

Chapter 1

Some Thoughts on the Supernatural, the Fantastic and the Paranormal in Medieval and Modern Literature

Arngrímur Vídalín

Center for Research in the Humanities, University of Iceland

What does 'supernatural' mean?

We tend to imagine that we know very much what terms such as 'supernatural' mean, and even that we all always understand them exactly as they were intended to be understood. It is all too easy to forget that context may make a world of difference, that 'the supernatural' can be taken to mean different things in different cultures, that different academic disciplines may view it and make use of it with varying emphasis and meaning, and of course that what would now be considered supernatural may not at all be the same as would have been thought of as being supernatural in previous centuries.

To know what is supernatural entails knowing what is not supernatural. What makes a particular being supernatural, and when, by the same token, does a supernatural being cease to be supernatural? Does the origin story of the being matter, if one is given? Dracula is originally a man, albeit bloodthirsty, who is then transformed into a literally bloodthirsty vampire. Is Dracula a supernatural creature, or is he a man with supernatural properties?

Do the supernatural properties he acquires, in other words, become such an integral part of him through his transformation into a vampire that he is made supernatural by them? In the world of the novel *Dracula*, what would it mean to be supernatural?

In Stephen King's *It*, the reader is introduced to a creature that by most people's standards is obviously supernatural: a vicious clown that attacks and brutally murders children and can take any form feared by them. The clown takes on the forms of the Wolfman, a mummy, and the father of Beverly Marsh, one of the main characters, to name a few examples. By the end of the novel, the monster is revealed to be some kind of ancient alien life form. Does it cease to be supernatural at this point, now that it has been revealed to be a force of nature older than humanity? Is the supernatural, in this sense, not something that merely seems to be contrary to nature until an explanation has been found, thus always remaining natural? Such a re-evaluation of the nature of the monster occurs in the 13th Century Icelandic saga *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, where a troll comes to the court of the Irish king, resulting in the panic and terror of everyone present. It is soon revealed that this troll has a name, Þórir járnskjöldr, and once he has been named, he assumes humanity and ceases to be a troll (cf. Á. Jakobsson 2009a: 192-193). But would a troll be supernatural? In fact, what is a troll? Even that term, as it is used in saga literature, has incredibly many layers of meaning, making trolls virtually impossible to define (Á. Jakobsson 2008: 105-110). I will come back to this point later on.

It seems to me, then, that there are two kinds of definitions of the supernatural making the rounds in academic discourse. The first is an understanding of the supernatural in modern terms, as something which does not belong to the natural world and thus cannot exist in reality (this is not to speak of what Alaric Hall has

aply named the ‘social reality’ of such phenomena in folk-belief, cf. Hall 2007:9). By this view, one may contend that vampires are supernatural, and that the alien monster of *It* is supernatural to the reader, because it can only exist inside the novel (or so we hope). I have previously used this approach to illustrate that most purportedly supernatural beings in the sagas of the Icelanders most definitely belong to the natural realm (i.e. that which is accepted as being either corporeally or spiritually real) of the saga universe (Vidalín 2012: 55-149). I have since come to realize that this approach is inherently flawed except when it is applied to modern literature, as I was applying an anachronistic understanding of the supernatural onto medieval texts (for an interesting comparison of different types of such ‘supernatural’ encounters, see Sävborg 2009; see also Vidalín 2013b, in which I compare this sense of the ‘supernatural’ with the ‘fantastic’). The other approach is to restrict ourselves to what ‘supernatural’ meant at the time of writing of the literature we aim to scrutinize – assuming we can reach a consensus on what that definition of the supernatural would entail. In the Middle Ages, the supernatural meant that which exists beyond nature, the higher powers: God and the divine order, miracles and angels (see e.g. Mitchell 2009: 285-287); demonic phenomena were supernatural as well, as according to Augustinian theology, nothing existed but through the virtue of God (cf. Vidalín 2013a: 181-186). In the dualist worldview of Medieval Catholicism, there could therefore exist two kinds of supernatural phenomena: *miraculosa* and *magica*, i.e. acts of God and the acts of the Devil. Those phenomena that belonged without certainty to either group, those of unexplained origin, were termed *mirabilia* (Tulinus 1999: 291-292).

Neither approach seems to me to be satisfactory when analyzing what traditionally has been categorized as ‘the supernatural’. The first approach is both inexact and anachronistic. To borrow

terminology from Hall (2007: 9), it relies too heavily on a modern understanding of objective reality while measuring Medieval social realities. The second approach, however, while accurate from the point of view of the theologian, idea-historian, or the folklorist, leads us in a wholly different direction from the monsters, werewolves, and “other beings from outside the observable natural world” (Mitchell 2009: 285) we are accustomed to think of when speaking of the supernatural. This is what I mean when I say that we all like to think that we know what we are talking about when we use words like ‘supernatural’, yet at the same time there is no good way of using them so as to make sure our choice of words is accurate and that everyone is on the same page. What the problem seems to come down to is thus a poor choice of words. The question is not as it seemed: what *is* the supernatural, as if that is necessarily what we are looking at, but rather: what *might be* an adequate term with which folklorists, historians, philologists, and literary critics alike might employ to group this mess of assorted phenomena to better understand them?

What might be the function(s) of the supernatural?

As with the supernatural as a general concept we all ironically claim to understand, so we tend to be certain (at least sometimes) that we can evaluate whether an occurrence is of supernatural origin based merely on a cursory reading of its description. It is rare that the question is posed: what, if anything, makes this particular encounter supernatural? And in what sense, if any, is it supernatural?

First, I would like to venture the thought that, through stigma attached to the very notion, we tend to think of the supernatural as something evil or foreboding. It is something negative or contrary to nature that awaits us, lurking out in the wilderness and the darkness, all too eager to tear us to bits in the blink of an eye

and carry our carcass to its lair. The supernatural may also be shocking to behold, whether good or ill. It may be an item imbued with magical properties, the act of a sorcerer or a witch, or the very person possessing said magical abilities. The supernatural need not be evil however. As Flint observes (1991: 33; cf. Mitchell 2009: 286), the difference between a good sorcerer and an evil one in the Augustinian view lies in their means and ends rather than the use of magic by itself. The supernatural may be also witnessed in an act of God, such as Jesus walking on a lake or re-animating the dead with positive results, though the dead may sometimes rise of their own accord, and this yields negative results as they wreak havoc upon the living. In Icelandic *afturgöngur* ('re-ambulants'), we may see elements of ghosts, zombies, and vampires all at once in the same creature. It is in the essence of the supernatural that it is something beyond our understanding, though we may sneak glimpses of its truth.

The supernatural is frequently manifested in some sort of challenge awaiting a protagonist to vanquish; had the protagonist not come along, it is implied, the supernatural would have been able to terrorize the innocent longer still. Often in modern works of fiction, the protagonist realizes that she or he is the only hope – such is the case in *It* and such is the case in John Carpenter's 1982 film *The Thing*. But this seems to be a more modern idea. In *Beowulf*, the eponymous hero must defeat the evil Grendel, for no one else seems capable of doing so. Beowulf then kills Grendel's mother and eventually he succumbs to a dragon. While there has been controversy over the nature of the mother (cf. Klaeber 1922; Gilliam 1961; Kuhn 1979; Stanley 1979; Trilling 2007), there is nothing to indicate that either she, her son, nor the dragon are supernatural, though arguably they are monsters (what constituted monstrosity in the Middle Ages is an issue I will deal with

separately). The Icelandic counterpart to Beowulf could be said to be Grettir Ásmundarson the Strong, a troll-hunter who, through an encounter with an *afturganga* named Glámr, loses his luck and eventually becomes outlawed from society and is himself likened to trolls, thus becoming the very thing he fought against. Grettir's encounter with a trollwoman at a farm very much resembles Beowulf's mortal fight with Grendel, and the ensuing combat with the trollwoman's male counterpart behind a waterfall is very much akin to Beowulf's fight with Grendel's mother (Jónsson 1946: 212–213, 214–216; Heaney 2000: 140–143, 144–145, respectively). These trolls are absolutely monstrous, not possessing any language as far as anyone knows, living in caves like animals, yet there is nothing in any sense of the word 'supernatural' about them that I can point my finger to, except if I were to passively equate everything monstrous with the supernatural.

The aforementioned battle that Grettir has with Glámr, on the other hand, could be said to have many supernatural elements. Glámr is a shepherd employed by the farmer Þórhallr in Forsæludalr when no one else dares watch over his sheep due to *reimleikar* – which would be directly translatable to 'haunting', although in Old Norse a haunting could either refer to the activity of ghosts or trolls, or both manifested in the same creature as later will be the case with Glámr himself (cf. Á. Jakobsson 2009b: 128–129; Á. Jakobsson 2008: *passim*). Glámr in his original human form is quite terrifying in appearance, signifying his borderline moral alignment, and he is unafraid of any hauntings or such things so he accepts the job of guarding Þórhallr's sheep almost too brazenly. This could be considered an act of hubris, as he is later found killed at the end of a long trail of destruction. The tracks indicate a great struggle and that the creature fought by Glámr must also have died from its injuries, although it is never found and thus never identified. After

his burial at a church, Glámr does not rest. Instead, he so violently haunts Forsæludalr that many inhabitants desert their farms. When he and Grettir meet, they wrestle so fiercely that everything is left broken in their wake, and finally when Grettir defeats him, the clouds move away from the moon so that he can see into Glámr's eyes, the sight of which is the only thing ever to frighten Grettir. At this moment, Glámr puts a curse on him that everything he will accomplish thereafter will be to his own detriment, that he will never reach his full potential in life, that Glámr's eyes will forever follow him in the darkness instilling mortal fear in him, and that he will die in exile. Grettir, regaining his strength, decapitates Glámr and puts his head by his rear (Jónsson 1946: 113-123), a common practice of exorcising ghosts in medieval Iceland (and of dispatching vampires in 18th Century Eastern Europe, cf. Á. Jakobsson 2010; Thorne 1999: 73; a closer comparison between the two may be found in Á. Jakobsson 2009b).

Glámr's curse is later fulfilled down to every detail: Grettir's actions eventually lead to his full outlawry from society, and his fear of the dark is crippling as he dares not dwell on his own in his hiding place on the island Drangey. It is implied that had Grettir not fought with Glámr, he would have reached his physical apex and become virtually indestructible, but that due to the curse his strength remains that of three to four men. But what kind of creature is Glámr, then? Torfi Tulinius offers the explanation for Glámr's re-ambulism that he is a heathen character slowly brought under the power of the Devil, so that he would be *mirabilia* bordering on *magica* (Tulinius 1999: 296). Glámr can thus be considered supernatural in both senses of the word as outlined before, but this is a rather rare occurrence in Old Norse literature except when it comes to those who come back from the dead (cf. Vídalín 2012).

The hero's role in literature remains the same: to prove one's valour in combat. Sometimes in doing so, the hero must fight powerful animals and horrible monsters. In *Brennu-Njáls saga*, the character Þorkell hákr is said, rather matter of factly, to have travelled abroad and killed a *finngálkn* and thereafter a flying dragon, *flugdreki* (Sveinsson 1954: 302–303). What *finngálkn* means in this context is uncertain, though frequently they are described as a kind of chimera, centaur, or other hybrid creature. That certainly seems strange enough in the mind of the modern reader, but such creatures and other kinds of monsters were without any doubt believed in the Middle Ages to inhabit foreign and especially faraway countries (see e.g. Vídalín 2013a; Friedman 1981; Mittman 2003). The nonchalant way in which Þorkell hákr is said to have disposed of said *finngálkn* and the dragon underlines the fact that the countries in which he encountered them, Finland and Estonia respectively, were considered far enough away from Iceland for it to be plausible that such creatures might inhabit them; in fact, Finland was considered a marginal place in the world by Icelandic and Scandinavian standards, and its inhabitants are frequently described as sorcerers and trolls (Pálsson 1997: 14–27; Vídalín 2013a: 191–204).

Thus it has increasingly become my opinion, the longer I have dealt with the term 'supernatural', that the supernatural does not really lie in the heart of what we are looking for. Unlike modern literature, monsters and the supernatural are rarely interlinked concepts in the Middle Ages. There are countless examples of monsters in historical literature from the advent of writing to modern times. The most influential school of teratology is derived, in part through Herodotus, from Pliny the Elder in his immense 1st Century AD work *Naturalis historia*. Pliny describes various monstrous peoples around the world, such as the headless Blemmyes who have faces in their chests, the Troglodytes who

live in caves, the Cynocephali who have the heads of dogs, the Anthropophagi, and many others. These monsters became extremely popular, prompting St. Augustine among others to find a solution to the problem they posed to the Christian worldview. St Augustine's answer was, as briefly touched upon earlier in this article: that monsters, should they exist, must be, as all other creatures, created by God. This became the default explanation in the Middle Ages, re-iterated by St Isidore in his *Etymologiae* in the 7th Century, and propagated from there all over Europe and all the way to Iceland (Vidalín 2013a: 178-191).

Never at any point in history were these monsters considered supernatural as far as I have seen. They have been associated with evil, the armies of the Antichrist, and the apocalypse, but in all the sources I have come across they are always considered to be actual nations of people living in their countries on the margins of the world. Sometimes monstrous births may occur, but I have found no indication of these being considered supernatural either; in fact it seems to have been considered a natural phenomenon that women might give birth to monsters should they experience shock or witness strange things during their pregnancy (cf. Roodenburg 1988; Shildrick 2002: 32-33), and I have found indications of such beliefs in Icelandic sources from the 14th Century, the scientific explanation for which is attributed to Hippocrates himself (Unger 1862: 178-9).

Supernatural or fantastic?

The same principle is in effect when we look at other creatures often associated with the supernatural. Are dragons supernatural? If so, then we must be able to explain how so. Are they supernatural because they cannot exist? Tell that to Medieval audiences of sagas and romances, who very much believed that such creatures could exist. Are they supernatural if they have the ability to speak, and if

so, what is the argument for that particular ability being supernatural when possessed by a dragon? Or do such creatures rather belong to the realm of ‘the fantastic’? It is, after all, not uncommon to find the presumption that ‘the fantastic’ must have something to do with dragons, or otherwise implausible elements of adventures. The problem with ‘the fantastic’ as a term is that it is even more vague and jejune than ‘the supernatural’.

The 2006 Saga Conference in Durham attempted, under the heading ‘the fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic literature’, to reach a better understanding of the term and its ramifications for Old Norse literature, and though the two massive volumes of preprints are among the greatest contributions to recent scholarship, the conference left ‘the fantastic’ just as poorly defined as it had been before, and it has rarely been touched upon since. A few examples of the problem will now follow.

Tatjana Jackson (2006: 426) understands the fantastic as “something created by imagination, not existing in reality” and that the term should therefore be applied “to the introduction of non-realistic details in the sagas that aimed to present the historical past.” The ‘definition-by-realism’ is widely invoked in scholarship, but as far as I can tell that definition is usually based on modern ideas of realism. It is rare to find attempts to grapple with what could seem real in the Middle Ages.

Vésteinn Ólason seems to me to equate ‘the fantastic’ with fantasy, and in the summary given in Icelandic, it becomes clear that he takes the word ‘fantastic’ to mean ‘strange’ (*furðulegt*) or ‘absurd’ (*ffarstæðukennt*) (Ólason 2007: 22) and he uses it almost as a binary opposite to the word ‘supernatural’. Ólason shows that he recognizes Todorov, who we will address later, yet for some reason he seems to avoid engaging with his definition of the fantastic (Ólason 2007: 14).

According to Else Mundal (2006: 718), “The fantastic [...] deals with beings and phenomena that do not belong to the real, experienced world, but rather to imagination and fantasy.” It seems to me that Mundal delivers ‘the fantastic’ quite close to the doorstep of *magic realism*, a term most commonly associated with modern literature, but most importantly she argues that ‘the fantastic’ is something that the audience of a saga would not believe in. Stephen Mitchell (2009: 282) also regards ‘the fantastic’ as being contrary to the believable, though he makes it explicitly clear when he speaks of ‘the fantastic’ that it is not a Medieval term, but a modern one. Sometimes ‘the fantastic’ is evoked without any explanation of its meaning. Sverrir Jakobsson (2006: 940) speaks of giants and dragons belonging to “the realm of the unknown and the fantastic”, and Peter Dinzelsbacher (2005: 65) speaks of confrontations with “phantastischen Wesen”.

These few examples represent a much larger, more diverse arena of ‘the fantastic’ in scholarship, and, perhaps unsurprisingly, they invariably presume some semantic relation to ‘fantasy’. In fact, scholarly discourse is riddled with such vague usage of ‘the fantastic’ as something to do with fantasy or fairy tales, akin perhaps to Tolkien’s speaking dragon Smaug in *The Hobbit*.

A premise for such an idea would have to be that Medieval audiences had a hard time believing in narratives of one sort of strange creature, but that they could very much believe in similar narratives of strange creatures of another sort. Mundal admits that making such a distinction between the believable and unbelievable, and thus between the supernatural and fantastic, is in practicality impossible. As Mitchell rightfully argues, whether audiences found something incredulous, we might never know, and if they did it may or may not have anything to do with what we, the modern readers, find believable. And as we find no indication in particular

that medieval audiences considered narratives of supposed ‘fantastic’ creatures unbelievable, in the sense that we find fantasy literature unbelievable, or in any other sense for that matter, we can hardly presume that ‘the fantastic’ in this meaning is by any means a term fit to be used in analysis of medieval literature.

In fact, in Medieval texts, we find much indication to the contrary, that at the very least the general possibility of the existence of various creatures – by our modern measure supernatural, fantastic, or what have you – was acknowledged. The fact that we find a flying dragon in *Njáls saga*, considered to belong to the ‘realistic’ genre of sagas, is not indicative of ‘fantastic elements’ in an otherwise realistic saga just because we modern readers find such things incredible. In my view, it indicates quite the opposite, that just as in a multitude of sources from the time of Pliny and his monstrous peoples, from St. Augustine’s inclusion of said monstrous peoples in Christian doctrine to St. Isidore’s popularization of them in a Christian context, from Alexander the Great’s letter to Aristotle proclaiming the existence of the Marvels of the East, right down to Sir Mandeville’s travels in the 14th Century, that just like these and many other sources indicate: there was a belief in the Middle Ages that strange creatures, peoples, and monsters existed, and yet as we must allow the possibility that many people in the Middle Ages might have been sceptical of the existence of such creatures, they themselves also had to at least allow for the possibility of their existence though they had not seen them with their own eyes.

Which brings me to my second point concerning this: There does indeed exist a proper definition of the term ‘the fantastic’, and it does apply to Medieval literature in very much a different way from the way it is being used, insofar as we are ready to analyse Medieval literature as fiction (this is in fact the method employed by Chiara Benati 2006). The definition was put forth by Tzvetan

Todorov in his expansive 1970 contribution to literary criticism, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, translated into English in 1973. Todorov (1975: 25) defines ‘the fantastic’ as follows: “The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event.”

It is clear from the outset that Todorov’s ‘fantastic’ is not an antithesis to the supernatural, but a theory of the reception of modern literature; in other words it is meant to convey the reader’s response to an event transpiring within a work of fiction, yet seemingly breaking the natural laws of that fictional universe by taking place. These natural laws that are broken can either be those that the reader assumed was at play in the text, or they may have been implied in the text itself. If, for example, an alien warship suddenly appears and blasts open Buckingham Palace in a Victorian era romance novel, the interplay between character and reader creates a moment of uncertainty as to whether the event is really transpiring or not, or in Todorov’s words: “The fantastic, we have seen, lasts only as long as a certain hesitation: a hesitation common to reader and character, who must decide whether or not what they perceive derives from “reality” as it exists in the common opinion” (Todorov 1975: 41).

‘The fantastic’ is thus not the same as magic realism; it is a reactionary effect that can be caused by magic realism or the use of unbelievable elements within a narrative. An author consciously employing techniques akin to magic realism is therefore a prerequisite for ‘the fantastic’ to ever occur. ‘The fantastic’ is not the speaking dragon in a Medieval saga; it is not even Tolkien’s speaking dragon, and neither of those dragons are shown to be so unbelievable within their respective narratives that they should ever have a fantastic effect upon their respective audiences. Quite to the

contrary, dragons are even to be expected in Medieval sagas as they many times appear in them, and they are most certainly to be expected in modern fantasy literature.

To summarize these two points and perhaps venture an opinion on where to go from here, we first have the way in which ‘the fantastic’ is being employed to signify phenomena (or understandings thereof) which are entirely absent from the literature, through the supposition that they are to be found all over the place. This is all a matter of definition, as I have argued, that though the phenomena described as ‘fantastic’ are indeed widely presented in medieval literature, they indeed are not ‘fantastic’ in any respect at all. They just are. Some of them may be supernatural, most of them are not, but none of them are fantastic.

Secondly, the uncertainty of how to deal with these phenomena once they occur, whether to believe in them or consider them to be supernatural within the believable world of the narrative at hand, is instead what ‘the fantastic’ as a concept is meant to describe. But even then we come off short-handed as the fantastic only exists through the interplay of us, the readers, and the protagonist of a narrative as the event occurs within said narrative — while we read it. It is a *Schrödinger’s Cat* sort of situation, and until it has been resolved to be either one or the other, supernatural or imaginary, it remains both at once, or in other words: fantastic.

Can we say with any measure of certainty that Medieval narratives possessed such a capability for their intended audiences? No. We cannot be sure. For those of us who accept Todorov’s definition of ‘the fantastic’, it is only possible to speak of the occurrence of the fantastic from the point of view of the modern reader, and unless we are studying the reception of Medieval literature in modern times it is a term we should by all means avoid to invoke. It seems that we are facing a term that in Medieval

studies neither means what it is supposed to signify, nor does that signification find place in the literature it is applied to.

The paranormal

Here, I have briefly touched upon some of the problematics of widely accepted terminology. 'The supernatural' is problematic in studies of Medieval literature because either it means forcing modern conceptions of what the supernatural is on societies that mostly did not share our understanding of what it is, but if used correctly it restricts our analysis to the Christian dichotomy between good and evil, divine and demonic, and the interplay between these two greater powers behind and above nature. 'The fantastic' is problematic in studies of Medieval literature because it also forces us either to impose our modern ideas of fantasy or the believable onto societies that most certainly did not share our understanding of the real as opposed to the imagined, societies in which actual belief in imaginary beings was widespread or, on the other hand, if we employ the fantastic as Todorov intended, we are anachronistically analyzing literary motifs and techniques which we have no indication of being consciously in use at the time. Indeed they probably were not.

This means that both terms can be used without trouble in analysis of modern literature, if the way in which they are used is clearly defined. On the other hand, only one of them can be properly used when analyzing Medieval literature, and then only in a very narrow sense. The question then remains how we are to advance our studies of certain phenomena in Medieval literature if we cannot go forward with the supernatural marker. The problems with the supernatural term listed in this discussion, as well as many others, have prompted some scholars to let go of the term in favour of 'the paranormal'.

I stated earlier in this essay that perhaps we have been too focused on trying to understand *the* supernatural in literature, and thus actively forcing this purported supernatural into being where perhaps there was nothing particularly supernatural to be found; that perhaps we should instead seek to understand the phenomena before attaching this label to it, that another term might more adequately describe what it is we are dealing with. ‘The paranormal’ has been suggested as a solution to this problem. ‘The paranormal’ may be understood as that which is out of the ordinary, that which threatens the boundary of the explicable, that which lies outside of normal experience. The paranormal does not imply a belief or lack of belief in the phenomena it is used to describe; it does not impose on the subject a cultural or anachronistic layer of meaning, even though it is a modern term and is a very self-conscious one at that. Thus dragons are paranormal, regardless of their characteristics, trolls and ghosts are paranormal, and so are magic, miracles, and demonic activity. Monsters are paranormal because they are not frequently encountered. Instead of arguing over modern notions of demarcation such as the rather meaningless supernatural/fantastic dichotomy, it is both possible and feasible instead to seek understanding of paranormal encounters in historical or legendary texts.

That is not to say that the term ‘supernatural’ might not sometimes be exactly the right term for certain encounters or phenomena, for sometimes the paranormal is also supernatural, but it does release from our shoulders a burden of a discourse of floating meaning that has not really led us very far. It also releases the Medievalist from the stigma following superstitious-sounding words like ‘supernatural’ which do not seem to have any relevance for the modern world, whereas the paranormal offers us a link between science and folklore that seems, at least to me, to offer a less biased opportunity of viewing the unexplained, for while the

‘supernatural’ necessarily implies an origin defying natural law, the ‘paranormal’ does not.

To answer my initial question then, whether Dracula or the monster from *It* are supernatural, or whether trolls and dragons are supernatural, I propose that the answer is greatly dependent on context and how we as researchers, whether our field is literature, folklore, history, or archaeology, choose to understand the term ‘supernatural’. Whether these beings are supernatural is complicated, but then again we can perhaps agree that they all are paranormal.

References

- Benati, C. 2006. The Fantastic and the Supernatural in the Saga Ósvalds konungs hins helga: Patterns and functions. In: *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles*, vol. 1, J. McKinnell et al. (Eds.). Durham: The Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, pp. 130-139.
- Dinzelbacher, P. 2005. Die Mittelalterliche Allegorie der Lebensreise. In: *Monsters, Marvels and Miracles: Imaginary Journeys and Landscapes in the Middle Ages*, L. Søndergaard & R. Th. Hansen (Eds.). Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, pp. 65-112.
- Flint, V. I. J. 1991. *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Friedman, J. B. [1981] 2000. *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Gillam, D. M. 1961. The Use of the Term ‘Aeglaeca’ in Beowulf at Lines 893 and 2592. *Studia Germanica Gandensia* 3, pp. 145-169.
- Hall, A. 2007. *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England: Matters of Belief, Health, Gender and Identity*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press.
- Heaney, S. (Ed.). 2000. *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*. London: Faber and Faber.

- Jackson, T. N. 2006. The Fantastic in the Kings' Sagas. In: *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles*, vol. 1, J. McKinnell et al. (Eds.). Durham: The Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, pp. 426–434.
- Jakobsson, Á. 2008. Hvað er tröll? Galdrar, tröll og samfélagsóvinir. In: *Galdramenn: Galdur og samfélag á miðöldum*, T. Tulinius (Ed.). Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan.
- Jakobsson, Á. 2009a. Identifying the Ogre: The Legendary Saga Giants. In: *Fornaldarsagaerme, myter og virkelighed: studier i de oldislandske fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, A. Lassen et al. (Eds.). Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums forlag, pp. 181–200.
- Jakobsson, Á. [2009b] 2013. The Fearless Vampire Killers: A Note about the Icelandic Draugr and Demonic Contamination in Grettis saga. In: Á. Jakobsson (Author) *Nine Saga Studies: The Critical Interpretation of the Icelandic Sagas*. Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, pp. 125–137.
- Jakobsson, Á. 2010. Íslenskir draugar frá landnámi til lúterstrúar: Inngangur að draugafræðum. In: *Skírnir* 184, pp. 187–210.
- Jakobsson, S. 2006. On the Road to Paradise: “Austrvegr” in the Icelandic Imagination. In: *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles*, vol. 2, J. McKinnell et al. (Eds.). Durham: The Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, pp. 935–943.
- Jónsson, G. (Ed.). 1946. Grettis saga. In: *Íslenzk fornrit*, 7. Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.
- Klaeber, Fr. (Ed.). [1922]1950. *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*. Third ed. Boston: Heat.
- Kuhn, S. 1979. Old English Aglæca–Middle Irish Olach. In: *Linguistic Method: Essays in Honor of Herbert Penzl*, I. Rauch & G. F. Carr (Eds.). New York: Mouton Publishers, pp. 213–230.

- Mitchell, S. 2009. The Supernatural and the fornaldarsögur: The Case of Ketils saga hængs. In: *Fornaldarsagaerne, myter og virkelighed*, A. Ney et al. (Eds.). Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, pp. 281–298.
- Mittman, A. 2003. The Other Close at Hand: Gerald of Wales and the ‘Marvels of the West’. In: *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, A. Bildbauer & R. Mills (Eds.). Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 97–112.
- Mundal, E. 2006. The Treatment of the Supernatural and the Fantastic in Different Saga Genres. In: *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles*, vol. 2, J. McKinnell et al. (Eds.). Durham: The Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, pp. 718–726.
- Ólason, V. 2007. The Fantastic Element in Fourteenth Century Íslendingasögur: A Survey. In: *Gripla* 18, pp. 7–22.
- Pálsson, H. 1997. *Úr landnordri: Samar og ystu rætur íslenskrar menningar*. Reykjavík: Bókmenntafræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands.
- Roodenburg, H. 1988. The Maternal Imagination. The Fears of Pregnant Women in Seventeenth-Century Holland. In: *Journal of Social History* 21 (4), pp. 701–716.
- Sävborg, D. 2009. Avstånd, gräns och förundran. Möten med de övernaturliga i islänningasagan. In: *Greppaminni: Rit til heiðurs Vésteini Ólasyni sjötugum*. M. Eggertsdóttir et al. (Eds.). Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, pp. 323–349.
- Shildrick, M. 2002. *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self*. California: Sage.
- Stanley, E. G. 1979. Two Old English Poetic Phrases Insufficiently Understood for Literary Criticism: Þing Gehegan and Senoþ Gehegan. In: *Old English Poetry: Essays on Style*, D.G. Calder (Ed.). Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 67–90.

- Sveinsson, E. Ól. (Ed.). 1954. Brennu-Njáls saga. In: *Íslensk fornrit*, 12. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag.
- Thorne, T. [1999] 2000. *Children of the Night: Of Vampires and Vampirism*. London: Indigo.
- Todorov, T. [1973] 1975. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. R. Howard (Transl.). Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Trilling, R. R. 2007. Beyond Abjection: The Problem with Grendel's Mother Again. *Parergon* 24 (1), pp. 1-20.
- Tulinius, T. 1999. Framliðnir feður: um forneskju og frásagnarlist í Eyrbyggju, Eglu og Grettlu. In: *Heiðin minni: greinar um fornar bókmenntir*, H. Bessason & B. Hafstað (Eds.). Reykjavík: Heimskringla, pp. 283-316.
- Unger, C. R. (Ed.). 1862. *Stjórn: Gammelnorsk bibelhistorie fra verdens skabelse til det babyloniske fangeskab*. Christiania: Feilberg & Landmarks forlag.
- Vidalín, A. 2012. *The Supernatural in Íslendingasögur: A Theoretical Approach to Definition and Analysis*. Reykjavík: Tower Press.
- Vidalín, A. 2013a. 'Er þat illt, at þú vilt elska tröll þat.' Hið sögulega samhengi jöðrunar í Hrafnistumannasögum. In: *Gripla* 24, pp. 173-210.
- Vidalín, A. 2013b. Að mæla róteindir með gráðuboga: Um fantasíuhugtakið í miðaldabókmenntum. In: *Skírnir* 187, pp. 356-380.