 46-47) puts it:

In such a situation it [translation] is by and large an integral part of innovatory forces, and as such likely to be identified with major events in literary history while these are taking place. This implies in fact that no clear-cut distinction is maintained between «original» and «translated» writings, and that often it is the leading writers (or members of the avant-garde who are about to become leading writers) who produce the most conspicuous or appreciated translations. Moreover, in such a state when new literary models are emerging, translation is likely to become one of the means of elaborating the new repertoire. Through the foreign work features (both principles and elements) are introduced into the home literature which did not exist there before.

This description fits excellently with the majority of translations appearing in «Fjölnir», especially Hallgrímsson's translations and imitations of poetry by Schiller, Heine, and others. But the premise for such an integration to be successful, Even-Zohar (1990, p. 47) adds, is that «the

very principles of selecting the works to be translated are determined by the situation governing the (home) polysystem: the texts are chosen according to their compatibility with the new approaches and the supposedly innovatory role they may assume within the target literature». In this respect the editors of «Fjölnir» seem to be making a mistake in selecting *Der blonde Eckbert* for translation; it is hardly compatible with the Icelandic polysystem.

But the editors do not let the case rest there. Having refused to adapt Tieck's tale «in accordance with Iceland», the preface continues in an ambitious attempt to adapt Iceland in accordance with Tieck. The aim is to «sophisticate» the Icelandic audience with a sketchy Aristotelian lesson in poetics. The editors' opening remark is that the quality of good poetry depends not on its content, but the way in which it «corresponds with poetic beauty, truth and morality» («Fjölnir» 1838, p. 9). Hence, a good author can write about the external world (specific, visible things) or the internal world (general, universal laws). In either case, the author has the option to write about man or nature; i.e. the external history of humans (and nations) vs the internal laws of the human soul – «its desires, and tendencies» – or the external natural history vs «the hidden spirit and mysteries of nature» (p. 10). These two schools of poetry cannot be clearly distinguished, the editors add, as they depend on each other for their existence and call for ingenuity and imagination in the author.

If the poet does not use in his poetry narratives about real people, nor what he has seen in life, then he must make up the occasion with his own imagination, and in that case he generally relies on his knowledge of the human soul; the poetry depends then on how perfect this knowledge is, and how well it describes the moods and the psychology of the characters («Fjölnir» 1838, p. 11).

At this point one might suspect that the editors are planning to interpret *Ævintír af Eggérti glóa* as internal poetry – maybe as a psychological description of human nature, our «desires, and tendencies» – and thus explaining its negative reception in Iceland with reference to the audience's preference for the external world (plausible stories). But as the argument continues, with the editors making associations between Tieck's writing and external history – the rise of nationalism in the wake of the French Revolution, the collection of folk-tales and original literature based on old folk-motives and traditions – it becomes clear that their attempt is self-defeating. The actual interpretation of *Ævintír af Eggérti Glóa* ends up as an adaptation to the very taste which «Fjölnir» set out to invalidate.

Marking Tieck as the Walter Scott of Germany, the editors celebrate his tale for its accurate historical description of medieval Germany, even drawing parallels with Iceland!

The aristocracy spent, then, in their castles, the wealth that the oppressed farmers created with their toil. Each chieftain had to be on his guard against the others, as the situation was uncertain and tumultuous, just as it was here in Iceland at the same time. Their homes were usually encircled with a mighty wall on the highest peak or hill, so one could see from afar if any belligerent was advancing. This is all made explicit in the fairy-tale, even though we may doubt whether Eckbert or Bertha ever existed («Fjölnir» 1838, p. 14).

In other words, the tale deserves to be published since it contains external history. Here it is suggested that *Ævintír af Eggérti Glóa* is plausible after all and thus belongs to the centre of the Icelandic system. The main purpose of Tieck, the editors then add, was to manifest moral truths:

The consequences of sin, even after a long time; how inclinations, if they are meditated on, make man leave the path of truth; how one sin brings on another, and how consciousness changes its voice, just like a bird, in keeping with how innocence is preserved or lost, and causes desperation and unhappiness in the heart of those who act amiss; and how the punishment finally visits one without mercy. This spiritual lesson is hardly depicted more clearly or effectively than in Tieck's fairy-tale («Fjölnir» 1838, p. 14).

I find this latter interpretation much more satisfying than the historical one, but at the same time I want to suggest that the editors of «Fjölnir» are here trying to establish the tale's central status within the «spiritual» canon. The bottom line, at least, is that *Ævintír af Eggérti Glóa* is a moral work about sin, the fall from grace, and punishment, and in that way comparable to *Paradise Lost* and *Der Messias*.

Critics' Point of View

What I have attempted so far is to use the Icelandic reception of *Der blonde Eckbert* to reflect on the literary scene in Iceland in the 1830s. I build most of my argument on two Icelandic texts, published in the same periodical. To counter-balance this limited scope, I have referred to the ideas of polysystem's theory and suggested that the workings of the Icelandic literary system follow the patterns which Even-Zohar describes in

his work on historical poetics. But I want to conclude by paying further attention to the correspondent's definition of the tale as a «skröksaga» (untrue story). This term appears twice in *Ævintír af Eggérti glóa* as a translation of the German word «Märchen» (fairy-tale). In both instances it is a part of the self-reflective nature of the narrative. Before telling Walter the story of her youth, Eckbert's wife Bertha states that he should not confuse her account with a «skröksaga», no matter how strange it may sound («Nur haltet meine Erzählung für kein Märchen, so sonderbar sie auch klingen mag», Tieck 1964, p. 10). Later, near the end of his life, after having killed Walter and lost Bertha, Eckbert meditates that the story of his life appears to him more like a strange «skröksaga» than a normal life («daß ihm sein Leben in manchen Augenblicken mehr wie ein seltsames Märchen, als wie ein wirklicher Lebenslauf erschien», p. 23). The narrative seems to be presenting the reader with a double message; defining itself as a «skröksaga» and an anti-«skröksaga». This contradiction is only one of many paradoxes in Tieck's tale. It resembles a fairy-tale, but at the same time it is an anti-fairy-tale with its irony, its disturbing ending, and its fusion of reality and fiction. The spiritual lesson the editors of «Fjölnir» found in the text is plausible, but one should remember that, as a Christian fable, the tale does not offer any redemption. The incestuous couple/doubles, Bertha and Eckbert, seem to be doomed from the very outset of their lives, driven by fate and some unaccountable spirits in their souls («Zwei widerspenstigen Geistern», p. 18). Every attempt they make to break that fate only leads them closer to their tragic destiny.

Rather than defining «skröksaga» merely as a translation of «Märchen» or as the opposite to plausible stories, I want to explain the term in relation to the correspondent's sentence from the opening quotation of this paper: «I have heard much reproach, and disgust, toward such *skröksögur*, of which they don't know the meaning». Sigurður Breiðfjörð's popular «rímur» of «Tristrani og Indíanda» (Tristan and Iseult) and the favourable reception of «Fjölnir»'s later translation of tales by H.C. Andersen and from the Grimm-collection, implies that, contrary to the correspondent's belief, the Icelandic reading public did not have serious problems with enjoying and understanding fairy-tales, although people might still question the practical usage of such texts. Instead, I think the audience's problem was to deal with a text that resists any single coherent interpretation. This is, in fact, still a problem for contemporary critics of various nationalities. In summarizing their responses to Tieck's tale, Alan Corkhill (1978, p. 147) states that some critics «have avoided the issue of 'realism' altogether by contending that a total dream world is presented in which the laws of the known world

do not operate, thus rejecting any attempt at a rational explanation. Others see the work simply as a vehicle for conveying moods». Another group of scholars has paid attention to the incest theme introduced at the end of the story. Robert Minder (1936, p. 105) suggests that this theme of Tieck's had a biographical background, while V.C. Hubbs (1956) advances the theory further in relation to Jung's theory about the collective unconscious. James Trainer (1961), on the other hand, finds it more fruitful to see this motif as part of Gothic «convention», providing Tieck with the opportunity to evoke terror and suspense. The main, ongoing controversy surrounding the incest motif, however, concerns the question whether its introduction in the last paragraphs of the narrative is «an artistic flaw in an otherwise perfect tale» (IMMERWAHR 1961, p. 116) or an «integral part» of the story (LILLYMAN 1971, p. 144). The relation or non-relation of *Der blonde Eckbert* to the «Märchen» tradition has been the topic of still another group of critics, including Heinz Schlaffer (1976).

Falling back on «Fjölnir»'s description of the four spheres which the author can choose to write about, one can claim that **Tieck's tale dissolves the borders** between these spheres, making it unclear if and how the text deals with the external or the internal, man or nature. From this point of view, we can use the Icelandic response to *Ævintír af Eggérti Glóa*, not to describe the Icelandic polysystem or any exceptional thickness of the Icelandic audience, but to reflect that response back on Tieck's work, seeing it as an early impression of the tale's ambiguity, its ill-definable nature, its characteristics as a... «skröksaga».

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