

**Matthias Egeler (Munich) on:**

# The Narrative Uses of Toponyms in Harðar saga

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## Abstract

The contribution analyses how the late medieval *Harðar saga* uses place-names as literary devices. It proposes that toponyms are employed not only to locate plot elements, but also for purposes of subversion, the dropping of keywords then taken up by the narrative in an often grotesque and ironic fashion, the creation of an (again, typically ironic) subtext, and the evocation of physical topographies and their visual appearance in the context of accounts of travels. Thus, the contribution argues that place-names are a central part of the storyteller's toolkit which can provide important pointers for how to read the saga.

## Zusammenfassung

Der Beitrag analysiert, wie die spätmittelalterliche *Harðar saga* Ortsnamen als literarische Ausdrucksmittel verwendet. Dabei wird vorgeschlagen, dass Toponyme nicht nur herangezogen werden, um die Schauplätze von Elementen der Sagahandlung zu lokalisieren, sondern auch zu Zwecken der Subversion, als insbesondere in ironischer und grotesker Weise verwendete Stichwortgeber für die Entwicklung von einzelnen Episoden der Saga, zur Schaffung eines (erneut typischerweise ironischen) Subtexts, und zur Evozierung des visuellen Erscheinungsbilds der physischen Topographie im Rahmen von Reisebeschreibungen. Damit erweisen sich Ortsnamen als ein zentraler Teil des »Werkzeugkastens« des Erzählers, der für eine Interpretation der Saga wichtige Anhaltspunkte geben kann.

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If not indicated otherwise, all translations by Matthias Egeler.

## Introduction

The present article will argue that place-names are a core part of the narrative strategies employed in *Harðar saga Grímkelssonar*, providing important pointers for how to read the saga, and that they may have played a central role in how the saga was appreciated by its late medieval audience. In *Harðar saga*, this importance of place-names becomes particularly clear: while playing with place-names generally is not uncommon in medieval Icelandic literature, no saga is as focused on place-name stories as *Harðar saga*. The saga's exceptionally intense focus on place-names has recently been highlighted by Theodore M. Andersson,<sup>1</sup> and to some extent, this focus may also stand behind the unusual attention that Þórhallur Vilmundarson paid to the toponymy of this text when he completed its *Íslenzk fornrit* edition after the death of Bjarni Vilhjálmsson.<sup>2</sup> In the latter case, the engagement with saga toponyms has, as Rory McTurk has noted, even almost led to the formulation of a theory of saga origins: reviewing Þórhallur Vilmundarson's approach to saga editing and saga toponyms, McTurk observes that his edition of *Harðar saga* seems to be based on an implicit theory according to which the basic persons and plot elements of (some) Sagas of Icelanders are extrapolated from place-names which originally had been topographically descriptive, but later were narratively reinterpreted as referring to Settlement Period persons and occurrences.<sup>3</sup> Here, place-names become the key to unlocking the most fundamental level of saga composition. The present article, in general terms, agrees with the importance that such an approach ascribes to place-names for understanding at least some saga narratives, but it is rather less ambitious in how far back in time it wants to push its impact on saga analysis: rather than trying to understand the origin of the saga-narrative through its place-names, the present article will study the ways in which place-names are used in *Harðar saga* as literary devices. Place-names, thus, are scrutinised for their literary function within the text as it stands rather than for what they may or may not tell us about the narrative's diachronic development.

## *Harðar saga*

*Harðar saga Grímkelssonar*, or *Hólmverja saga*, is a late Saga of Icelanders.<sup>4</sup> In the form in which we meet it in its only extant complete version, preserved in the late fifteenth-century manuscript AM 556a 4to, it is generally held to have been written in the fourteenth century,<sup>5</sup> most likely towards the end,<sup>6</sup> even though allusions to core

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<sup>1</sup> Andersson 2006, p. 17; see also Lethbridge 2016, p. 60, with more detailed statistics.

<sup>2</sup> Þórhallur Vilmundarson & Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991, esp. Þórhallur Vilmundarson (1991), pp. XXX–XLI.

<sup>3</sup> McTurk 1994–1997, pp. 166–170; cf. Lethbridge 2016, pp. 60, 63–64, 66–68.

<sup>4</sup> *Harðar saga* has been translated several times, e.g. Boucher 1983; Kellogg 1997; Faulkes 2004, pp. 265–327; while I have consulted some of these translations, all translations given in the following are mine, as no translation that I have been able to access considers the semantics of the saga's toponyms in a way sufficient for the purposes of the present study. For discussions of the saga cf. Poilvez 2016; Merkelbach 2016, pp. 76–82; Ahola 2014, esp. pp. 112–114, 235–236, 243–245; Cochrane 2007; Schottmann 2000; Faulkes 1993; Faulkes 1983.

<sup>5</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1958, pp. 105–107.

<sup>6</sup> Faulkes 1993, p. 269; Kellogg 1997, p. 193.

## The Narrative Uses of Toponyms in *Harðar saga*

elements of the saga's plot in the *Sturlubók*-recension of *Landnámabók*<sup>7</sup> imply that some version of the underlying tale must have already existed by the thirteenth century. Among the Sagas of Icelanders, it is the youngest of three »outlaw sagas« (the other two being *Grettis saga* and *Gísla saga*),<sup>8</sup> telling of the fates of men cast out of society but, for a while, surviving against all odds. It tells the story of the rise and fall of a certain Hörðr, son of Grímkell. Hörðr is not a settler of the first generation but is born in Iceland. As a young child he is cursed by his own mother and so grows up to become a characteristically unlucky man. After a childhood spent in Iceland, Hörðr goes first to Norway and then to Gautland in Sweden. In Gautland, he marries Helga, an earl's daughter, and successfully breaks into a grave-mound; the latter success backfires, however, as the mound's undead resident curses the booty taken from his grave, which is to cause much misfortune. After Hörðr has returned to and settled down in Iceland, this curse, in combination with the impetuous behaviour of one of Hörðr's companions, leads to Hörðr killing one of his neighbours. For this, he is outlawed. To protect himself, Hörðr moves onto the little islet Geirshólmr in the Hvalfjörðr fjord; there, he lives with his family, a number of friends and associates, and an increasing number of other outlaws that ultimately swell his retinue to almost two hundred men. To support themselves, the outlaws on Geirshólmr, the *Hólmverjar*, perform raids on surrounding farms, and in doing so commit increasingly reproachable deeds of violence. In the end, the Hvalfjörðr farmers decide to put an end to this threat. By means of some peculiarly transparent treachery all the Hólmverjar, with exception only of Hörðr's wife Helga and his children, are lured ashore and killed. The final chapters of the saga describe how even more blood is spilled when Hörðr's widow Helga and his sister Þorbjörg contrive a measure of vengeance for Hörðr's death. Throughout the telling of this tale, place-names are enumerated, explained, played on, used to evoke the visual appearance of places, and sometimes perhaps are significant even in their very absence.

### Naming, semanticising, and subverting place

Current and classical writing on »place« or »landscape« as critical terms generally emphasises that place-names play a core role in how space is made meaningful, connected with stories and associations, and thus humanised and turned into something which to its inhabitants can feel like »home«.<sup>9</sup> The importance of both place-names

<sup>7</sup> *Landnámabók*, esp. chs. S32, S37, pp. 72, 74–76.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Faulkes 1983, pp. 9–10; Faulkes 1993, p. 269; Faulkes 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Cresswell 2015, esp. pp. 135, 139–140; Barraclough 2012; Hoggart 2010; Vikstrand 2002, pp. 121–123; Vikstrand 2001, pp. 17–20; Tuan 1991, esp. p. 102; Basso 1984; Egeler 2018. While the importance of place-naming has long been recognised in anthropology, history, and cultural geography, place-names comparatively rarely play a role in literary criticism. A noteworthy exception (though with a broader focus on naming more generally rather than place-names in particular) is the *Journal of Literary Onomastics* (<<https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/jlo/>>, last accessed 20/11/2017), founded in 2011. Earlier, see the journal *Literary Onomastics Studies* (<<https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/los/>>, last accessed 20/11/2017), which was published from 1974 to 1989. In contemporary literary works, the integration of place-names and their semantics into the fabric of narratives is occasionally even made virtually explicit intradiegetically; see e.g. Eco 2001 (1988), pp. 607–608; Mosse 2015 (2007), pp. 190, 530–531, cf. pp. 271, 315, 595, 616, 658, and p. 7 of the separately paginated »Reading Group Notes« at the end of Mosse's novel. More generally, cf. Sverrir Jakobsson 2017 for a survey of approaches to space as a critical concept in the study of Old Norse

and meaning for the human engagement with places is, for instance, emphasised by Christopher Tilley in his *A Phenomenology of Landscape*:

The naming and identification of particular topographical features [...] is crucial for the establishment and maintenance of their identity. Through an act of naming and through the development of human and mythological associations such places become invested with meaning and significance. Place names are of such vital significance because they act so as to transform the sheerly physical and geographical into something that is historically and socially experienced.<sup>10</sup>

A place-name enables a place to be talked about and thus to become the object of stories which invest it with a meaning that far transcends its purely geographical existence as a stretch of ground. Having been named, a place becomes an object of human culture and storytelling, and this storytelling in turn not merely reflects upon the place, but also upon the people inhabiting or in other ways interacting with it. At its most important, a named place can even become the point where a people's identity crystallises. Examples of such highly »semanticised« places are provided by Rome in the context of the Roman Empire or by Þingvellir for Iceland. The importance that storytelling (understood in its broadest sense) has for this process of semanticisation cannot be overemphasised: a place becomes »meaningful« first and foremost because stories (including histories: *historiae*) are told about it. The cultural importance of the Roman Forum does not in the first instance lie in the ruins of the ancient buildings that still occupy it, but in the historical narratives associated with them. Similarly, the importance of Þingvellir does not lie primarily in the often hardly-visible remains of the booths that once offered shelter to the assembly's participants, but in the (hi)stories connected with this assembly. In this process of semanticisation through narrative, the name of a place has the crucial role of providing the link between the narrative and the specific location to which it is tied.

This function of place-names, and the characteristic combination of place-names and stories, is also found in *Harðar saga*: there as well, in the spirit of classic approaches to the cultural importance of toponymy, place-names are used to connect specific locations with a significance that transcends their purely physical aspect. A case in point is provided by the passage which tells how Þórdísarholt, »Þórdís's Copse«, got its name: this place is named when Signý is travelling together with her foster-mother Þórdís and then...<sup>11</sup>

[...] varð fóstra Signýjar bráðdauð ok er jörðuð í Þórdísarholti; þat er skammt frá Bæ.

[...] Signý's foster-mother suddenly died, and she is buried in Þórdís's Copse; that is not far from Bær.

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literature. Wyatt 2004 proposes the idea that elements of landscape descriptions in Icelandic saga literature have identifiable literary functions, but builds his argument on a discussion of selected topographic terms rather than toponymy. Ward 2016 analyses *Þórdar saga hreðu* from the perspective of its use of place-names and evocations of places.

<sup>10</sup> Tilley 1994, p. 18.

<sup>11</sup> *Harðar saga*, ch. VIII, pp. 19–20.

## The Narrative Uses of Toponyms in *Harðar saga*

Here, the death of a beloved person leads to the coining of a place-name. Thus, the deceased is memorialised, as the newly-named place is turned into a »memory place« which, through its name and the associated story, gives the memory of Þórdís a permanent presence in the landscape.<sup>12</sup>

Something very similar – at least at first glance – also appears to be the case in ch. 27, which in its entirety is dedicated to telling the tale of how the farm of Bollastaðir, »Bolli's Steads«, was founded.<sup>13</sup> At this point in the narrative, Hörðr already is the leader of the outlaws out on Geirshólmr. One winter's night, a group of his men raid the farm of a certain Ormr and manage to carry off the chest that contains his valuables. Ormr's slave Bolli, who had been at home looking after the farm, is displeased with how he had, in his own eyes, failed in performing his duty as the farm's keeper, and so he goes off to retrieve the chest. Using a false name and claiming to be an outlaw wanting to join the Hólmverjar, he enters Geirshólmr and manages to convince the men there that the stolen chest (which the outlaws so far had failed to pry open) contains nothing but tools, useless to the outlaws but sorely missed by the farmer; on this basis, and in spite of Hörðr's misgivings, he manages to talk the outlaws into helping him to return the chest to its owner. For the outlaws, this ends not only with the loss of the chest but also, to add injury to insult, with the death of four of their men, whereas Bolli is duly rewarded:

Ormr gaf síðan Bolla frelsi ok land á Bollastöðum ok öll búsefni. Bjó hann þar síðan ok varð auðigr maðr ok ófælinn.

Ormr then gave Bolli his freedom and land at Bolli's Steads and all the necessary equipment for running a farm. He then lived there and became a rich and fearless man.

On one level of the narrative, here a farm, and especially this farm's name, is provided with a heroic founding story that celebrates the cunning and valour of its name-giving ancestral hero; from this perspective, the farm indeed becomes a place filled with (in Tilley's words as quoted above) »meaning and significance«, extolling the place's first, name-giving inhabitant and associating it with a glory that could reflect on everybody who later was to work its land. Yet at the same time, the place-story of Bollastaðir also has something deeply tongue-in-cheek about it, being a tale about how a mere slave outwits a group of apparently remarkably incompetent and gullible robbers and thus acquires his freedom and land from a master who is rather less resourceful than his slave. Thus, a place is created whose name glorifies a slave who outmanoeuvres his betters, treating conventional concepts of status and social standing with a deep irony and subverting common Icelandic notions that there is a correlation between a man's class and his value.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Assmann 1999, pp. 298–339.

<sup>13</sup> *Harðar saga*, ch. XXVII, pp. 68–70.

<sup>14</sup> This ironic undertone might be the more pronounced if Þórhallur Vilmundarson is right to suspect that the toponym Bollastaðir is not actually derived from a personal name, but either from *bolli* »bowl« or *boli* »bull«: Þórhallur Vilmundarson 1991, pp. XXXIV–XXXV. Schottmann 2000, p. 247 denies the episode all interest (»das merkwürdige und im Grunde salzlose Abenteuer«). For a discussion of the conventional link between social status and a person's quality in Icelandic literature cf. Ahola 2014, pp. 205–209, who summarises the general pattern: »The behavior of the members of lower social strata is depicted in the Family Sagas differently than those of higher strata. Those in lower strata may be portrayed as cowardly, beguiling, helpless, or outright stupid,

Subversion also seems to be the dominant mood of the story of Grímsstaðir.<sup>15</sup> The marriage between Hörðr's mother Signý and her much older husband Grímkell is not a happy one by any standards, and the only person able to get along with both, and to maintain a modicum of peace between them, is Grímr the Short. Yet at some point, he as well has enough and asks for permission to leave. Grímkell, however, is well aware of how important it is for their domestic peace that Grímr stays and continues to play his role as a go-between between husband and wife; so he asks Grímr to remain in their house and in exchange for this continued presence offers him much better terms than he had had before. This is repeated one year later; now, however, Grímr is not content merely with conventional better terms within Grímkell's household but asks Grímkell to secure for him the hand of Guðríðr in marriage. Since Guðríðr is the daughter of a very wealthy man while Grímr is a mere servant, Grímkell points out to him that this marriage would be well above his rank; but as Grímr insists, Grímkell gives in and uses his influence to arrange the marriage. Another year later, Grímr finally does leave, together with his new wife, and with the support of Grímkell and his new father-in-law founds a farm *er hann kallaði á Grímsstöðum*, »which he called »at Grímr's Steads«; through good husbandry he now quickly becomes a very wealthy man.

As in the case of Bollastaðir, here again a place is created whose name associates it with a founding story about how a servant profits from the quarrels of his betters, gaining wealth and a status far above his original rank through his wit and others' imprudence. While other heroes of Icelandic saga literature (like Egill Skallagrímsson, Gunnarr Hámundarson, or Óláfr Peacock) at the very least stem from the land-owning class, here a place-story questions classical notions of a correlation between descent and a man's worth and rather seems to celebrate the self-made man and to mock those who have inherited rather than earned their wealth.<sup>16</sup>

These two instances of place-stories, the tales of Bollastaðir and Grímsstaðir, thus are »classic« place-stories in the sense that they explain how a place got its name, but they seem to indicate that *Harðar saga* has a rather subversive take on status, rank, and heroism. In this way, they call into question whether current theories that see place-names primarily as tools of a construction of »meaning and significance« here apply in any straightforward manner.

### Dropping keywords

In a way rather different from how they incorporate subversions of social distinctions, place-names in *Harðar saga* also seem to be used as devices that drop keywords interrelated with the action taking place in their textual

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whereas the members of the higher strata are usually depicted as being brave, strong and resourceful.« This, perhaps tellingly, also applies to Hörðr, whose paternal lineage included significant leaders, prefiguring his own position as a leader of a large armed force (Ahola 2014, p. 235) – for all the good it did him and his surroundings.

<sup>15</sup> *Harðar saga*, ch. V, pp. 12–15.

<sup>16</sup> Pace Schottmann 2000, pp. 245–246, who rather accuses the episode of a brittle narrative logic.

## The Narrative Uses of Toponyms in *Harðar saga*

surroundings. One such passage is the account of the raid on the farm inhabited by the sorceress Skroppa.<sup>17</sup> The passage is too long to be quoted in full, but the relevant points can also be illustrated on a close summary:

In this episode, Hörðr decides to raid the farm of Þorsteinn Oxen-Spike, which is protected by the magic powers of Þorsteinn's foster-mother Skroppa. As the outlaws land their boat by the farm, they see a big bull (*gríðungr mikill*) nearby; when two of Hörðr's men throw spears at this bull, the spears rebound and kill the men. When the raiders reach the farmhouse, Skroppa and the farmer's two daughters are at home, but Þorsteinn himself is away on the alp in Kúvallardalr, »Cow Field's Valley«,<sup>18</sup> which is in Svínadalr, »Valley of Pigs« (*Þorsteinn var í seli í Kúvallardal; þat er í Svínadal*). In the farmhouse, Skroppa creates illusionary chests which tempt the Hólmverjar, but which Hörðr recognises for the illusions they are. When the Hólmverjar now try to find some sheep to steal, they see a sow with two piglets (*gyltr ein [...] með tveimr grísum*) running away. Then they see a large force of armed men approaching, with the sow and the piglets standing to the north of these warriors. Hörðr then kills the sow with a thrown stone; now the Hólmverjar see that the sow had been Skroppa, whereas the piglets had been the farmer's daughters. Also the approaching warriors now turn out to be, in reality, a herd of cattle. The outlaws drive off these cattle and abduct one of the girls. Skroppa is buried in Skroppugil, »Skroppa's Glen«.

I would argue that this little passage, which characteristically ends with the creation of a place-name that henceforth memorialises it in the landscape, has been composed with greatest attention to detail.<sup>19</sup> In terms of »normal« narrative structure, one can note the illusionary chests created by Skroppa, which anticipate the chest that, one chapter later in the saga, will be at the core of the Bollastaðir-episode (already discussed above). One should also note the elegantly inverted relationship between cattle and warriors: whereas the (apparently more or less real) bull which the outlaws meet at the beginning of the raid is rather more able to resist their attack than they had thought, the warriors they meet at the end of the raid are rather less able to do so than originally feared, being mere illusions conjured up on the basis of a herd of cows. Thus, at the end of the episode, the bovine encounter from its beginning is turned on its head. This careful composition makes it striking that the animals which play the main roles in the little drama unfolding here are the very same animals that also are at the basis of the place-names mentioned roughly in the middle of the episode: Kúvallardalr, »Cow Field's Valley«, and Svínadalr, »Valley of Pigs«. Strikingly, while the episode otherwise is quite economically told, these two valleys as such play no role for how the action unfolds; the only important point is Þorsteinn's absence, while his exact whereabouts are utterly irrelevant. Yet nevertheless this detail is given. In such a densely-woven story, the question should be asked why this is the case, and as an answer I propose that the storyteller introduces these cattle- and pig-toponyms as a foil that mirrors the episode's animal plot, which revolves around (magical) cattle and pigs.

<sup>17</sup> *Harðar saga*, ch. XXVI, pp. 67–68.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Kellogg 1997, p. 225; Þórhallur Vilmundarson 1991, p. XXXI.

<sup>19</sup> *Pace* its negative assessment by Schottmann 2000, pp. 238, 246–247, which merely shows that more attention needs to be paid to saga toponymy than is normally done.

Arguably something similar seems to be going on two chapters later in the saga, even though (in contrast to the Skroppa-episode) there the places that provide the central keywords for the story also are physically part of the narrative. In ch. 28, the raiding party of the Hólmverjar lands at Sjálfkvíar, the »Self-Pens«.<sup>20</sup> A *kví* is a fold or pen, particularly one used for managing sheep, and the compound probably refers to an »auto-generated« instance of such a pen, i.e. a natural rock formation that suggested itself for use for this purpose.<sup>21</sup> Having arrived there, the Hólmverjar begin driving down sheep from a nearby mountain pasture. The farmer of the closest farm, stepping out of his farmhouse apparently half-dressed merely in a »shirt and linen trousers« (*í skyrtu ok línbrókum*) – the scene and phrasing suggest he is wearing the Icelandic equivalent of pyjamas –,<sup>22</sup> spots them and assembles a large number of men from the surrounding farms, not taking action until they have superior numbers. Meanwhile, Hörðr organises his outlaws into two groups: one is to slaughter the sheep and dress their meat while the other one is to hold off the farmers. Anticipating heavy losses among the men fighting the superior force of the farmers, Hörðr also decrees that every time one of the defending party falls, a member of the butchering party is to step in as a replacement to maintain their fighting strength. »That was extraordinary, how gallantly Hörðr defended the sheep-pens« (*Var þat at frágerðum, hversu rösklíga at Hörðr varði kvíarnar*), while the numbers of the attacking farmers continue to increase and Hörðr's men, vastly outnumbered from the beginning, continue both heroically to fall around him and to work hard on slaughtering and dressing the sheep and putting the meat into the boat. Especially *Geirr var eigi handseinn at drepa féit ok gera til eptir*, »Geirr was not slow at slaughtering the livestock and making it ready afterwards«. In the end, the Hólmverjar put to sea with their booty after having suffered extremely heavy losses. They row past Katanes and Kalmansárvík, but are pursued by the farmers; the name of the former place is established when the fleet of the farmers comes round this headland, as this prompts Hörðr to name it: »Then Hörðr gave the peninsula its name and called it *Katanes*, »Peninsula of the Boats«, because it seemed to him that many a boat (*kati*) came forward there.« (*Þá gaf Hörðr nafn nesinu ok kallaði Katanes, því at honum þótti þar margr kati fyrir fara.*) This is followed by a small-scale sea battle in which the farmers are beaten back.<sup>23</sup>

Here, two place-names correlate with two battles: the place-name Sjálfkvíar with the battle of the sheep pens, and the toponym Katanes with the final naval battle. Again, the degree of attention paid to compositional detail makes it highly unlikely that this is in any way due to chance. During the battle of the sheep pens, the saga constructs a beautifully grotesque parallelism between the slaughtering of the outlaws by the superior force of the farmers and the slaughtering of the sheep by the outlaws: as the ranks of the raiders dwindle, so do the ranks of the sheep. The grotesqueness of what is happening here is underlined not least by the absurd detail that the outlaws, instead of simply throwing the sheep into their boats and making a quick escape, tarry to slaughter the animals and even

<sup>20</sup> *Harðar saga*, ch. XXVIII, pp. 70–73.

<sup>21</sup> Þórhallur Vilmondarson & Bjarni Vilhjálmsón 1991, p. 70 (note 4); cf. Cleasby & Gudbrand Vigfusson 1874, s. v. »kví«.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Cleasby & Gudbrand Vigfusson 1874, s. v. »skyrt« (meaning 2).

<sup>23</sup> All quotations from *Harðar saga*, ch. XXVIII, pp. 70–73.

## The Narrative Uses of Toponyms in *Harðar saga*

dress the meat while still on the mainland and under attack: on both sides of the sheep pens' defensive rock wall, long drawn-out butchery is being celebrated with relish and not the faintest trace of realism. As the outlaws, by their own doing, let themselves be slaughtered like sheep, one wonders what exactly the toponym »Self-Pens« is referring to: sheep or outlaws?

Both the mock-heroism of the first battle and the way how it seems mirrored in the associated toponym may have a counterpart in the »mock-etymology« that precedes the second battle of this episode. Historically, the toponym Katanes is a transferral from the Norse colonies in Scotland, where Katanes was the Norse name of Caithness, the northern tip of the Scottish mainland.<sup>24</sup> In *Landnámabók* (H21), the first settler at Katanes is a certain Kalman, who is explicitly said to have been Irish and whose name is a simple borrowing from the Gaelic onomasticon (<OIr. Colmán); this may suggest that there was a degree of awareness in medieval Iceland that the place-name Katanes had Gaelic connotations. *Harðar saga*, however, ignores these Scottish-Gaelic roots of Katanes and instead re-etymologises (mock-etymologises?) the Scottish place-name as a »Peninsula of Boats« that can serve as a fitting, and (after the battle of the sheep pens) perhaps fittingly ironic, introduction for a naval skirmish. That the author of *Harðar saga* may be mis-etymologising Katanes very consciously could be indicated by the mentioning of Kalmansárvík: name-dropping the Gaelic settler Kalman/Colmán through the toponym »Colmán's River's Bay«, the saga writer may be reminding his audience of the traditional associations of Katanes – which are with Caithness in Scotland and thus with the Gaelic world, not with boats full of angry farmers.

This general mock-heroic and gorily bucolic tone, and the interlinking of toponymy and saga action, is continued in the next chapter.<sup>25</sup> In the winter after the »Battle of the Sheep Pens«, the Hólmverjar again undertake a raid for livestock. The route of their raid, in which they carry off eighty sheep, leads them through Álptarskarð (»Swan's Pass«), Svínadalr (»Valley of Pigs«), Skorradalr (»Oystercatcher[?] Valley«; *skorri* is a kind of bird, possibly an oystercatcher),<sup>26</sup> past Skorradalvatn (»Oystercatcher[?] Valley's Lake«), onto Geldingadragi (»Wethers' Trail«), and finally to Gorvík (»Cud Bay«, <sup>27</sup> cud being the semi-digested fodder that is chewed again by ruminants). This remarkably zoological assemblage of place-names seems to suggest that animal theft goes hand in hand with animal toponymy and ends with the act of eating. »Cud Bay«, seen from this perspective, is a particularly fitting

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<sup>24</sup> Fellows-Jensen 1996, p. 122; Bandle 1977, p. 63, cf. p. 66.

<sup>25</sup> *Harðar saga*, ch. XXIX, pp. 74–75.

<sup>26</sup> Cleasby & Gudbrand Vigfusson 1874, s.v. »skorri«, identify the meaning of the word as »a bird, the pie (?)«. In mid- and late-nineteenth century Britain, »pie« would have been a normal name for the bird now generally known as »magpie« (Lockwood 1993, s.v. »pie«). However, there are no magpies in Iceland (species factsheet *Pica pica* from BirdLife International at <<http://www.birdlife.org>>, last accessed 25/11/2017). Toponyms formed with *skorra-* as the first name element are found for a variety of maritime, coastal, and slightly inland locations, cf. <<http://ornefnasja.lmi.is/>> (last accessed 25/11/2017); their distribution would dovetail nicely with the habitats of the oystercatcher, a distinctive (black and white with an orange bill) and fairly large wader species that breeds in grassland and often feeds on rocks and skerries. Furthermore, its older name was »sea pie«; this name remained in use until some point in the twentieth century (Lockwood 1993, s.v. »sea pie«, »oystercatcher«). Maybe the »sea pie«/oystercatcher was in fact the bird that Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson had in mind.

<sup>27</sup> Þórhallur Vilmundarson 1991, p. XXXI.

place-name for the last waypoint before the sheep are carried off to the outlaws' island, as after this point the only thing the stolen sheep are going to undergo is being chewed and digested.

The following spring, another raid is undertaken.<sup>28</sup> During this raid, a herd of cattle is first driven away but then (with Hörðr's consent) returned home by a cowherd boy; this leads to the creation of the toponym Kúhallardalr, »Cow Slope Valley«. <sup>29</sup> To make up for the lost cows, the outlaws then steal the pigs of the farmers in the valley Svínadalr (»Valley of Pigs«), which they slaughter on the beach and load into their ship; *þar heitir nú Svínasandr*, »the place there is now called Beach of Pigs«. Again, plot and toponymy dovetail completely.

Perhaps the most striking instance, in its convoluted and yet simple brevity, of a place-name as a keyword reflecting, and perhaps inspiring, elements of the plot is the account of the death of Hörðr's foster-brother Geirr:<sup>30</sup>

[Ormr] skaut eptir Geir gaflaki, ok kom í milli herða honum, ok fekk hann af því bana. Hann var lofaðr mjök af þessu verki. Þar heitir Geirstangi, er líkit rak á land.

[Ormr] threw a javelin after Geirr, and it hit him between his shoulders, and from that he died. He [i.e., Ormr] was much praised for this deed. The place where the body was washed ashore is called Geirstangi, »Geirr's Point«.

Today, Geirstangi is the name of the westernmost end of the peninsula Þyrilsnes, a rather long and narrow peninsula projecting into the Hvalfjörður fjord.<sup>31</sup> Þórhallur Vilmundarson has suggested that, rather than being derived from a personal name, this toponym could originally have been topographically descriptive, making reference to the pointed shape of the headland: since *geirr* is a normal Old Norse word for »spear«, Geirstangi could have been »Spear Point« rather than »Geirr's Point«. <sup>32</sup> Topographically at least, such an interpretation would make perfect sense. If this is so, however, then this toponym would have given rise to the character Geirr (»Spear«), whose body supposedly was washed ashore there. Furthermore, I would suggest that also the weapon that killed this Geirr takes up this play with the semantics of Old Norse words and names: it hardly seems by chance that a person derived from a »Spear Point« and himself called »Spear« is, of all things, killed with a throwing spear. The events that the saga ascribes to this place thus would seem to be derived directly, in a multilayered fashion, from its name.

To conclude this section with a somewhat speculative note, one may wonder whether the playfulness of *Harðar saga's* engagement with the local toponymy even extends to an implicit play with toponyms that are not actually mentioned in the saga. It has to be emphasised that such an interpretation must necessarily remain highly

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<sup>28</sup> *Harðar saga*, ch. XXIX, pp. 74–75.

<sup>29</sup> Kellogg 1997, p. 225.

<sup>30</sup> *Harðar saga*, ch. XXXV, p. 85.

<sup>31</sup> Kálund 1877–1882, vol. 1, pp. 290–291.

<sup>32</sup> Þórhallur Vilmundarson 1991, pp. XXXVI–XXXVII. In general on the very common phenomenon that stories explaining place-names often are secondarily derived from these place-names rather than reflecting their historical origins cf., e.g., Andersson 1964, p. 70; Vikstrand 2001, p. 20.

## The Narrative Uses of Toponyms in *Harðar saga*

speculative, as it can only be based on working backwards from the area's modern toponymy, even though it is anything but clear whether there really is an unbroken continuity between today's toponymy and the toponymy of the fourteenth century. With this *caveat* in mind, however, one can still wonder about the naming of Dögurðarnes. The saga explains this toponym in the following manner:<sup>33</sup>

Þeir átu dögurð um morgininn eptir á nesi því innanverðu, er þeir kölluðu Dögurðarnes síðan.

The following morning, they ate breakfast on the inner part of the headland which they then called Breakfast Headland.

Within Icelandic toponymy, the place-name »Breakfast Headland« (*Dögurðarnes*) is not unprecedented.<sup>34</sup> Yet by the second half of the nineteenth century at the latest, no such name was to be found in the local toponymy of the Hvalfjörður area: already in the 1870s, P. E. Kristian Kálund, while trying to relate the saga plot to the local topography and toponymy, recorded only the name »Þyrilsnes« for the headland.<sup>35</sup> This, perhaps, makes it curious that a slope towards the western end of Þyrilsnes is, at least today, called Smjörbrekkur: »Butter Slopes«.<sup>36</sup> Is »Breakfast Headland« a purely fictional name that plays on a real-world toponymy which itself remains entirely hidden, as a kind of private (or perhaps better: local) joke for an audience in the know about the lay of the land?

### Riding in the mind

In the instances of place-name use discussed so far, toponyms are, in various ways, used playfully, and thus help to furnish the saga narrative with additional colour or additional layers of meaning. *Harðar saga*, however, also contains a number of accounts of itineraries where long strings of toponyms are recounted that seem to contain neither any kind of witty play with the semantics of place-names nor to add anything else to the story. At first glance, such itineraries merely seem to provide remarkably pedantic localisations of minor parts of the action; for instance:<sup>37</sup>

Um fardagaskeið reið Grímkell goði heiman út í Ölfus um Hjalla, en utan um Arnarbæli ok upp eptir Flóa í Oddgeirshóla, þaðan í Grímsnes ok gisti í Laugardal ok svá heim.

Around the time of the moving days, Grímkell the Priest rode from home out into Ölfus past Hjalli, and upcountry past Arnarbæli, and up along Flói to Oddgeirshólar, from there into Grímsnes and stayed overnight in Laugardalr, and thus home.

Or (still in the same chapter):<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup> *Harðar saga*, ch. XXXII, p. 80.

<sup>34</sup> For a discussion cf. Þórhallur Vilmundarson 1991, pp. XXXII–XXXIII.

<sup>35</sup> Kálund 1877–1882, vol. 1, p. 290.

<sup>36</sup> *Landmælingar Íslands* at <<http://ornefnasja.lmi.is/>>, 28/05/2017, s.v. »Smjörbrekkur (Hvalfjarðarsveit)«.

<sup>37</sup> *Harðar saga*, ch. X, p. 25.

<sup>38</sup> *Harðar saga*, ch. X, p. 26.

Þeir riðu um Gjábakka, svá til Klupta ok um Ok; svá ina neðri leið ofan hjá Augastöðum ok svá á Breiðabólstað.

They rode past Gjábakki, thus to Kluptir and past Ok; thus the lower road down by Augastaðir and thus to Breiðabólstaðr.

Or one chapter later:<sup>39</sup>

Þeir fóru yfir fjörð til Kjalarness ok fyrir norðan Mosfell ok svá upp hjá Vilborgarkeldu, þaðan til Jórúkleifar ok svá til Hagavíkr ok svá heim til Ölfusvatns ok kómu snemma dags.

They crossed the fjord to Kjalarnes and travelled north of Mosfell and thus up by Vilborgarkelda, thence to Jórúkleif and thus to Hagavík and thus home to Ölfusvatn, and arrived early in the day.

As is the case with the genealogies so profusely found in Icelandic saga literature, such strings of place-names can, to the modern reader, at first glance seem like boring and irrelevant details.<sup>40</sup> Yet given the care that *Harðar saga* devotes to its treatment of place-names elsewhere, the last thing such strings of toponyms are likely to be is irrelevant. The question is: what do they mean? There are two fundamental ways of how to approach this question: through external comparison and text-internally. Both approaches can be argued to point in a rather similar direction.

As an external comparison, I would like to point to something that Keith Hamilton Basso has noted in the context of his long-term ethnographic study of the use of place-names and place-lore among the Western Apache. Like Icelandic place-names, Western Apache toponyms are semantically clear and descriptive, though they tend to be longer and more detailed; most of them indeed provide little vignettes of the place whose essence they try to capture. Basso's study has a strong focus on how these place-names are used in Apache society to help maintain the moral standards of the members of this society.<sup>41</sup> More pertinent to the matter at hand, however, is an observation he made while helping to mend a fence in the Western Apache reservation of Cibecue:

[S]everal years ago, when I was stringing a barbed-wire fence with two Apache cowboys from Cibecue, I noticed that one of them was talking quietly to himself. When I listened carefully, I discovered that he was reciting a list of place-names – a long list, punctuated only by spurts of tobacco juice, that went on for nearly ten minutes. Later, when I ventured to ask him about it, he said he »talked names« all the time. Why? »I like to,« he said. »I ride that way in my mind.«<sup>42</sup>

Basso puts this little occurrence into the context of many others like it, as well as relating it to conventions of Apache storytelling (both of the everyday, informal and of the traditional variety), where the use of place-names for their own sake is widely seen as enjoyable in itself and aesthetically appreciated: the descriptive nature of Apache place-names allows them to evoke the places they refer to, which makes their use intrinsically

<sup>39</sup> *Harðar saga*, ch. XI, pp. 29–30.

<sup>40</sup> On the importance of genealogies as narrative devices cf. Egeler 2016, pp. 278–289.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Basso 1996; Basso 1984.

<sup>42</sup> Basso 1984, p. 27.

## The Narrative Uses of Toponyms in *Harðar saga*

gratifying.<sup>43</sup> The descriptive, place-evoking power of Apache place-names also means that they are used in storytelling to situate the action of a tale: being intrinsically descriptive, they can stand in for discursive descriptions of places. If an Apache storyteller wants their audience to have a mental picture of a place, they do not have to characterise it narratively; they merely have to mention its name.<sup>44</sup> Returning to *Harðar saga*, this makes one wonder whether something similar might not stand behind the way how place-names are used in giving accounts of overland travel in Iceland: are seemingly bare strings of toponyms given perhaps because they too create mental images of places? Note how graphic some of them are: the toponym *Hjalli*, one of the names quoted above in the first excerpt from ch. 10,<sup>45</sup> is the same word as the noun *hjalli*, which designates a shelf or ledge in a mountainside.<sup>46</sup> The two place-names mentioned immediately afterwards are equally visual: *Arnarbæli* as a noun is an »eagle's dwelling«, an *eyri*.<sup>47</sup> *Flói* as a noun designates a marshy moor or a bay or large firth.<sup>48</sup> Are enumerations of place-names as those quoted above perhaps comparable less to a string of coordinates than to a sequence of little landscape paintings, and were they as such intrinsically enjoyable to their originally intended audience, making them »ride in the mind«?

Some corroboration for such an interpretation is perhaps provided by the account that *Harðar saga* gives of Hróarr's and Hörðr's journey to the burial mound of the semi-dead Sóti in Gautland, somewhere in the forests of Sweden.<sup>49</sup>

En er vár kom, bjóst Hróarr við tólfta mann til haugs Sóta. Þeir riðu um skóg þykkvan; ok í einhverjum stað sá Hörðr, hvar lá af skógarbrautinni lítill leynistígr; hann ríðr þenna stíg, þar til er hann kemr í eitt rjóðr; þar sér hann standa eitt hús, bæði mikit ok skrautligt.

And when spring came, Hróarr made himself ready to go to Sóti's mound in a group of twelve. They rode through a dense forest; and at one place Hörðr saw, where a small hidden track led off from the forest path; he rides this track, until he comes into a clearing; there he sees a house standing, both big and splendid.

This account, representing the beginning of the journey to Sóti's mound, shows two marked differences from the accounts of journeys in Iceland that I have quoted above: first, the account of the journey undertaken in Sweden does not contain a single place-name, whereas the accounts of journeys undertaken in Iceland had consisted almost exclusively of place-names; and second, whereas the accounts of Icelandic journeys had contained no elements of place- or landscape-descriptions, the Swedish travel account does in fact try to evoke the visual aspect of the landscape through discursive means: it mentions a forest and a clearing, adjectives are used to

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp. 26–27.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>45</sup> *Harðar saga*, ch. X, p. 25.

<sup>46</sup> Cleasby & Gudbrand Vigfusson 1874, s.v. »hjalli«.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., s.v. »bæli«.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., s.v. »flói«. Both places are mentioned in the quoted passage from *Harðar saga*, ch. X, p. 25.

<sup>49</sup> *Harðar saga*, ch. XV, p. 39.

specify the impressions created by the things observed on the way (the forest is »dense« [*þykkir*], the track »small« [*lítil*], the house »big« and »splendid« [*mikill, skrautligr*]), and characteristics of the surroundings are captured by descriptive compounds (*skógarbraut*, »forest path«; *leynistígr*, »hidden track«). At first glance, *Harðar saga* seems to describe travel in Iceland and in Sweden in fundamentally different ways. Yet Basso's observations on the use of place-names in narrative suggest that this impression may be misleading: perhaps the Icelandic travel accounts are different from the Swedish one only in that the saga author, when dealing with Iceland, is able to draw on the evocative power of local place-names, whereas when dealing with Sweden he and his audience have no access to the local toponymy and thus he has to take recourse to discursive description rather than toponymic evocation. The Swedish travel account perhaps shows us how the saga's travel accounts were meant to be perceived – as descriptive, evocative, and highly visual – and thus shows us the effect that the place-name itineraries of the saga's Icelandic parts had on an Icelandic audience: taking this audience »riding in the mind«.

## Conclusions

### Functions of place-names in research to date

Current approaches to place-names and to the role of named places both in human culture in general and in Old Norse culture more specifically tend to emphasise a wide range of functions that place-names and named places can have, but generally the functions taken into focus tend to underline the importance that toponyms can have for the social construction of reality, cultural identity, and history. Thus, in a broadly anthropological perspective, Christopher Tilley has (as already mentioned at the beginning of this article) strongly emphasised the function of place-names as investing places with »meaning and significance«,<sup>50</sup> and particularly has viewed place-names as »mnemonics« that anchor the history of groups and persons in the landscape.<sup>51</sup> In the study of Norse place-names, this function has not least been emphasised by Stefan Brink.<sup>52</sup> Others have emphasised their crucial importance for the creation of »memory places« that are charged with meaning in the form of »cultural memories«; in an Old Norse context, especially Pernille Hermann should here be mentioned.<sup>53</sup> Hermann, with a view in particular to the founding legends presented in Icelandic saga literature, has emphasised the contribution that place-names in these texts make to the establishment of different time layers (relating the time in which a place was named to the present in which the story about this act of naming is being told), has highlighted how

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<sup>50</sup> Tilley 1994, p. 18; above, p. 83.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 18, cf. p. 59 and Basso 1996, p. 62.

<sup>52</sup> Brink 2013, p. 35; Brink 2001, pp. 80–81 (esp. p. 80: »The mnemotechnic »pegs« in use to remember myths are extraordinary natural objects, remarkable ancient monuments, other man-made structures and especially place names in the landscape. As long as the place names are remembered, they preserve the myths.« Cf. p. 81: »Some of these [stories] may even produce place names attached to the physical object, something that we have a lot in the Book of Settlement in Iceland. In this way, the landscape becomes the history, the past of the people living in that territory.«).

<sup>53</sup> Hermann 2010.

## The Narrative Uses of Toponyms in *Harðar saga*

toponyms give the past a place in the space of the present, and has underlined how they thus contribute to guaranteeing the continued existence of memories of the past in this present. The last aspect in particular is of fundamental importance not least because, as she argues, these memories of the past constitute the foundation for a »new social space« in the present. Hermann thus sees place-names in such saga narratives as part of a process of »literary mapping« that »imposes a superstructure of meaning on the landscape which is crucial for the conception of ›Iceland‹ and its various localities.«<sup>54</sup> In this way, place-names become a central element of Icelandic identity construction. Furthermore, the conceptual mapping that is achieved through place-names and their associated stories is often thought to contribute to providing orientation. Drawing on hypertext theory, this function of place-names has recently been foregrounded by Emily Lethbridge, who highlights the function of place-names to hold narratives »in crystalised form« and emphasises the importance of such narratives to »help [Icelanders] understand their place in the world physically and existentially«.<sup>55</sup>

Another classic function ascribed to places which through place-names have become drawn into narratives is their ability to confirm stories connected with them: if a story can be related about the name of a place, this not only gives a deeper meaning to the place, but inversely it also illustrates the truth of the story; in a Norse context, this has recently been argued by Joonas Ahola in his discussion of the Icelandic outlaw sagas.<sup>56</sup> In this discussion, Ahola also takes up the classic function of place-names as tools for the creation of a meaningful space by discussing the semanticisation of geographically marginal spaces through place-names connected with outlaws. Thus, he suggests that in this literature some outlaws are placed into a similar functional slot as the first settlers of Iceland, since they are depicted as the first men to have settled the most marginal spaces of the country. As an example, he points to the naming of the mountain ledge *Grímsbyggðir*, »Grímr's Dwellings«, which in *Droplaugarsona saga* was so named because the outlaw Grímr Droplaugarson stayed there for a while.<sup>57</sup>

### The functions of place-names in *Harðar saga*

All these interpretations may well be true, and in the right circumstances all of them certainly are. Yet the narrative use of place-names in *Harðar saga* seems to have its focus elsewhere. Just as in the case of *Droplaugarsona saga* discussed by Ahola, the presence of the Hólmverjar gives their temporary abode a new name: because of them, the island formerly called simply Hólmr becomes Geirshólmr:<sup>58</sup> *Sá hólmr er nú kallaðr Geirshólmr; tók hann nafn af Geir Grímssyni.* »That island is now called Geirshólmr; it took the name from Geirr

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 76, 78–79; cf. Glauser 2000.

<sup>55</sup> Lethbridge 2016 (quotes: p. 83).

<sup>56</sup> Ahola 2014, p. 258 (»[a]lready a mere place name may metonymically imply a whole narrative, or a place name could be leaned upon in arguing the correspondence of the narrative to reality«); Assmann 1999, pp. 21, 55, 299, 305; Tilley 1994, p. 33; Malinowski 1922, p. 302 (more generally about this as a function of places, where, however, it has to be mediated through a place-name, cf. Brink 2001, p. 80). In passing see also Lethbridge 2016, p. 66.

<sup>57</sup> Ahola 2014, p. 256; *Droplaugarsona saga*, ch. XIV, pp. 175–176.

<sup>58</sup> *Harðar saga*, ch. XXIV, p. 65.

Grímsson,« Hörðr's most important and most intimate companion. Yet this abode, in difference to the example highlighted by Ahola, is anything but marginal; rather, it is an island smack in the middle of a densely settled fjord on the western Icelandic coast, one of the most densely settled parts of the country. Furthermore, the episodes of Bollastaðir and Grímsstaðir, both of which describe how the established land-owning class is unable to cope and thus ends up handing women and land over to slaves and servants, are more likely to subvert the order of society rather than to inscribe it into the land, as classical approaches to the semanticisation of the land through place-names would have let one to suspect. One may note in particular how telling it is that the latter two episodes use place-names whose formation expresses a property situation (»Bolli's Steads«; »Grímr's Steads«) to undermine the naturalness of the distribution of land ownership. Other place-name episodes in *Harðar saga* also jar with conventional approaches to the cultural role and importance of toponyms. The episode of the sorceress Skroppa uses place-names as keywords in the construction of a burlesque narrative that actually has nothing to do with the places on whose names it draws. The Sjúlfkvíar-episode, with its parallelism between the slaughtering of warriors and the slaughtering of sheep, is deeply mock-heroic and has virtually nothing serious about it. The episode of »Cud Bay« and the other zoological toponyms connected with it seems to construct, again, a slightly grotesque parallel between the outlaws and ruminants – though in this case through the metaphor of digestion rather than that of slaughter. (Yet note that the immediately preceding Sjúlfkvíar-slaughter had its sole purpose in providing something to digest, which may interlink the two episodes in an equally subtle and ironic way.) Even the account of the heroic death of Geirr and the naming of Geirstangi seems to be, first and foremost, a literary play with a place-name that manages to tie together the name of a person, the weapon used in this person's killing, the toponym, and the shape of a physical feature of the landscape. Not a single one of these place-name stories seems to be intent on the construction of »meaning and significance« in the serious sense in which these terms are commonly used in the discourse on space, place, and landscape. Also the use of place-names for »riding in the mind« has no apparent further motivation but to add additional colour and spatial depth to the narrative, and thus to add to its aesthetic quality. Place-names, in this saga, seem to be used in a variety of ways, but all of these usages appear to be narrative strategies in the service of the construction of a deeply ironic, mock-heroic, and most of all entertaining story. One may wonder whether this fourteenth-century saga reflects an ironic take on issues of the semanticisation of space which earlier, thirteenth-century writing perhaps may still have taken more seriously, at least gradually so. Perhaps it is significant that Pernille Hermann develops her »memory«-focused approach to saga place-names on the examples of comparatively early, »classical« texts from the thirteenth century, drawing on *Landnámabók* and *Vatnsdæla saga*.<sup>59</sup> It is just possible that these early texts represent the »Modernism« to *Harðar saga*'s »Postmodernism«.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Hermann 2010, pp. 76–77. Cf. Faulkes 1983, pp. 12–14.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Faulkes' (1983, p. 9) assessment that »the Saga of Hord is probably the least historical of the outlaw sagas, perhaps among the least historical of the Icelandic sagas as a whole«, and his corresponding comparison of the degrees of narrative realism and other elements of style in the three outlaw sagas: Faulkes 1983, pp. 12–14. Schottmann 2000, p. 242 highlights the irony which some episodes of *Harðar saga* develop by playfully harking back to established narrative patterns. A systematic study of the younger

## The Narrative Uses of Toponyms in *Harðar saga*

However that may be, rather than serving the construction of »meaning and significance« in the conventional, serious sense, the narrative use of place-names in *Harðar saga* appears to be focused primarily (if not purely) on adding to the narrative colour and entertainment value of the saga. This, to summarise, it does by employing the following strategies: the saga explains place-names through subversive stories (Bollastaðir; Grímsstaðir; perhaps also the grotesque Sjúlfkvíar-episode); it playfully interlinks episodes with the semantics of place-names that, as locations, are actually inessential for the plot (Kúvallardalr and Svínadalr in the Skroppa-episode; the zoological toponymy of the Gorrík-episode as the background scenery for a theft of animals); it wittily dovetails the semantics of toponyms with the action taking place there (Sjúlfkvíar; Kúhallardalr and Svínadalr in its second connection with a raid; Geirstangi); and it uses the semantics of place-names for adding an ironic subtext (Gorrík/»Cud Bay«; perhaps Sjúlfkvíar, if there is an undertone that the name refers to the »self-penning« of the outlaws as much as to the penning of sheep). Furthermore, *Harðar saga* employs place-names to evoke landscapes as part of travel accounts.

An analysis of *Harðar saga* through its toponymy suggests a reading which sees the narrative primarily as tongue-in-cheek and mock-heroic. This may correlate with the remarkable contrast between *Harðar saga* and the two other extant outlaw sagas, *Grettis saga* and *Gísli saga*: as Anthony Faulkes, Jamie Cochrane, and Joonas Ahola have highlighted, whereas Grettir and Gísli have to endure loneliness and solitude during their time as outlaws – a condition which can indeed be seen as a fundamental characteristic of them being outlaws – Hörðr enjoys the company of his wife and children, his foster-brother Geirr, and a retinue of up to 180 men.<sup>61</sup> In effect, this gives Hörðr a larger retinue than some contemporary kings would have been able to claim as their own. In so far as it is possible to speak of »outlaw sagas« as a genre, one wonders whether this state of affairs might not best be viewed as a deliberate breach of genre conventions, a tongue-in-cheek commentary that underlines that the story of Hörðr is in an altogether different category from the much more genuinely tragic tales of Gísli and Grettir: an exercise in mock-heroism. In this spirit, I will conclude this discussion of *Harðar saga* with a quotation taken from the saga's final chapter, which, while not itself employing any place-names, so beautifully dovetails with the impression created by the saga's usage of place-names that it may be allowed to stand without further comment, to serve as a corroboration of the conclusions drawn from my analysis of the saga's toponymy:<sup>62</sup>

Skeifr hét maðr, er bjó á Hvítárvöllum, félitill maðr. Þess gátu sumir, at hann mundi hafa drepit sára menn ok tekit síðan góða gripi, þá sem Þórðr hafði haft með sér ok aldri spurðist til síðan. Skeifr fór utan ok kom aldri út síðan ok varð vellauðigr at fê.

A man was called Skeifr, who lived at Hvítárvellir, a poor man. Some people surmised that he had killed the wounded men and then taken a goodly treasure, the one which Þórðr had had with him and which

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sagas in this perspective might yield interesting results; cf. already Würth 1999 on parodic elements in *Hænsa-Þóris saga*. That playful uses of place-names were not entirely absent from earlier literature either, however, is exemplified by the treatment of the toponym Dritsker in *Eyrbyggja saga*. Egeler 2017.

<sup>61</sup> Faulkes 1993, p. 269; Cochrane 2007, p. 67; Ahola 2014, p. 113.

<sup>62</sup> *Harðar saga*, ch. XLI, p. 96.

afterwards was never heard of again. Skeifr went abroad and never came back again, and he became very rich in livestock.

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