Modernist Medievalisms and Medieval Modernisms: Auðr the Deep-Minded and Derdriu in Norse, Old Irish, Modernist Irish and Post-1945 Scottish Literature

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Modernist Medievalisms and Medieval Modernisms: Auðr the Deep-Minded and Derdriu in Norse, Old Irish, Modernist Irish and Post-1945 Scottish Literature

by

Cori L. Gabbard

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

MODERNIST MEDIEVALISMS AND MEDIEVAL MODERNISMS:
AUÐR THE DEEP-MINDED AND DERDRIU
IN NORSE, OLD IRISH, MODERNIST IRISH AND POST-1945 SCOTTISH LITERATURE

by

Cori L. Gabbard

Adviser: Professor Steven F. Kruger

This dissertation explores in a comparative manner the connection between female identity and war in medieval and twentieth-century literature, arguing that texts written before the early modern period acknowledge a relationship between women and conflict that modernist and post-1945 writing mitigates or expunges. Given the binary opposition of women to war that underlies traditional gender roles, my work therefore challenges common perceptions of the twentieth-century as an essentially progressive period in relation to the political and social status of women while addressing widely held notions of the medieval as backwards and irrelevant in order to demonstrate the lack of connotative opposition between the terms “medieval” and “modern.”

More specifically, my dissertation considers two particular figures as both a medieval and a twentieth-century text respectively conceive of them. The Old Icelandic Landnámabók (The Book of Settlements) identifies Auðr in djúpuðga (“Aud the deep-minded”) as the only woman among its most prominent settlers and, in keeping with this stature, provides a correspondingly lengthy account of her settlement in Iceland; Scottish writer Naomi Mitchison’s 1955 novel, The Land the Ravens Found, provides an expanded retelling of Auðr’s establishment in Iceland. Derdriu (Deirdre) is the female protagonist of “Longes mac nUislenn” (“The Exile of the Sons of Ûisliu”) from the Ulster cycle of Irish mythology.
Numerous poets, fiction writers and playwrights have since retold this narrative, including William Butler Yeats whose 1907 play, *Deirdre*, I have chosen to explore. Through an analysis combining feminist, new historicist, philological and legal approaches to literature, my dissertation demonstrates that *Landnámabók* and “Longes mac nUislen” implicate Auðr in *djúpúðga* and Derdriu in war while Naomi Mitchison’s *The Land the Ravens Found* and William Butler Yeats’ *Deirdre* conventionalize these figures’ association with conflict by diminishing their agency as aggressors and identifying them with domesticity.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation embodies not only years of effortfully accumulated insight, but also, in ways direct and indirect, the contributions of other people who have influenced my development as a scholar. Although limitations of time and space prevent me from acknowledging everyone who has furthered my academic growth, it is to the following individuals that I would like to express my deepest appreciation:

Completing a dissertation is, from a conventional perspective, the culmination of a scholar’s progress through a doctoral program, but to my mind, its underpinnings were rooted long before I knew that such a thing as graduate school ever existed, let alone what a dissertation was or how to write one. Copious thanks go to my parents, Lynn and Richard Gabbard, for their early encouragement of my passion for books and for the earlier educational opportunities that they afforded me, opportunities without which I might not have had the intellectual skills and training to pursue a Ph.D. In particular, I am indebted to my mother for all those trips to the library and for introducing me to a wide and eclectic range of works that, in retrospect, has anticipated the scope of my current scholarship. I am also grateful not only for my parents’ support in the form of my hard-copy volume of the *Icelandic-English Dictionary* and otherwise, but especially for my father’s belief in my abilities as it manifests itself in his text messages asking me for the answers to crossword puzzle clues that reference works and writers in my particular fields.

With respect to my years as a student at the CUNY Graduate Center, I have been the very fortunate recipient of generosity in a multitude of ways over the years, one of which is financial support. My utmost gratitude in this regard goes to my supervisor of the last five years, Sharon Lerner, Director of Disability Services in the Office of the Vice-President of Student Affairs. She, along with Matt Schoengood, Vice-President of Student Affairs, gave me every possible opportunity that she could provide, and I am extremely grateful for the moral support and collegiality of everyone in our office past and present.

Completing this dissertation would not have been possible without the academic and intellectual support of several individuals. I owe a debt of gratitude to the following scholars who generously shared their knowledge and insights with me in answer to my queries: Bergljót Kristjánsdóttir of the University of Iceland; Vincent P. Carey of SUNY-Plattsburgh; Jennifer Goff of the National Museum of Ireland; and Eric Bryan of the Missouri University of Science and Technology who also shared his own scholarship with me. In addition, I would like to acknowledge Frederick Suppe of Ball State University for giving me the opportunity to present on Derdriu at the 45th International Conference on Medieval Studies.

I am also grateful to those of my friends who, in addition to their moral support and companionship, have provided intellectual support in the form of guidance, scholarly exchange, critical feedback on my own work and even some assistance with obtaining materials I needed to peruse. Jaime Cleland, Sean Egan and Caroline Hellman generously shared their prospectuses with me which served as models for my own. Reading T. Meyerhoff’s and Audrey Raden’s work during our dissertation group sessions gave me new perspectives on how a successful dissertation-in-progress emerges. Heather Blatt’s comments on the beginning of my first chapter encouraged me to continue writing, while Jay Gates’ comments on my fourth chapter helped me to think about how I might reshape its beginning. Christopher Leydon, who read my prospectus, introduction, third chapter and bibliography, read more of my dissertation than anyone else outside of my committee. Simon Grote generously sent me scans of materials that were available to him at a time when I did not otherwise have access to them.
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To Glenn Burger and Catherine McKenna I respectively owe my discovery of *The Táin* and *The Mabinogion*, the two texts that inspired me to write a dissertation exploring both medieval and twentieth century British literature. Both Glenn and Catherine provided valuable feedback in their respective reviews of my prospectus, and I am additionally thankful to Catherine for her early support of this project. It was she whom I first consulted about the feasibility of completing a dissertation in two rarely related fields of English literature and who encouraged me to go forward with such an endeavor.

Immense thanks is due to my third reader, the late Jane Marcus, whose early mentorship of me at City College was in part responsible for my matriculation at the CUNY Graduate Center, and whose own scholarship grounds and has inspired my own. It was in Jane’s class on Virginia Woolf in the 21st Century that I first encountered *Three Guineas*, the philosophical underpinning of this dissertation, and it was in a later class taught by Jane, Twentieth Century British Poetry, that I encountered David Jones’ *In Parenthesis*, a Modernist poem that in its allusions to the medieval Welsh *Mabinogion* might serve as a fitting emblem of my own work here. Her generosity in allowing me free access to her collection of texts by twentieth century British women writers gave me an opportunity to acquaint myself with numerous works exploring the relationship between women and war, and beyond her intellectual contributions to my scholarship, I also acknowledge, with gratitude, her generosity to me as both a mentee and a friend.

I am especially grateful for the generosity of Clare Carroll who agreed to teach me Old Irish without having previously taught (or for that matter, having met) me and who, at the end of our term together, spontaneously offered to be one of my dissertation readers. Clare’s enthusiastic and careful, detailed attention to each of my chapters as I drafted them not only exceeded the duties of a second reader, but also reflected her unwavering faith in my intellectual and scholarly abilities, and often it was her encouragement that inspired me to keep writing, particularly at times when I most doubted myself. Clare’s insights were especially pertinent to the successful revision of my third chapter, but beyond her reading of my work, I am thankful for our many conversations about teaching and poetry and for her friendship.

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suggestions that were integral to the successful revision of what had been a somewhat unwieldy opening to my first chapter and that gave shape to my dissertation as a single work.
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INTRODUCTION

The epistolary form of Virginia Woolf’s *Three Guineas* (1938) contextualizes the essay as a response to three apparently unsolicited letters seeking donations for their respective causes, the first of which encompasses the answers to the other two as a query from an Oxbridge-educated, upper-middle-class man to one of his uneducated, female counterparts asking how England might “prevent war” (Woolf 5). The answer to this question is that the economic dependence of “the daughters of educated men” (Woolf 6) upon their fathers, brothers and husbands fostered by the patriarchal subjugation of women throughout England’s existence means that the latter “cannot possess an independent and disinterested influence with which to help [the correspondent] to prevent war” (Woolf 101) despite the fact that “to fight has always been the man’s habit, not the woman’s” because “[l]aw and practice have developed that difference, whether innate or accidental” (Woolf 9). And what is more, the oppression of women on the part of England’s educational, legal and ecclesiastical institutions reflects the same “iniquity of dictatorship” (Woolf 122) that has manifested itself “in Germany, in Italy [and] in Spain” (Woolf 122)—the very three nations embodying the threat of war that motivated the composition of the first letter.

*Three Guineas*, as I have summarized it above, underpins this dissertation as both its inspiration and its impetus. ¹ Most obviously, Woolf’s essay posits a relationship between women and war, which is what I seek to establish in my own scholarship here through my comparative analyses of two prominent figures, Auðr in djúpúðga (“Aud the deep-minded”) and Derdriu (Deirdre), both as the Norse and Old Irish literary traditions respectively have depicted them and as two twentieth-century writers, Naomi Mitchison and William Butler Yeats, respectively have reconceived of them.

At the same time, *Three Guineas* situates itself not only as a critical commentary upon the historical condition of women within English society but also as a radical polemic in response to the socio-political

¹ The genesis of this project owes itself to the scholarship of Jane Marcus with whom I first studied *Three Guineas*.
climate that existed at the time of its publication and that both informed and perpetuated the
circumscription of women’s lives in late-1930s England. That is, the essay explicitly engages the broader
social context that defined its own present, and because the Hogarth Press published it, as it had Woolf’s
previous works, whatever their respective genres, for public consumption—Three Guineas went on sale in
England on the 3rd of June, 1938, and by the 19th of December of that same year, 8,000 copies of it had
been purchased— it posits itself as a bridge between its writer as a public intellectual and her intended
audience. Such positioning grounds and underscores my broader goals in arguing here that the Old Icelandic
Landnámabók (The Book of Settlements) and the Old Irish Longes Mac n-Uislenn (The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu),
through their respective depictions of Auðr in djúpúðga and Derdriu, acknowledge a relationship between
women and conflict that Naomi Mitchison’s 1955 novel The Land the Ravens Found and William Butler Yeats’
1907 play, Deirdre, mitigate or expunge. Given the binary opposition of women to war that underlies
traditional gender roles, my work therefore challenges common perceptions of the twentieth century as an
essentially progressive period in relation to the political and social status of women while addressing widely
held notions of the medieval as backwards and irrelevant in order to demonstrate the lack of connotative
opposition between the terms “medieval” and “modern.” In so doing, this dissertation compels us to
consider the ways in which we have conceived of ourselves in gendered terms over time, not only with
respect to the contrasts between the medieval depictions of Auðr in djúpúðga and Derdriu and those of their
twentieth-century counterparts, but also—and especially—with respect to how the social status of women
has changed over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Such meditations are integral to the
self-awareness that any society needs in order to broaden its attitudes towards womanhood, but I would

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2 In her diary entry for 19 December 1938, Woolf sums up the reactions to Three Guineas as follows: “[t]he
reception of 3 Gs. has been interesting, unexpected—only I’m not sure what I expected. 8,000 sold. Not
one of my friends has mentioned it. My wide circle has widened—but I’m altogether in the dark as to the
true merits of the book” (Woolf, Diary 5,193).
argue that the implications of this dissertation speak to its own relevancy and urgency at a time when
decisions in recent court cases at both the national and state level, as well as certain educational practices,
dermine some of the major legal and educational gains in the U.S. during the 1960s and 70s that
increased women’s autonomy and gave them the opportunity both to extend the boundaries of womanhood
beyond the domestic realm and to define themselves in terms of identities other than those of wife and
mother. The outcomes of three U.S. Supreme Court cases, Griswold v. Connecticut (1965), Eisenstadt v.
Baird (1972) and Roe v. Wade (1973), respectively legalized access to birth control on the part of married
and single individuals and the right of women to procure an abortion in all fifty U.S. states, while Title IX
(1972) mandated equal access to education on the part of both sexes at institutions to which the U.S.
government provides financial support. Over forty years later, on the 30th of June, 2014, the U.S.
Supreme Court, ruled it unconstitutional in Burwell v. Hobby Lobby, Inc. for the Affordable Care Act to
compel closely-held family companies to underwrite the insurance costs of their employees’ contraceptive
needs on the basis that doing so would trample the company owners’ right to religious freedom, while a
number of states have enacted legislation curtailing women’s access to abortion services. In March of 2013,
for example, North Dakota legalized abortions on account of the fetus’ sex and genetic profile; more
recently, in June of 2014, Florida outlawed abortion in cases where physicians have concluded that a given
fetus would be able to live outside uterine walls.

As for education, student bodies on college campuses have overall comprised slightly more women
than men since the beginning of the current century (Williams ST1), but admissions policies at certain
colleges within this timeframe have resulted in “complaints that less-qualified men are being admitted over
more-qualified women” to the point that in the last month of 2009, the United States Commission on Civil
Rights served a subpoena upon nineteen institutions of post-secondary education in order to access their
undergraduate admissions records for the purpose of determining “whether they were discriminating against
qualified female applicants” (Williams ST1).³ Five years later, in the spring of 2014, the U.S. Department of Education identified over fifty institutions of higher learning as the focus of federal scrutiny because of their alleged mishandling of reported rapes on campus—a transgression against federal law with respect to the stipulations of Title IX which prohibits sexual harassment of any sort, including sexual assault.

Both the implementation of the laws and the need to instigate the investigations described above are reflective of an increasingly hostile and regressive attitude towards women, one that seeks to disempower them and to re-identify womanhood with the capacity to bear children and to serve as the objects of sexual aggression on the part of men. In light of Woolf’s emphasis in *Three Guineas* upon the complicity of social institutions in perpetuating the oppression of women in English society, it is therefore not surprising that the implications of this dissertation should be particularly pertinent to considering the paradoxical status of and attitudes towards women enlisted in the U.S. military. On the one hand, Admiral Michelle J. Howard became the first woman in the U.S. Navy to earn a four-star ranking in July of 2014, a little more than a year after the U.S. Department of Defense announced in June of 2013 that it would no longer prohibit women from engaging in battle. This policy change, which apparently “was in large part driven by the military itself” (Bumiller and Shanker A1) and which also seems to reflect contemporary attitudes towards women’s participation in warfare (Bumiller and Shanker A1),⁴ may address indirectly the challenges faced by female veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder who in recent years have returned from combat to a society that has refused to acknowledge female identification with the military:

³ Because the United States Commission on Civil Rights cannot subpoena any given entity beyond “100 miles of where it holds its meetings” (Terris) —i.e., the D.C. region—eighteen of the nineteen subpoenaed institutions received a subpoena on the basis of their geographical location relative to the U.S. capital alone (Terris). The University of Richmond, however, received a subpoena because journalists had claimed that the school “was intentionally admitting a disproportionately high number of male applicants” (Terris).

⁴ “Public opinion polls show that Americans generally agree with lifting the ban. A nationwide Quinnipiac University poll conducted [in 2012] found that three-quarters of voters surveyed favored allowing military women to serve in units that engaged in close combat, if the women wanted to” (Bumiller and Shanker A1).
Indeed, at home, after completing important jobs in war, women with the disorder often smack up against old-fashioned ignorance: male veterans and friends who do not recognize them as “real soldiers”; husbands who have little patience with their avoidance of intimacy; and a society that expects them to be feminine nurturers, not the nurtured. (Cave A1)

On the other hand, over six percent of women in the U.S. military were the targets of sexual assault at the hands of a colleague during 2012 according to a survey published by the U.S. Department of Defense on the 5th of May in 2013 (Steinhauer A1)---a mere forty-eight hours “after the officer in charge of sexual assault prevention programs for the Air Force was arrested and charged with sexual battery for grabbing a woman's breasts and buttocks in an Arlington, Va. parking lot” (Steinhauer A1). This figure represents an increase in the percentage of women troops who have been raped or molested by a fellow officer: two years earlier, that statistic stood at approximately four-and-a-half percent (Steinhauer A1). Yet in early March of 2014, a bill that would have stripped commanders in the U.S. military of the authority to determine whether or not in-house offenses involving rape and sexual assault should be prosecuted failed in the U.S. Senate. Two weeks later, the outcomes of two trials concerning sexual assault in the military highlighted the implications of this failure: counsel for both the plaintiffs and the defendants of these respective cases concluded that “[j]ustice [had been] subverted, and [that] sexual assault cases should be prosecuted by military lawyers, not commanders who have inherent conflicts of interest” (Cooper A3) who “because of the stigma of sexual assault charges within their ranks treat female accusers unfairly and often suppress victims from fully reporting” (Cooper A3). That “Congress has already voted to revamp the military’s legal system by ending the statute of limitations on assault and rape cases, making it a crime to retaliate against victims who report assaults and requiring the dishonorable discharge or dismissal of anyone convicted of sexual assault or rape” (O’Keefe) means little in the face of the U.S. Senate’s refusal to pass the aforementioned measure. It is not difficult, in these events, to discern the same collusion against women on the part of the U.S. legislative and military branches that Woolf observed on the part of England’s legal,
educational and religious institutions. And because the U.S. Senate did not approve this bill, it is likely that the suffering of women discharged from the military will continue to exceed that of their male counterparts:

While male returnees become homeless largely because of substance abuse and mental illness, experts say that female veterans face those problems and more, including the search for family housing and an even harder time finding well-paying jobs. But a common pathway to homelessness for women, researchers and psychologists said, is military sexual trauma, or M.S.T., from assaults or harassment during their service, which can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder. (Brown A1)

To be clear, my advocacy of women’s participation in the U.S. military is absolutely not an endorsement of war. Rather, I support—and hope that my work here will contribute to—widespread acceptance of women’s involvement and success in an occupation that traditionally has been and to an extent is still today synonymous with masculinity and whose literal location, the battlefield, has long been defined in opposition to the domestic realm, the sphere to which, generally speaking, women were confined in the U.S. from its founding until the mid-to-late 1960s when the passing of the Civil Rights Act (1964) legalized hiring practices that discriminated against job applicants on account of their sex, ethnicity, race and religion and the outcome of Weeks v. Southern Bell, 408 F. 2d. 228 (5th Cir. 1969) rendered state legislation restricting women’s access to certain jobs null and void.

Although the potential of this project to raise awareness of the historical and ongoing trajectories of how society has perceived women and also therefore the possibility that the American public as a whole might reverse its current trend concerning its perspectives on women is valuable in and of itself, the implications of this dissertation’s findings also achieve another aim of mine that predicates itself upon the positioning of Three Guineas as a communiqué from its author to the English public. Woolf’s insecurities
concerning her own lack of formal education notwithstanding, both the main text of and footnotes to *Three Guineas*, which quote or otherwise allude to a variety of sources, including those that testify to the lives of women as expressed in their correspondence and journals, are reflective of the range and depth of her research into England’s social structures in relation to the country’s subjugation of its female population. That is, *Three Guineas* is a work of scholarship; and as a work that seeks to “help...to prevent war” (Woolf 170), it inherently embodies the relevance, value and applicability of intellectualism to the pragmatic world. More specifically, as an essay that draws upon texts and other materials that are commonly the object of scholarly inquiry in the humanities, *Three Guineas* implicitly asserts why no education can be complete without immersion in them: because it is the humanities that, via the heightened awareness of the human condition and its failings that they impart, empower us to discern our own history and the contexts in which we have generated it—and based upon that evaluation to steward our own future in a way that is morally superior to the way in which we have done so in the past. In other words, the humanities serve as the moral compass of a healthy, evolving society. Perhaps more to the point, it is the humanities, in the form of the U.S. Constitution, that have provided the philosophical and political foundation of the United States of America—the gradual undermining of which has increased since the U.S. Supreme Court’s appointment and installation of George W. Bush as the nation’s forty-third president in 2001. It is no coincidence that the encroachment of the corporate domain upon civic realms that began under the G.W. Bush administration is inextricable not only from the intensification of the U.S.’s anti-intellectual climate in the twenty-first century but also from its corollary, the increasing perception on the part of the America public that the humanities are “useless” because formal study of them does not result directly in a lucrative

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5 “Woolf was intensely conscious of her self-education. True, her father, one of England’s most learned men, had guided that education, and true, Woolf was rigorously trained in Greek and had read widely and deeply in the English and American classics and in history. But as a woman, she was denied the systematized public-school and Oxbridge intellectual training that was the entitlement of the male members of her family and class—and she was acutely aware of her status, for better and for worse, as a non–academically schooled amateur” (Schwarz).
career. It is precisely in times such as the current era, when we as a society have prioritized the immediacy of material comfort on an individual and personal level at the expense of our own enlightenment and sense of community, that knowledge and application of the humanities become most vital to the preservation of the values upon which our nation was established, values that are antithetical to those of the “proto-fascist state” that developed during the G.W. Bush administration (Giroux 108; 98) and that continues to exert its power through the U.S Supreme Court as reflected by its ruling in Burwell v. Hobby Lobby, Inc. Among other motivations, those who ratified the U.S. Constitution did so in order “to form a more perfect Union [my italics], establish Justice. . .[and] promote the general Welfare [my italics]. . .”

(<http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html>).

As an analysis that combines feminist, new historicist, philological and legal approaches to literature, my own dissertation, like Three Guineas, constructs its argument on the basis of humanist sources. Insofar as it hopefully will contribute to the broadening of the reactionary definitions of womanhood that in the current century have become re-entrenched, this dissertation also follows Three Guineas in implicitly demonstrating the importance and relevance of the humanities to a critical assessment of the era in which

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6 As Thomas White implicitly observes through his allusion to Richard Hofstadter’s survey of America’s intellectual climate from its beginnings, Anti-Intellectualism in American Life (1963), American anti-intellectualism is not a new phenomenon. Nevertheless, in “Why Anti-Intellectualism is Dumb,” White implicitly identifies the Bush administration with a resurgence of this tradition in asserting that Susan Jacoby’s commentary on our contemporary intellectual climate, Age of American Unreason (2008), “[updates] Hofstader’s work, arguing that the GOP has made the word ‘intellectual’ taboo, much like ‘liberal.’” What is more, White links contemporary attitudes towards intellectualism not only to beliefs and behaviors that reinforce ignorance—“[t]oday,” he states, “nearly a quarter of adults in the U.S. believe that climate change is not happening. Twenty-eight percent haven’t read a book in the last year. And a third don’t believe in evolution”—but to common conceptions of the humanities: “Surely the humanities are important, and yet, we’re studying them less and less. Surely Shakespeare and Rousseau and Austen are important even if English and philosophy majors don’t have the same lucrative job options of a financier. And yet, we’re fleeing the humanities. The idea that one’s education needs to have immediate, direct financial benefits has become common belief.

“It’s no surprise that, at the same time society mocks the humanities, English majors are dropping and business majors are rising. When did we decide that literature and philosophy and art were less important and less valuable than a paycheck with 5 zeros?”
we live in order to catalyze positive social change. To the extent that this project calls attention to the words “medieval” and “modern” and what we mean by them in order to challenge our conceptions of ourselves in relation to the medieval past, it also anticipates and undermines the dismissal of its argument as a trivial matter concerned with the pedantic subtleties of semantics. More importantly, my examination of these terms and their widely-held connotations accentuates not only the stagnation of progression but also the backwards trajectory that presently defines twenty-first century America:

The alliance of neoconservatives, extremist evangelical Christians, and free-market advocates on the political Right imagines a social order modeled on the presidency of William McKinley and the values of the robber barons. The McKinley presidency lasted from 1897 to 1901 and "had a consummate passion to serve corporate and imperial power" (Moyers 2003c). This was an age when blacks, women [my italics], immigrants, and minorities of class "knew their place"; big government exclusively served the interests of the corporate monopolists; commanding institutions were under the sway of narrow political interests; welfare was a private enterprise; and labor unions were kept in place by the repressive forces of the state. All of these conditions were being reproduced under the leadership of the Republican Party that held sway over all branches of government. William Greider, writing in The Nation, observes a cult of traditionalism and anti-modernism within the Bush administration and its return to a past largely defined through egregious inequality, corporate greed, hyper-commercialism, political commercialism, political corruption, and an utter disdain for economic and political democracy. (Giroux 104).
Not surprisingly, the American public’s pervasive contempt for the humanities reflects a more general scorn for academia in general. Yet the implications of this dissertation as I have just described them also constitute a response to the devaluation of the humanities on the part of some from within academy who ought to be their most outspoken defenders, as the following two examples illustrate. In one of his regular op-eds for The New York Times, Stanley Fish, Florida International University’s Davidson-Kahn Distinguished University Professor of Humanities and Law, cheerfully declared in 2008 that the humanities “don’t do anything, if by ‘do’ is meant bring about effects in the world” and that “[t]o the question ‘of what use are the humanities?’ the only honest answer is none whatsoever.” Fish’s own defense of his position, that “it is an answer that brings honor to its subject” because “[j]ustification, after all, confers value on an activity from a perspective outside its performance,” notwithstanding, his characterization of the humanities as a useless abstraction affirms the perspective of their detractors. The following year, The New York Times published “End the University as We Know It,” an op-ed by Columbia professor and Religion scholar Mark C. Taylor. In it, Taylor refers to a doctoral student completing a “dissertation on how the medieval theologian Duns Scotus used citations” to exemplify his claim that the tendency towards specialization in academia means that scholars possess “limited knowledge that all too often is irrelevant for genuinely important problems” (A23).

More specifically, my interrogation of the distinction between the medieval and the modern is a finding that has no small implications given both the tensions between the medieval and the modern as they are conceptualized within and without academia and the resulting division between the medieval and the other chronological divisions within the humanities. In “On the Field,” Roberta Frank humorously acknowledges the American public’s dismissal of the medieval as backwards and irrelevant: “[M]edievalists,”

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7 As White notes, the “decline in support for education and for intellectual pursuits -- both rhetorical and otherwise -- isn’t so hard to believe in a country where a serious presidential contender -- Rick Santorum -- called President Obama a ‘snob’ for wanting ‘everybody in America to go to college.’”
she writes, “are used to living in a time and place that does not quite know what to make of them. . .given a free vote, the great majority would elect baseball over Beowulf or Madonna over Hildegard of Bingen” (205). Similarly, in “The Return to Philology,” Lee Patterson asserts that for the “vast majority of humanists. . .both medieval studies and the Middle Ages remain terra incognita” (237) and that attitudes towards the medieval on the part of those specializing in other periods are mostly the consequence of how the medieval era has been conceived in the “development of modern thought” (237):

As I have argued elsewhere, in the grand récit by which the Western historical consciousness has organized its past the Middle Ages has typically functioned as the all-purpose other. According to this master narrative, the Renaissance is to be identified with modernity; the Middle Ages with premodernity; indeed, recent disciplinary discourse has replaced the term Renaissance with the more politically canny “early modern.” (Patterson 237)

Frank presented “On the Field” at a 1992 conference concerning the trajectory of medieval studies; “The Return to Philology” appeared as a chapter in The Past and Future of Medieval Studies two years later. “Anglo-Saxon Studies in the Profession,” a round table discussion held at the 2014 Modern Language Association Annual Convention, demonstrated that, twenty years later, these attitudes have not shifted. As one of the discussion participants, Edward J. Christie put it, scholars specializing in other periods conceive of the medieval period as the academic equivalent of “Jurassic Park” while another discussion participant, Mary F. Dockray-Miller, pointed to decreases in course offerings focused upon Anglo-Saxon or the history of the English language as evidence of academia’s marginalization of the medieval. During the Q & A period, an audience member referred to the isolation of Anglo-Saxonists from their colleagues in other periods (although she conceded that this inclination towards segregation is often mutual). And the strategies that Dockray-Miller and two other discussants, Damian J. Fleming and Elaine Treharne, suggested for emphasizing the value of Anglo-Saxon involved linking it, in their different ways, to tools or their
consequences that are indisputably contemporary. Dockray-Miller recommended making Old English texts, both as written and in modern English translation, openly and digitally available in order to increase their accessibility and visibility throughout the academy; Treharne advised using public media to engender public responses to Anglo-Saxon texts and scholarly criticism about them. Using Twitter, Treharne said, not only attracted followers but also inspired them to seek out the medieval works themselves. While Fleming’s methodologies for attracting interest in and attention to Anglo-Saxon, which included sponsoring student research to be presented at poster sessions and giving talks that anyone on campus was welcome to attend, were technologically low-key, their common underpinning, “shameless self-promotion,” characterizes much of the activity that occurs over social media.

As a project that, generally speaking, demonstrates a more progressive attitude towards the relationship between women and war in medieval texts than in twentieth-century ones—a perspective that implicitly posits the medieval as a forward-thinking model for the present era—my dissertation undermines pervasive notions of the adjective “medieval” as a connotative descriptor for all that is obsolete. At the same time, it, like the approaches I have just described, embodies connection between the medieval and the modern which in turn situates it in relation to the work of [the comparatively few] scholars such as Chris Jones and Stephanie Trigg who in different ways examine the legacy of the medieval in the post-medieval period. In Strange Likeness: The Use of Old English in Twentieth-Century Poetry (2006), Chris Jones explores the metamorphoses of Anglo-Saxon verse in the poetry of W. H. Auden, Seamus Heaney, Edwin Morgan and Ezra Pound. In Shame and Honor: A Vulgar History of the Order of the Garter (2012), Trigg examines how the Order of the Garter has been reconceived and reinterpreted in the centuries since its inception.

Although neither Jones’ nor Trigg’s scholarship has directly informed my own, my work here nevertheless posits itself as an amalgamated, partially inverted expansion upon their respective concerns. Jones asserts that Auden’s, Heaney’s, Morgan’s and Pound’s appropriation of the themes, cadences and structures of Old English poetry “is an overlooked aspect of the much more familiar modernist trope of
seeking renewal by returning to supposed origins, of holding a pre-modern cultural artefact up as a mirror to modernity” that “can therefore be seen as part of a general trend that includes Stravinsky's use of tribal rhythms in ‘The Rite of Spring’, Eliot's use of vegetation myths in his own rite of spring, *The Waste Land*, Picasso's interest in African mask and Gaughin's fetishization of the ‘noble savage’ of the South Pacific” (Jones 6). Yet because the incorporation of Old English literary conventions in modernist poetry “accords neatly with modernist strategies of defamiliarization, a mode of refreshing the intensity of sensory perception by first making strange the act of perception and then allowing refamiliarization, the eventual perception of likeness, to occur” (Jones 6-7), the adaptation of Old English into their own verse on the part of twentieth-century poets reflects a “conservative radicalism” (Jones 6) and “[a] sense of the otherness of Old English” that “often gives way to a sense of its rightness” (Jones 7). In other words, the abovementioned writers' employment of Old English in their verse renders what is apparently archaic and other inextricable from what is revolutionary and not othered. At the same time, the engagement of these four poets with Old English, as Jones demonstrates, emphasizes the diasporic spread of both Old and Modern English--Anglo-Saxon’s direct, if adulterated, descendant. Three of the four writers (Auden, Heaney and Morgan) link Old English to the literary traditions associated with their respective ethnicities (the Norse in Auden’s case 8; the Irish and Norse in Heaney’s 9; and the Scottish in Morgan’s), although the English literary continuum may be said to encompass these legacies even as they exist simultaneously as separate entities unto themselves. In connecting Gaelic to Old English, Pound anticipates Heaney and Morgan in relating Old English to the Celtic literary tradition, and it is, perhaps, indicative of his status as an American—which is to say as a

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8 The father of W. H. Auden (d. 1973) claimed descent from “one of the first Norse settlers to colonize Iceland” (Jones 69) which instilled in the poet “a deep sense of personal belonging to Northern European culture” (Jones 69). In any case, Auden was an English subject for the first thirty-nine years of his life; he became a U.S. citizen in 1946, having lived there since 1939.

9 Seamus Heaney (d. 2013) was of course from Northern Ireland, but insofar as the Norse dominated Ireland between the ninth and the twelfth centuries, Norse culture may be said to be part of the Irish cultural tradition.
citizen of a nation long identified as a “melting pot”—that he should also link Anglo-Saxon to Ancient Greek and Chinese literature. Like Strange Likeness: The Use of Old English in Twentieth-Century Poetry, my dissertation provides a textual analysis of works by four different sources, each of which texts belongs to one of the literary traditions that Auden, Heaney, Morgan and/or Pound references in relation to Old English: as I have mentioned earlier, the Norse and Old Irish corpora comprise Landnámabók (The Book of Settlements) and Longes Mac n-Uislenn (The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu), respectively. As a novel by a Scottish writer, Naomi Mitchison’s 1955 The Land the Ravens Found is part of Scotland’s literary heritage; the Irish pantheon includes the 1907 play Deirdre by virtue of the fact that its creator, W.B. Yeats, was Irish. And like Jones, I posit a relationship between the medieval and the modern, as exemplified by the twentieth-century, that interrogates the commonly-held connotative distinctions between these two entities through the exploration of a particular theme—women and war in my case, and Old English in Jones.’ Unlike Jones, however, whose analyses focus upon the transformations of the Anglo-Saxon in the twentieth-century poems of the writers he explores, I examine Landnámabók as a text unto itself before turning to Mitchison’s twentieth-century revision of it and do likewise with respect to my treatment of Longes Mac n-Uislenn and Yeats’ Deirdre.

My work here echoes Shame and Honor: A Vulgar History of the Order of the Garter insofar as it, like Strange Likeness: The Use of Old English in Twentieth-Century Poetry, demonstrates the inextricability of the medieval from the modern—in this case, as the Order of the Garter exemplifies it. But unlike my scholarship and Jones,’ Trigg’s focuses upon a ritual, not a text, even though it discusses the motto of the Order and the documents and narratives that are associated with it. Although the second chapter of Shame and Honor considers the circumstances surrounding Edward III’s founding of the Order, which is to say that the book does focus upon its subject as a medieval ritual in and of itself before analyzing it in its post-medieval incarnations, Trigg examines the Order as it has been reimagined and reenacted not only in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries but also in the centuries between the end of the medieval era and the
beginning of the twentieth century. That is, I follow Trigg in examining the medieval apart from its later revisions, but unlike her, I do not explore any early modern or Victorian analogues of Landnámabók or Longes Mac n-Uislenn that may exist. More significantly, Trigg situates her discussion of the Order as a performative phenomenon in the previous century—the beginning of which era is the point at which “the adjective ‘medieval’ starts to assume a decidedly negative valency” (Trigg 253)—in light of Three Guineas. Woolf’s use of defamiliarization to describe the insignia worn by England’s public servants—adornment that implicitly codes as medieval, whether or not it actually is or could plausibly date from the period—by deliberately omitting to contextualize their figurative meaning “[refuses] their easy entry into the modern, except as pastiche and fragment” (Trigg 254). Citing Woolf’s remark that “whatever these ceremonies may mean you perform them always together, always in step, always in the uniform” (Woolf qtd. by Trigg 255-56) as evidence that “[t]he proliferation of honors and the very professionalism of royal rituals could also be seen as a ‘circus,’ the empty performance of customary ritual that has been emptied of any meaningful symbolic import” (Trigg 255), Trigg concludes that “[a]t the high point of European modernism,

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10 Trigg quotes the following passage from Three Guineas:

Now you dress in violet; a jeweled crucifix swings on your breast. Now you dress in violet; a jewelled crucifix swings on your breast; now your shoulders are covered with lace; now furred with ermine; now slung with many linked chains set with precious stones. Now you wear wigs on your heads; rows of graduated curls descend to your necks. Now your hats are boat-shaped, or cocked; now they mount in cones of black fur; now they are made of brass and scuttle shaped; now plumes of red, now of blue hair surmount them. Sometimes gowns cover your legs; sometimes gaiters. Tabards embroidered with lions and unicorns swing from your shoulders; metal objects cut in star shapes or in circles glitter and twinkle upon your breasts. Ribbons of all colours—blue, purple, crimson--cross from shoulder to shoulder. After the comparative simplicity of your dress at home, the splendour of your public attire is dazzling. (Woolf qtd. in Trigg 254)

11 “Nor do we need to see the words “medieval” and “Garter” to observe how easily the trappings of ritual practice are envisaged as medieval: the plumage, glittering objects, and ceremonies of the Garter are regularly glimpsed in such contexts. In 1938, for example, in Three Guineas Virginia Woolf characterized the ‘clothes worn by the educated man in his public capacity’ . . . There is nothing that is specifically named as medieval in any of Woolf’s examples, though the associations of gaiters, ermine, tabards, unicorns, and tapestry are clearly medieval. The ‘rows of graduated curls,’ on the other hand, suggest the judicial wigs that represent a survival of seventeenth-century court dress. Again, an important component of Woolf’s satire is to blur the historical distinctions that specific groups hold so dear” (Trigg 254; 255).
Woolf dehistoricizes and demedievalizes the medieval inheritance of ritual practice, anticipating the postmodern pastiche by which the medieval is now chiefly known and disseminated" (273). As Trigg posits it, then, *Three Guineas* is a modernist work that distinguishes the modern from the medieval through the effect of its author’s employment of defamiliarization, one that is contrary to that of Auden’s, Heaney’s, Morgan’s and Pound’s use of the same device. To the extent that *Three Guineas* is the theoretical basis of my argument here, I, by contrast, situate Woolf’s essay as the foundation of the connection between the medieval and the modern that I seek to establish.

In this light, I would like to suggest that my dissertation is an unorthodox addition to Woolfian scholarship, and more particularly to criticism focused upon *Three Guineas*—unorthodox because unlike previous, including recent, studies pertaining to this essay, this project does not explicitly dissect *Three Guineas*, and the textual analyses that I put forth in subsequent chapters do not overtly engage with Woolf’s ideas. At the same time, each chapter of this dissertation expands upon the scholarly critical traditions to which it respectively and more obviously belongs, and the order in which each appears in this dissertation reflects the relationship between the medieval and the modern that I underscore, which is to say that instead of addressing *Landnámabók* (*The Book of Settlements*) followed by *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* before turning to Mitchison’s novel and Yeats’ play, my examination of each twentieth-century work immediately succeeds that of the medieval text to which it corresponds. The appearance of Auðr in *djúpúðga* (“Aud the deep-minded”) in a number of Norse texts testifies to her significance within the Old Icelandic literary tradition, an importance that in turn implicitly rationalizes the fact that she is the focus of the first half of this dissertation. In Chapter One, I examine Auðr in *djúpúðga* as *Landnámabók* (*The Book of Settlements*), the medieval work that provides the most expansive narrative of her existence, depicts her. With respect to *Landnámabók*’s portrayal of her, Sofie Vanherpen has explored Auðr’s status as a Christian, while Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, Carol Clover, Margaret Clunies Ross and, more recently, Chris Callow, have identified Auðr in terms of gender. According to Meulengracht Sørensen, Auðr performs as a man in
Landnámabók, an assessment that Clover invokes in pointing her out as a woman “whose behavior exceeds what is presumed to be custom and sometimes the law as well” (Clover 3). By contrast, Clunies Ross has argued that Landnámabók’s description of Auðr’s settlement in Iceland codes it as feminine; and Callow groups Auðr with the other women who claimed land during Iceland’s Settlement Period (870-930 A.D.). Expanding upon Meulengracht Sørensen’s and Clover’s ideas while departing from the scholarship of Clunies Ross and Callow, my analysis of Landnámabók’s portrayal of Auðr in djúpúðga reinforces the text’s own classification of her as one of Iceland’s “best-born settlers” (“En þesser land-náms-menn hafa gaofgaster vereð” [Hauksbók V. xvii. Ii]) — all the rest of whom are men — and identifies her with war, a traditionally male domain.

That The Land the Ravens Found is a deliberate revision of and expansion upon Landnámabók’s account of Auðr, as Naomi Mitchison’s own postscript to this work acknowledges, certainly justifies my use of it in defense of my argument. But insofar as Scotland was once a Norse dominion and Mitchison was Scottish (even if she did spend a good portion of her life in England until Scotland became her permanent residence in 1939 when she was forty-two), The Land the Ravens Found is a fitting analogue of Landnámabók as a Scottish text that the Icelandic literary tradition arguably encompasses. Furthermore, my analysis of The Land the Ravens Found in Chapter Two contributes to the comparatively small body of criticism on Mitchison, a prolific and underrated writer whose fiction and poetry deserve much more attention than they have yet received. By writing about one of Mitchison’s novels here, I hope to heighten awareness of her on the part of both scholars and general readers. Insofar as Chapter Two concentrates upon the relationship between women and war in The Land the Ravens Found, it examines the novel from a perspective that differs from Julian D’Arcy’s whose discussion of Mitchison’s Norse-themed fiction — including The Land the Ravens Found — in Scottish Skalds and Sagamen: Old Norse Influence on Modern Scottish Literature (1996) concentrates upon the dynamics of race and ethnicity.
Just as allusions to Auðr in djúpúðga in several narratives reflect her importance to the Icelandic literary tradition, the numerous post-medieval adaptations of Longes Mac n-Uislenn that position Derdriu (Deirdre) as their title character speak to her prominence within the history of Irish literature and, as with Auðr, this weightiness underlies the reason that Derdriu is the subject of the second half of this dissertation. In their respective analyses of women in medieval Irish literature, Lisa Bitel and Philip O’Leary have noted a relationship between womanhood and aggression as it pertains to Longes Mac n-Uislenn. According to Bitel, “[s]ex initiated or controlled by a virago such as Medb or Deirdriu produced no heirs” (199), exemplifying the fact that “[w]ith few exceptions in early Irish literature, women who tried to take male attributes became less womanly: they became androgynous characters or lost their definitive fertile and maternal characteristics” (Bitel 201). O’Leary links Derdriu’s suicide in Longes Mac n-Uislenn to the idea that the valor of the warrior defined the relationship between women and society in medieval Ireland: that women “shared their men’s unwillingness to live on in disgrace” (O’Leary 41) informs Derdriu’s decision to kill herself. Similarly, Maria Tymoczko and Máire Herbert connect Derdriu to violence in their respective analyses of Longes Mac n-Uislenn. Tymoczko asserts that Derdriu’s elopement with Noisiu “leads to massive social destruction and chaos,” an observation that paradoxically distances her from conflict in that she is the catalyst for, but not the instigator of, warfare. Furthermore, as Tymoczko also claims, Derdriu’s suicide “avoids potential carnage and bloodshed” (154); Herbert states that Derdriu’s “femininity was a source of threat to the male preserves of warriorhood and kingship” (61). Building upon Bitel’s and O’Leary’s arguments and departing somewhat from Tymoczko’s and Herbert’s, in Chapter Three I consider Derdriu as Longes Mac n-Uislenn depicts her in light of contemporary Irish law pertaining to women and violence in order to demonstrate the extent to which the narrative itself identifies its female protagonist with war even as it expresses its ambivalence toward that connection.

To the extent that his canonical status underlies my decision to scrutinize his revision of Longes Mac n-Uislenn rather than that of another writer such as John Millington Synge, William Butler Yeats needs no
introduction; and if his plays have not received as much critical attention as has his poetry, his *Deirdre* nevertheless has been the subject of much scholarly research. Interestingly, comparatively few of the analyses of the 1907 drama have considered the ways in which it echoes and deviates from *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*, and while some scholars, such as Jacqueline Genet, Bettina Knapp and Gordon Wickstrom, have alluded to Yeats’ own references to figures from Old Irish sources other than *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*—namely, Lugaid Redstripe; his wife, Derbforgaill (to whom Yeats does not allude by name but rather calls “the seamew); and/or Étain—none provides a thorough analysis of both *Deirdre* and the sources that feature Lugaid Redstripe, Derbforgaill and/or Étain in relation to each other. In Chapter Four, I not only examine Yeats’ *Deirdre* in light of both my reading of *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* in Chapter Three and my readings of *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (The Destruction of Dá Derga’s Hostel), *Tochmarc Étaine* (The Wooing of Étain) and the *Aided Derbforgaill* (The Violent Death of Derbforgaill).

Overall, then, my dissertation stands as an eclectic project that brings together texts from disparate, non-contiguous periods that are rarely considered in relation to one another, enriching existing scholarship in various disciplines. As such, it is intended to demonstrate the relevance of the medieval and the modern to one another not only for the purpose of reconciling those factions within academia that, when all is said and done, share a common interest in preserving and extending the study of the humanities as a whole, but also for the purpose of heightening awareness of, and influencing public opinion about, the status of women in society in order to reverse the regulations that circumscribe it. In so doing, my dissertation is meant to underscore the importance of the humanities to the survival of the U.S. as an enlightened democracy, thereby helping to reclaim for academics a role as public intellectuals in an effort to reestablish a relationship based upon respect and goodwill between the general public and academia.
CHAPTER ONE:

“And this has been the best-born (female) settler”:

Landnámabók’s Auðr in djúpúðga (“the deep-minded”)

In her preface to Women in Old Norse Society, Jenny Jochens states that “[t]he present book focuses specifically upon Norway, especially Iceland, and the women whose lives are described primarily in the two genres known as the sagas of Icelanders and the contemporary sagas, further corroborated from the perspective supplied by the laws” (x). That is, unlike Old Norse Images of Women, her then as yet unpublished analysis of “divine, mythic and heroic women” (Jochens x), Women in Old Norse Society focuses upon women as they plausibly may have lived in medieval Iceland. This scrutiny informs the paradoxical implications of Jochens’ distinction of Auðr in djúpúðga (“the deep-minded”) in Women in Old Norse Society from many of the other “independent, older widows” in Norse literature “who confirm that a woman at this stage of life enjoyed her greatest power” (Jochens 62):

Best known is Auðr /Unnr Ketilsdóttir,13 the daughter of a Norwegian chieftain and wife of a Norse king in Dublin. Little is known about her until both her husband and son were killed and she became responsible for a large household, including several granddaughters and a grandson. At that moment “she had a ship built secretly in a forest, and when it was completed she loaded it with valuables and prepared for a voyage. She took all her surviving kinsfolk with her. It is generally agreed that it would be hard to find another example of a woman (kvennmaðr) escaping from such hazards with so much wealth and such

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12 Because the works I will be discussing here were originally composed in Old Icelandic, I will cite original text before providing its corresponding translation in English when quoting very brief phrases if they can be syntactically integrated into my own sentences. For the sake of readability, however, I will, for the most part, cite only English translations of longer passages in the main text of this chapter; the corresponding Norse text will be quoted in the footnote that will respectively accompany each translation.

13 Jochens refers to this figure by her full name as “Auðr /Unnr Ketilsdóttir” instead of by her nickname, “in djúpúðga (“the deep-minded”). “Unnr” is an alternative form of Auðr.
Auðr was clearly an exceptional woman. Aware of the authority that male kinsmen could exercise—especially younger male in-laws—she wisely scattered her granddaughters on islands in the Atlantic and married them to local men whose authority she avoided by proceeding to Iceland with her young grandson. (Jochens 62)

Jochens’ identification of Auðr in terms of her familial roles affirms her inclusion in a book that, as its title indicates, explicitly posits women as its subject and considers them within the bounds of community and culture. Auðr’s father’s and husband’s status, as well as her actions in relation to their respective slayings, define her own social standing. Jochens’ own assessment of Auðr as “an exceptional woman,” which echoes Laxdæla saga’s assessment of her as “a paragon among women,” emphasizes her gender, as does the fact that she strategically negotiates marriages on behalf of her granddaughters to young men who are geographically remote from Iceland, her own destination, so that the latter will not have any jurisdiction over her. In addition, Jochens’ quotation of Laxdæla saga attests to the fact that her own esteem for Auðr is an affirmation of the saga’s own valuation of this figure as its own narrative depicts her.

Yet as Jochens points out with respect to Gudrun, another character who appears in Laxdæla saga, widows, as opposed to wives or young single women, were “best able to embody masculine ideals” (62). Auðr’s singularity in “escaping” differentiates her from other women, anticipating Jochens’ assertion that in Iceland, by “[i]growing the restrictions on land claim (landnám) that applied to women, [Auðr] claimed as much land as any man” and “passed the last phase of her life in conformity with the masculine model available to mature men” (62).

Two themes that emerge from Jochens’ consideration of Auðr—namely, gender and intertextuality—inform my discussion of this figure here in light of both her appearance in Norse literature and previous critical scholarship pertaining to her. The first mention of Auðr in djúpúðga (“the deep-
minded”) in Icelandic literature occurs in the second chapter of Ari Þorgilsson’s Íslendingabók (The Book of Icelanders), the oldest account of medieval Icelandic society still in existence and the single surviving text of its author, as follows:

Auðr, daughter of Ketill Flatnose, a Norwegian lord, settled in the west in Breiðafjörð; from her the people of Breiðafjörð are descended. (trans. Grønlie 4)

Among other things, Ari’s reference to Auðr reflects the primacy of genealogy in Íslendingabók and her own significance as the common ancestor of those living in western Iceland. Brennu-Njáls saga (The Saga of Burnt Njal) also emphasizes Auðr’s genealogical importance, mentioning her only in the line of descent provided for her great-grandson, Hoskuld (who figures significantly in the first third of the saga), while other Icelandic texts—namely Eyrbyggja saga (The Saga of the Dwellers of Eyrr); Eiríks saga rauða (The Saga of Erik the Red); Laxdæla saga (The Saga of the People of Laxardal); and Landnámabók (The Book of Settlements)—provide, to varying degrees, a fuller sense of Auðr’s life. The author of Eyrbyggja saga mentions Auðr as one of Ketil Flat-nose’s offspring in Chapter One; and as in Íslendingabók and Njals saga, Eyrbyggja saga provides only “objective” details concerning Auðr’s life. What is more, these few particulars contribute little to the

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14 Ari composed the version of Íslendingabók that has come down to us somewhere between 1122 and 1133 (Grønlie xiii).
15 “Auðr, dóttir Ketils flatnefs, hersis nórræns, byggði vestr í Breiðafjörð; þaðan eru Breiðfjörðingar komnir” (Þorgilsson, Íslendingabók, ÍF 1 6).
16 This reference implicitly emphasizes the importance of historical accuracy as a single, brief sentence that establishes Auðr as an authentic personage by defining her in terms of the putatively irrefutable facts of her existence—who her father was, what place she had in Iceland’s social structure by virtue of that lineage, where she established residency in Iceland and who her descendants were—while apparently refusing to comment subjectively about her by omitting reference to her as “in djúpúðga.” Indeed, Ari’s second reference to Auðr in the final chapter of Íslendingabók seems to affirm his purpose in putting forth an accurate account of Iceland’s history as a settled nation. In a short paragraph that serves as an appendix to Chapter Ten and therefore to the work as a whole, Ari reiterates that Auðr “byggði vestr” (“settled in the west”) and then lists those individuals who descended directly from her, concluding with one of his own contemporaries, Bishop Þorlákr of Skálaholt. In so doing, Ari provides the biological details that demonstrate the authenticity of Auðr’s status as the progenitor of Breiðafjörðr’s inhabitants.
plot of *Eyrbyggja saga*: Chapter Five informs us that Auðr once hosted her brother, Bjorn the Easterner, when she was living in the Hebrides, and Chapter Six relates her emigration to Iceland, where “var inn fyrsta vetr” (“[she] was the first winter”/*Eyrbyggja saga, IF IV 11*) on that island, the geographical boundaries of her estate and the location of her homestead. 17 Nevertheless, Auðr herself appears as a character in Chapters Five and Six of this saga, and what *Eyrbyggja saga* relates of her at least reveals some specifics of her experience in Iceland.

By contrast, the first chapter of *Eiríks saga rauða* provides an account of Auðr’s settlement in Iceland that in comparison with *Landnámabók*’s version of the same reads as a truncation of the latter. That *Eiríks saga rauða* begins with a description of this event is not, however, a reflection of Auðr’s own importance to the saga, although it is indicative of her narrative function within the text: the depiction of her relocation to Iceland serves as a convenient means of introducing an individual with a fairly significant role in the work.

Auðr of course is present in *Laxdæla saga*, as Jochens’ quotation of a passage pertaining to her from that work attests: after defining her as one of Ketil Flat-nose’s daughters and Olaf the White’s spouse in its first chapter 18 and mentioning that she accompanies her father when he departs from Norway and sails westward, the saga details Auðr’s immigration to Iceland in Chapters Four through Seven. As in *Njals saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða*, Auðr’s appearance in *Laxdæla saga* is brief relative to the length of the work that comprises her: *Laxdæla saga* consists of seventy-eight chapters. Yet unlike the three other sagas

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17 The fifth chapter of *Eyrbyggja saga* relates Bjorn’s arrival in the Hebrides, his reaction to his siblings’ conversion to Christianity, and their response to him, which explains how he came to be called “Bjorn inn auströna” (“Bjorn the Easterner”). However, the author of *Eyrbyggja saga* does not single out Auðr with respect to these events other than to say that Bjorn stayed with her after coming to the Hebrides (“. . .var hann jó um vetrinn med Auði, systur sinni . . .” (*Eyrbyggja saga, IF IV 10*).
18 “Olaf” is the standard translation of “Oleifr,” the name of Auðr’s husband; Gudbrand Vigfusson and F. York Powell translate “Oleifr as “Anlaf” in their translation of *Hauksbók*, one of the two full and extant versions of *Landnámabók*. 
that allude to Auðr, *Laxdæla saga* imbues her with both narrative and thematic significance through a

description that comprises one full version of her Icelandic *landnám* (“land-taking”) 19:

> The account of Unn 20 resembles structurally those of Old Testament patriarchs. At the same time it bears witness to the fact that the very foundation of *The Saga of the people of Laxardal* lies in a reversal of traditional gender roles: a woman plays the role of patriarch as if she were male and the men accept her leadership, but clashes are imminent should they neglect to show her the respect she feels is her due. While Unn hold the reins of power, peace and lawfulness prevail. However, just like any patriarch, this matriarch declines to nominate a woman as her successor. She chooses instead a son of a king, her grandson, Olaf Feilan Thorsteinson, but he has no intention of deferring to a female for long. . . . After Unn’s death no woman gains the same social position and power. Nor is it long before events take a turn for the worse, partly due to gender conflicts. (Kristjánsdóttir xiii).

The last work 21 in which Auðr appears is *Landnámabók* (*The Book of Settlements*), 22 which is, ostensibly, a record of those who claimed land in Iceland during its Settlement

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19 Although an examination of Auðr’s presence in this saga would be germane to my discussion here, I have elected, for reasons having to do with constraints of time and space, not to analyze *Laxdæla saga* ’s depiction of her in this chapter.

20 In her introduction to Keneva Kunz’s translation of *Laxdæla saga*, Bergljót S. Kristjánsdóttir, like Jochens, refers to Auðr as “Unn.”

21 Another narrative in which Auðr does feature more prominently is “Gullbra og Skeggi í Hvammi” (“Goldbrow and Skeggi at Hvamm”). Apparently, the first reference to this folktale appears in a letter that historian Thormod Torfæus received in 1690 from “manuscript collector Árni Magnússon, who grew up at Hvammur. . .” (McKinnell 132). That the first extant allusion to “Gullbra og Skeggi í Hvammi” dates to 1690 does not rule out the possibility that it first surfaced during the medieval period, but by the same token, there is no conclusive evidence indicating that the narrative was in existence before 1450. In any case, this story, which contextualizes Auðr as a Christian foil for the (pagan) witch Gullbra, appears to take place long after the widow has settled in Iceland and more pertinently does not seem to engage the themes that are the focus of this chapter.

22 Ari Þorgilsson and Kolskegg the Wise composed *Landnámabók* at some point before the former produced *Íslendingabók*. That juncture may have been as early as “c. 1097 when the tithe system was adopted” (Pálsson and Edwards, Intro to *Landnámabók* 5), though it is possible that Ari and Kolskegg began to amass the details comprised by *Landnámabók* towards the end of 1117 and into 1118 (Clunies Ross 161). Although neither
Period (870-930) and which in its entirety exists in two manuscripts, Sturla Þórdarson’s
_Sturlubók_ (1275-80). and Haukr Erlendsson’s _Hauksbók_ (1306-08). This register
comprises an entry for each settler, of whom there were approximately four hundred. In
this light, _Landnámabók_ arguably consists of four hundred vignettes, the majority of which

Ari’s manuscript nor that of Stymir Kárason (c. 1220) come down to us, the three medieval manuscripts
that have been preserved were based wholly or partly upon _Styrmisbók_ (Pálsson and Edwards, Introduction
to _Landnámabók_ 5). _Hauksbók_, whose compiler, Haukr Erlendsson (d.1334), was logmaðr (“lawman”—i.e.
head of the _logrétta_ (formerly Iceland’s legislative body)) between 1294 and 1299 (Gerst 255), is an
amalgam of _Styrmisbók_ and _Sturlubók_, one of the other three manuscripts for which _Styrmisbók_ was the copy-
text. Sturla Þórdarson (d. 1284), the compiler of _Sturlubók_, was a distinguished member of one of Iceland’s
most prominent families. One of Iceland’s lawspeakers and the nephew of Snorri Sturluson, Sturla was a
writer in his own right as a poet and the author of _Íslandinga saga_, among other works. Sturla also used
_Styrmisbók_ as his copy-text.

Although in her view _Landnámabók_ cannot wholly be explained as a narrative justification of land
ownership on the part of prominent Icelanders between 1100 and 1199 given that many settlers mentioned
in the text did not have illustrious descendants, Margaret Clunies Ross admits that “we cannot escape the
hermeneutic circle in which early settlers are represented by their descendants as invoking supernatural
revelations of an authority that was significant, as invested in the pioneers, to the extent that their
descendants were successful in the colony” (161). Adolf Friðriksson and Orri Vésteinsson largely concur in
arguing that producing narratives of the nation’s prosperous familial dynasties was not inimical to that which
they perceive as the impetus behind the composition of _Landnámabók_—namely such as that which explains
the formation of Iockle-river as a magical phenomenon resulting from a truce between two wizards,
obviously belie historical accuracy (see _ÍF_ I 305/ _Hauksbók_ IV. ix. iv).

Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards provide this time span in the introduction to their translation of
_Landnámabók_ (3) which, they state, is “based on the standard edition of the _Sturlubók_ text by Jakob
translations of _Sturlubók_ will come from Pálsson and Edwards’ 1972 edition. However, as Pálsson and
Edwards’ comment that readers “who wish to examine variant readings in different texts should consult Dr.
Benediktsson’s edition” (Notes on the Translation 12) implies, Benediktsson’s edition comprises material
from other manuscripts of _Landnámabók_ besides _Sturlubók_ (the third extant copy of this text, _Melabók_,
consists of only “two vellum leaves, dating from the early fifteenth century . . .” [Pálsson and Edwards,
Introduction to _Landnámabók_ 4]). In this chapter, I shall follow Pálsson and Edwards in using Benediktsson’s
edition as my original language source for _Sturlubók_, but because Benediktsson indicates that certain passages
come from both _Sturlubók_ and _Hauksbók_, I shall cite any material I quote from his version by the series
abbreviation (_ÍF_) for and volume number (_I_) of this edition, as well as by the page on which the quoted text
appears.

Pálsson and Edwards also provide these dates in their introduction to _Landnámabók_ (3). The original
language text and corresponding translation of _Hauksbók_ to which I will be referring are comprised by
Gudbrand Vigfusson and F. York Powell’s _Origines Islandicae: A Collection of the More Important Sagas and Other
Native Writings Relating to the Settlement and Early History of Iceland_ (1905).
are self-contained narratives that make sense in and of themselves. From this perspective, the work’s account of Auðr’s landnám (“land-taking”) is but one of several hundred.

This paradox—that Landnámabók is at once a cohesive and a comprehensive document—informs my own reading of this record’s account of Auðr’s land claim. It also underlies the third of the three reasons that my analysis of Auðr in this chapter concerns her as she appears in The Book of Settlements and not as she features in the five other texts that allude to her. The first reason, of course, is that I am examining Auðr in this dissertation as both a medieval work and a twentieth-century one depict her, and Gudbrand Vigfusson and F. York Powell’s 1905 translation of Hauksbók—the same translation that corresponds to the edition upon which my analysis of Landnámabók will mostly be based— is the narrative source upon which Naomi Mitchison based her 1955 novel, The Land the Ravens Found, which I will be discussing in the next chapter.

The second reason is that Landnámabók provides one of the two full versions (Laxdæla saga contains the other) of Auðr’s land-taking in and of itself.

The third reason is that to the extent that it acquires some of its thematic significance through its relation to the other landnám narratives in the same text, The Book of Settlements’ account of Auðr’s land claim in Iceland is the most expansive rendering of this event—and my discussion of it here positions my argument in relation to previous scholarship concerning the same. Indeed, it is in light of Margaret Clunies Ross’ analysis that I wish to put forth my own interpretation here for the reason that hers is the only one that provides a close reading of Landnámabók’s Auðr in relation to both gender and the settlements of other Icelanders. Clunies Ross argues that Auðr’s “landnám” as it is depicted in Landnámabók reinscribes

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26 To a lesser extent, I will also refer to Sturlabók in the course of my analysis.
27 Preben Meulengracht Sørensen in The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society and Carol Clover in “Regardless of Sex: Men, Women and Power in Early Northern Europe” refer briefly to Auðr in making a holistic assessment of gender in Norse literature. Sofie Vanherpen does not address gender in “Remembering Auðr/Unnr djúp(a)udga Ketilsdóttir: Construction of Cultural Memory and Female Religious Identity.” Chris Callow notes the salient geographical details of both Auðr’s land-taking and those of other women in order to argue that Landnámabók “is likely to have been compiled in two
contemporary perceptions of land-taking as a “male activity” (160) in its distinctiveness from the
settlements of men that are described in the same text, a uniqueness that paradoxically renders it an
exemplar of female settlement, as her (Clunies Ross’) focus upon Auðr seems to imply. 28 Clunies Ross
observes that Landnámabók portrays the settlements of landnámsmenn (“male land-takers”) as “divinely
sanctioned” (176) events that position each settler as the conduit of his family’s fortunes, social standing and
influence to Iceland from his place of emigration (often Norway but sometimes elsewhere). Specifically,
Clunies Ross observes that the settlements of the landnámsmenn follow a particular paradigm: upon sighting
the coast of Iceland, the immigrants toss the high-seat pillars that have accompanied them on their
respective journeys into the sea; after living a somewhat peripatetic existence in Iceland for a period of
three or so years, these newcomers stake their claim to land wherever their high-seat pillars have
respectively beached, which is where the gods have intended them to settle on behalf of their heirs. Auðr’s
“landnám” deviates from this pattern, according to Clunies Ross, in that it is not preternaturally destined;
she is the third rather than the first person from her natal family to come to Iceland and therefore is not the
channel by which her family’s fortunes, social standing and influence come to Iceland; her descendants
perpetuate her husband’s lineage rather than her own; and the matriarch acquires land for these descendants
via marital unions rather than through her own landnám. In short, Clunies Ross takes issue (despite her
claims not to do so) with Meulengracht Sørensen and Carol Clover’s argument that Auðr functions as a
patriarch in Landnámabók. 29

28 Clunies Ross states that the “acts of the few female land-takers (landnámskonur) who are mentioned in the
Icelandic texts are described in significantly different terms from those of the men, a difference that
presumably reflects a subconscious awareness of the inappropriateness of the male paradigm to women
settlers” (162). The only landnámskonur Clunies Ross discusses, however, is Auðr.
29 Clunies Ross paraphrases Meulengracht Sørensen who argues that “Auðr acted as a man because the men
who should have acted on her behalf were dead” (22) and states that “[t]his view has been endorsed most
recently by Carol Clover [in “Regardless of Sex: Men, Women and Power in Early Northern Europe”],
when she writes that the literary representation of Unnr in Laxdæla saga shows her ‘in her role as the
It is my intention here, then, within the broader context of my dissertation’s overriding premise, to elucidate how Landnámabók, unlike Njals saga, Eyrbýggja saga, Eiríks saga rauða, and even Laxdæla saga (and much more so than Íslendingabók), explicitly and implicitly positions Auðr as a prominent figure within its pages through its general structures and, more particularly, through the ways in which its depiction of Auðr’s settlement in Iceland compares to its portrayals of the landnám of other settlers. In so doing, I will demonstrate the extent to which Landnámabók’s depiction of Auðr and her landnám represents a blurring of gender boundaries that reasserts the validity of Meulengracht Sørensen’s and Clover’s ideas and expands upon them even as it builds upon Clunies Ross’ argument by defining Auðr not only in terms of masculinity but also in terms of war.

I. “This is the Prologue to this Book”

Sturla Þórðarson and Haukr Erlendsson list 401 original landnám in their respective versions of Landnámabók (Friðriksson and Vésteinsson n. 145). That is, both Sturlubók and Hauksbók account for 401 original settlers. According to Judith Jesch, approximately three percent, or thirteen, of these individuals are women (81) while the alphabetical listing of settlers that Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards have appended to their translation of Sturlubók includes the names of eleven women. There is no question that revered and authoritative head of the family, when in every respect she has taken over the conduct and social functions of the male householder and leader’ (64)” (Clunies Ross 160).

10 All subheadings consist of (edited) text from Gudbrand Vigfusson and F. York Powell’s translation of Haukr Erlendsson’s compilation of Landnámabók (Hauksbók [1306-08]) which they published in Origines Islandicae: A Collection of the More Important Sagas and Other Native Writings Relating to the Settlement and Early History of Iceland (1905).

11 The frequently cited figure of 430 includes the landnám of some who acquired their land through gift or purchase (Friðriksson and Vésteinsson n. 145).

12 Pálsson and Edwards include the following women in their index: Arnbjorg of Arnbjargar Brook, Arndis the Wealthy, Asgerd Ask’s-daughter, Aud the Deep-Minded, Geirrid of Borgardale, Ljot of Ljotarstead, Steinunn the Old, Thorbjorg Pole, Thorgerd of Sandfell, Thorunn of Thorunnarholt and Thurid the Sound-Filler. However, Sturlubók and Hauksbók each contain a narrative about a settler by the name of Eyvind Knee in which it becomes clear that he and his wife, Thurid Grunt-Sow, jointly “[take] possession of Alfáfjord and Seyðisfjord” (trans. Pálsson and Edwards 70)/ “þau námu Álptafjordóð ok Seyðisfjord ok bjoggu þar” [ÍF
six women claim previously unclaimed land according to both Haukbók and Sturlubók while linguistic ambiguities make it likely, but not definite, that four other women are the first owners of the land to which

[301x54]29
[72x710]six women claim previously unclaimed land according to both Hauksbók and Sturlubók while linguistic ambiguities make it likely, but not definite, that four other women are the first owners of the land to which

I 189]). I have not provided the equivalent text from Hauksbók here because it is substantively, if not orthographically, identical to the material I have just quoted from Sturlubók. I will follow this practice of citing original language text from one source instead of from two when the lines I am quoting are substantively identical in both manuscripts throughout this chapter. In addition, both Sturlubók and Hauksbók identify a woman called Thurid the Prophetess as Thorunn of Thorunnarholt’s neighbor and sister in their respective narratives of the latter’s landnám even though neither manuscript includes an account of the former’s settlement or acknowledges her as a landnámskona: “[Þórunn] átti land ofan til Viðilœkjjar ok upp til móts við Þuríði spá-konu, systur sína, er bjó í Grol” (ÍF I 86). Again, I have not provided the equivalent text from Hauksbók here because it is substantively, if not orthographically, identical to the material I have just quoted from Sturlubók.

Asgerd Asks-daughter, Auðr in djúpudga, Ljot of Ljotarstead, Thorgerd of Sandfell, Thurid Grunt-sow and Thurid Sound-Filler. Sturlubók’s account of Thurid Sound-Filler’s landnám situates her and her son as the grammatical subjects of its first sentence in stating that she and her son “[go] from Halogaland to Iceland and [take] possession of Bolungavik” (trans. Pálsson and Edwards 69-70)/ “Þuríðr sundafyllir ok Volu-Steinn son hennar fór af Hálogalandi til Íslands ok nam Bolungavík. . . ” (ÍF I 186). Sturlubók deploys the third person singular “nam” (“took”) in the Old Icelandic text. Hauksbók, however, uses the third person plural “naomo” (see II.xxiv.v), and Vigfusson and Powell’s translation, like that of Pálsson and Edwards, posits Thurid Sound-Filler and her son as joint land claimants.

29
they stake claim. 34 Three women become landnámkonur as grantees or purchasers 35 while another settles upon previously claimed land that is contextualized as neither gift nor purchase. 36

34 Both Sturlubók and Haukbók state that Arnbjorg took up residence at Arnbjargar Brook (“hon bjó Arnbjargarleik” [I F I 86]). That is, neither manuscript designates her unequivocally as a landnámkonan by asserting, as it formulaically does in the majority of its brief narratives, that she “nam land” (“took land”). Yet in both manuscripts, the account in which she appears begins formulaically in positing her as its grammatical and substantive subject (“Arnbjorg hét kona” [I F I 86]). That is, Arnbjorg “was the name of a woman” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 48), and beyond indicating that someone called Arnbjorg once existed, this clause paradigmatically situates her as a settler. Similarly, Sturlubók and Haukbók relate that Thorunn of Thorunnarholt “att land. . . .” (I F I 86)—i.e., that she “owned land. . . .” (trans. Pálsson and Edwards 34). However, Sturlubók’s description of Thorunn’s settlement—which according to Benediktsson is identical to Haukbók’s but differs slightly from Vigfusson and Powell’s version—introduces Thorunn with the formulaic clause “Þórunn hét kona” (I F I 86), which, contextualizes her as a settler in the same way that “Arnbjorg hét kona” indicates that Arnbjorg is one. In addition, Landnámabók contains several examples of settlers who acquire land that others have previously owned—for example, one settler, An, is the recipient of land from Grim, another landnámsmáðr (see I F I 90/91 and Haukbók II. iv. viii)—and the absence of any explicit details indicating that Thorunn of Thorunnarholt receives or buys land implies that she is the first person to settle upon her land. In note 32, I mentioned that Sturlubók’s and Haukbók’s descriptions of Thorunn’s landnám allude to a neighbor known as Thurid the Prophetess although, strangely enough, neither manuscript provides an entry for her. The sentence in which The Book of Settlements refers to Thurid the Prophetess, which I have quoted in note 32, indicates only that she owns property that borders Thorunn’s but does not say how she acquired it. However, the same logic that applies to the status of Thorunn’s settlement may also be applied to Thurid’s; given Landnámabók’s overt concern with the ways in which settlers become landowners, the text’s failure to designate Thurid the Prophetess’ property as a gift or purchase suggests that she, like Thorunn, is its first claimant. Finally, Sturlubók’s entry for Thorstein Asgrímsson mentions that he emigrated to Iceland “with his brother Thorgeir and their aunt Thorunn” and that “[s]he took possession of the whole of Thorunnar Ridge” (trans. Pálsson and Edwards 134-5)/ “Eptir þat fór hann til Íslands ok Þorgeirr bróðir hans ok Þórunn móðursystir þeira; hon nam Þórunnarhalsa; ok bygðe þar síðan” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 214/ Haukbók V. viii. iii]). While Haukbók states that Thor-gar travels “to Iceland with Thor-stan and Thor-wen, their mother’s sister, and took in settlement Thor-wen’s—neck, and dwelt there afterwards” (“Hann fór til Ílannz með Þórsteine; ok þórunn móðor-systyr þeirra, ok nom þórunnar-halsa; ok bygðe þar síðan” [trans. Vigfusson and Powell 214/ Haukbók V. viii. iii]) while Haukbók states that Thor-gar travels “to Iceland with Thor-stan and Thor-wen, their mother’s sister, and took in settlement Thor-wen’s—neck, and dwelt there afterwards” (“Hann fór til Ílannz með Þórsteine; ok þórunn móðor-systyr þeirra, ok nom þórunnar-halsa; ok bygðe þar síðan” [trans. Vigfusson and Powell 214/ Haukbók V. viii. iii]). However, the semi-colon separating “bóhrsteine” from “ok” suggests that we should not read “ok þórunn móðor-systyr þeirra” as a continuation of the prepositional phrase “með þórunnr,” an interpretation that is supported by the nominative form of “systyr.” The placement of “ok þórunn móðor-systyr þeirra,” ok nom þórunnar-halsa” between two semi-colons implies that we should read these clauses as a single unit, and I would argue that the second “ok”—a word that is commonly translated as “and” but may also function as a relative pronoun among other things—should be translated as “who.” That is, the grammar and punctuation of these lines from Haukbók V. viii. iii support the idea that it is Thor-wen/ Thorunn, not Thor-gar/ Thorstein, who claims Thor-wen’s neck/ Thorunnar Ridge, especially in light of the fact that places in Landnámabók often derive from the names of those who settle them.

35 Geirrid of Borgardale, Steinnun the Old and Thorberg Pole.

36 As indicated in note 32, Pálsson and Edwards cite Arndís the Wealthy in their index of settlers. Sturlubók’s account of her, which is substantively identical to that found in Haukbók, is as follows: “Arndís en auðga,
References to both Irish priests and Scandinavian explorers notwithstanding, *Landnámabók* begins with an account of the emigration and settlement of Ingolf who “bygðe fyrst landet” (*Hauksbók* I. iii. ix/“was the first to settle the country” [trans. Vigfusson and Powell 24]) and who “bió í Reykjar-vik” (*Hauksbók* I. iii. viii/“dwelt in Reek-wick” [trans. Vigfusson and Powell 23]), which lies on the southwest coast of Iceland. This description is both a narrative and a geographical starting point insofar as *Landnámabók*’s narrative metaphorically moves away from Reykjavik in a clockwise direction along the coast of Iceland, and the order in which it introduces each settler corresponds to where he lived along this route.

dóttir Steinólfs ens lága, nam siðan land í Hrútafirði út frá Borðeyri; hon bjó í Bœ. Hennar son var Þórðr, er bjó fyrir í Múla í Saurbœ” [ÍF I 201]/ “Afterwards, Arndis the Wealthy, daughter of Steinolf the Short, took possession of land in Hrutafjord, north of Bordeyr and made her home at Bœ. She was the mother of Thord, who first lived at Muli in Saurby” (trans. Pálsson and Edwards 77). In isolation, the Norse account gives the impression that Arndis becomes the owner of land that has not previously belonged to anyone else. However, the previous entry tells us that a “man called Balki. . .took possession of the whole of Hrutafjord” (trans. Pålsson and Edwards 76/ “Bálki . . . .pat för hann til Íslands ok nam Hrútafjórð allan. . . .” [ÍF I 200]) where his son, Bersi the Godless, eventually becomes a farmer. The chronology of these events thus implies that Arndis acquires land that Balki originally claimed, although no details indicate how she does so (i.e. whether she comes into possession of it as a buyer, grantee or plunderer), and Vigfusson and Powell, like Pálsson and Edwards, emphasize this timeline via the deployment of the word “afterwards” in their translation: “Balce. . .took in settlement all Ram-frith. . .Arndis the Wealthy, daughter of Stan-wolf the Low, afterwards took land in settlement in Ram-frith out from Bord-eyre. She dwelt at By. Her son was Thord, that dwelt before at Mull in Sower-by” (119).

Although Vigfusson and Powell spell this title as “Landnáma-bóc,” I will follow Jakob Benediktsson, editor of the official scholarly edition of this work, in referring to it as “Landnámabók” throughout this chapter. Similarly, I shall follow Benediktsson in referring to the two extant versions of this text as *Sturlubók* and *Hauksbók* throughout.

Vigfusson and Powell’s translations of names, whether of people or of places, differ from those of Pálsson and Edwards which creates something of a challenge in maintaining consistency with respect to referencing these entities. Such is especially true in cases where Pálsson and Edwards’ comparatively modernized versions are preferable (and more recognizable) to those of Vigfusson and Powell. In an effort to be both consistent and accurate, I will follow the orthography and translations of the passages I discuss in cases where first references occur within quotations, using footnotes to clarify any obscure allusions. Otherwise, I will choose the most accessible versions of names when alluding to people and places outside of quotations which most likely will follow Pálsson and Edwards’ renditions.

Generally speaking, segments in original language text and their corresponding translations appear on the same page in Vigfusson and Powell’s edition of *Hauksbók*. However, because I eventually will be referring to certain original language sections in terms of how they have been arranged (about which I will say more later in this chapter), my citations for Norse passages from *Hauksbók* will reflect this organization, while my citations for translated passages from the same will contain page references.
That is, the text details the respective *landnám* of Iceland’s original settlers, the last of which, according to Ari, occurred in 930 A.D. To the extent that these chapters are paradigmatic, they generally relate the first name of a given colonist and the location of his claim; that person’s lineage or place of emigration; the names of his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren; 40 the name of his farm; the borders of his property; his blood or marital ties to other Icelanders; subsequent claimants to and residencies on his *landnám*; and any vignettes or saga episodes that concern him or his relatives (Friðriksson and Vésteinsson 145). What is more, this patterning extends to reflect the broader sociological context of women in medieval Iceland. The narrative formulaic “[X] hét maðr” (“[X] was the name of a man. . .”) with which most of these entries begin simultaneously underscores the historical reality that the majority of settlers were *landnámsmenn* (“male land-takers”).

Insofar as the order of *Landnámabók*’s entries corresponds to the geography of Iceland, the text identifies those who first claimed land in, respectively, Iceland’s western, northern, eastern and southern quarters.41 After naming all of the *landnámsmenn* in a given area, both Sturlubók and Hauksbók explicitly note that they have done so. Sturlubók then lists the most prominent settlers in that region before announcing that it will tell of the *landnámsmenn* in the adjacent quarter; Hauksbók, by contrast, records the names of all of Iceland’s most illustrious settlers by sector in its epilogue. The penultimate entries of both versions of *Landnámabók* acknowledge the best chieftains in each fourth of the island, and after pointing out those settlers who have been baptized, the final entries of both Sturlubók and Hauksbók conclude by explaining why, despite these early conversions, Iceland nevertheless remained pagan for almost a century after the Settlement Period. *Landnámabók* distinguishes Auðr as one of the few Christians amongst Iceland’s original

40 On occasion, entries also include descendants who lived between 1100-1200 A.D. (Friðriksson and Vésteinsson [145]).
41 It should be noted that although the general schema of the work is to move in a clockwise direction around the coast of Iceland, the first entries in *Landnámabók* refer to individuals who came to Iceland but did not stay there, and these narratives are followed by an account of the settlement of Iceland’s first permanent settler and all of those who made their homes within his *landnám* which technically is in the South Quarter.
landnámsmenn, and of those individuals whom the text specifically names, she is the only woman. More significantly, Auðr, one of the “best-born settlers” in the “West Frith-men’s Quarter” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 235), is the only “best-born” landnámskona throughout the entire island, and in fact, this status not only differentiates Auðr from the other women in the text by placing her in a category that otherwise comprises men but also defines her as a man in identifying her as one of “þesser land-náms-menn hafa gaofgaster vereð” (Hauksbók V. xvii. ii).

That Landnámabók defines Auðr as one of Iceland’s most prominent landnámsmenn raises questions as to what underlies its categorization of her as such, and its initial reference to her seems to contradict its own declaration of her status. The first actual reference to Auðr in Hauksbók occurs in I. iv, the first lines of which introduce Bjorn Buna, Auðr’s paternal grandfather, as a “herser ríkr ok ágætr í Norege. . .” (“mighty and noble herse in Norway” [trans. Vigfusson and Powell 25]) who by his wife We-lang is father to Cetil Flat-neb, Holgi and Hrapp. The first sub-chapter of I. iv concludes by describing these three brothers as “ágæter menn” (“noble men”) who are the progenitors of the “greatest race that is told of in this book” and of “allt stór-menne komet á Íslande” (Hauksbók I. iv. i) (“all the gentle-folk of Iceland” [trans. Vigfusson and Powell 25]). This sentence anticipates and serves as an introduction to I. iv. ii-v, each of which

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42 The others are Helgi the Lean, Orlyg the Old, Helgi Bjolan, Jorund the Christian and Ketil the Foolish. 43 “En þesser land-náms-menn hafa gaofgaster vereð” (Hauksbók V. xvii. ii). Sturlubók lists the “leading settlers of the West Quarter” (trans. Pálsson and Edwards 80/”Pessir landnámsmenn eru gofgastir í Vestfirðingafjörðungi. . .” [ÍF I 209]) followed by the caveat that “[e]ven so, there were still nobler forbears in some family-lines” (trans. Pálsson and Edwards 80/ “þótt langfeðr haldisk stœrra í sumum ættum” [ÍF I 210]).

44 As I mentioned earlier, much of my discussion of Landnámabók will be based upon my examination of Hauksbók. From this point on, my interpretations will generally derive from my reading of this version of The Book of Settlements. I will, however, make note of any substantive discrepancies between Vigfusson and Powell’s edition and Benediktsson’s that affect my argument. In the absence of such commentary, readers should assume that lines or passages I discuss from Hauksbók are substantively identical to those found in Íslensk fornrit I.

45 “. . .ok es frá þierra afkvæme mart sagt í þesse bök. . .” (Hauksbók I. iv. i).

46 The corresponding passage in Sturlubók (S 10) differs slightly from Hauksbók I. iv. i. in that it (the former) does not describe Bjorn Buna as “ríkr,” only as “ágætr” (ÍF I 146), says that Hervor is the mother of Bjorn Buna’s father Grim (Hauksbók claims that she is Grim’s wife), does not mention that Bjorn’s wife, Velaug, is
concerns the descendants and/or marital ties of Hrapp and Cetil Flat-neb (despite its assessment of Holgi, The Book of Settlements does not mention him again except as a genealogical link which perhaps suggests that he did not emigrate to Iceland). I. iv. ii introduces Hrapp’s wife and more importantly his son, Thord-Sceg, who claims ownership of Icelandic soil within the jurisdiction of Iceland’s first permanent resident (i.e. Ingolf). The location of Thord-Sceg’s landnám explains the placement of Landnámabók’s introduction of Bjorn Buna and his descendants. I. iv. v follows the first of Bjorn Buna’s sons, and it is in this section that Landnámabók first mentions Auðr:

Cetil had to wife Yngw-hild, daughter of Cetil o’ Wether, herse in Ring-ric. Their sons were these, BEORN THE EASTERN and HELGE BEOLAN; EAD THE DEEP O’WEALTH and THORUND HYRNA were their daughters. (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 26) 47

That Landnámabók references Auðr (rendered here by Vigfusson and Powell as “EAD THE DEEP O’WEALTH”) only in passing here is in keeping with the geographical schema of the text: Auðr claims land beyond the bounds of Ingolf’s original claim, so it makes sense that The Book of Settlements does not detail her landnám until its narrative reaches the West Quarter. At the same time, the order in which Landnámabók names Cetil’s children (sons before daughters) certainly emphasizes Auðr’s status as a woman.

Indeed, the passages that foreground Auðr provide an ambiguous answer to the query of how and to what extent we may conceive of Auðr as a landnámsmaðr. Ari Þorgilsson 48 allegedly partitioned his version of Landnámabók into several books which he in turn separated into chapters (Vigfusson and Powell 11), an arrangement that Vigfusson and Powell maintained in putting together their edition and translation of

the “sister of We-mund the Old” (Hauksbók I. iv. i.) and asserts that “[a]lmost all the prominent Icelanders are descended from Bjorn Buna” (trans. Pálsson and Edwards 22/ “Frá Birni er nær allt stórmenni komit á Íslandi [I F I 46]) instead of declaring his sons to be the forefathers of “allt stór-menne komet á Íslande.” 49 “Ketill átte Yngvilde, dóttor Ketils Veðrs hersess af Hringa-rike; þeirr syner vóro þeir, Biaorn enn Austreene, ok Helge Biolan: Auðr en Diúpauðga, ok Þórunn Hyrna vóro døetr þeirra” (Hauksbók I. iv. v).

47 See Note 22.
Ari accorded one entire chapter to each of Iceland’s most prominent settlers (Vigfusson and Powell 11). In this light, it is therefore notable that Hauksbók’s account of Auðr spans two chapters (II. xiv-xv) which simultaneously affirms her place amongst, and distinguishes her from, the landnámsmenn whom Landnámabók has deemed her peers: if, on the one hand, Hauksbók differentiates Auðr by allotting twice as many sections to the telling of her landnám as it does to that of any other major settler’s land-taking, it also, on the other hand, implies that she is in no way their inferior in allotting no fewer chapters to her settlement narrative than it does to any of theirs.

Pálsson and Edwards’ edition of Sturlubók confirms what may be implied by the number of sections that the depiction of Auðr’s land-taking comprises. Pálsson and Edwards’ translation includes an index containing the chapter headings that they have given to each of Sturlubók’s entries. With few exceptions, each of these headings consists of the name of the settler with which it concerns itself. Although there is nothing absolute about the length of any given account insofar as the layout of Pálsson and Edwards’ edition reflects not only subjective decisions concerning spacing and font choices but also spatial discrepancies between Norse and Modern English, the translation’s sub-narrative titles, in conjunction with the number of paragraphs or pages that each entry respectively comprises, provide some indication as to how much or

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49 Actually, Vigfusson and Powell expanded upon Ari’s arrangement by “breaking up the chapters into small paragraphs, after the manner of other classics,” as they put it (11).

50 In fact, some of the depictions, such as that of Gruel-Atli (Hauksbók IV. iv. i/iii), do not take up an entire chapter. Hauksbók does, however, mention a few landnámsmenn—Ketilbjorn the Old (V. xiv), Eirik of Goddales (III. viii) and Helgi the Lean (III. xiv)—in chapters that immediately precede or succeed the ones in which they feature prominently as settlers.

51 Chapters in Vigfusson and Powell’s edition of Hauksbók are not equivalent to chapters in Pálsson and Edwards’ translation which do correspond to the Sturlubók sections from Benediktsson’s edition. For example, Hauksbók’s record of Ingolf’s landnám takes up Book One’s entire third chapter which in turn consists of ten sub-sections. The equivalent material in Íslensk fornrit I may be found in SH 6-9 (and in H 10, which differs slightly from the last paragraph of SH 9—it adds another generation of descendants to Ingolf’s family tree). The following chapters in Pálsson and Edwards’ translation correspond to SH 6-9: “6. The Blood Brothers”; “7. Sacrifice”; “8. In Iceland;” and “9. Ingolf’s settlement.”
how little Landnámabók has to say about any given settler. Of the thirty-eight \(^{52}\) settlers whom Landnámabók names as the most illustrious ones in their respective Quarters, five are the focus of sub-narratives that span more than two full consecutive pages. \(^{53}\) One of these five individuals is Auðr, and Landnámabók’s account of her is arguably and notably longer than that of any of her acknowledged peers. \(^{54}\) By contrast, only one of the entries describing the landnám of other women \(^{55}\) takes up the equivalent of a single page, and much of that narrative pertains to others related to the landnámskona whose settlement it relates. \(^{56}\)

II. “ANLAF THE WHITE . . .took to wife AUD or EAD THE DEEP-WEALTHY”

Yet if the length and divisions of Landnámabók’s description of Auðr’s settlement confirm her place among her male peers, the content of that narrative implicitly indicates the contradictory nature of that status in its initial sentences:

ANLAF THE WHITE was the name of a Host-king. He was the son of king Ingiald, the son of Helgi, the son of Anlaf, the son of God-fred, the son of Half-dan White-leg, the king of the Upland-folk. Anlaf the White harried in the West in wicking cruises, and won Dyflin [Dublin] in Ireland, and Dublin-shire, and made himself king over it. He took to wife AUD or EAD THE DEEP-WEALTHY, the daughter of Cetil Flat-neb, the son of Beorn Buna, a

\(^{52}\) Hauksbók adds Hamund Hell-skin to Sturla’s list of the “best-born settlers” in the Northern Quarter. Accordingly, Hauksbók identifies thirty-nine “best-born settlers.”

\(^{53}\) Ingolf, Geirmund Hell-Skin, Ingimund the Old, Hrollaug son of Earl Rognvald and Auðr. It should be noted that the narratives about each of these settlers, with the exception of that pertaining to Ingimund, comprise at least two chapters in Pálsson and Edwards’ translation.

\(^{54}\) In Pálsson and Edwards’ translation, chapters relating to Auðr take up a little more than five pages.

\(^{55}\) I am referring here to all women who become landowners, whether or not their claim consists of virgin territory.

\(^{56}\) See “86. Geirrod and Geirrid” (trans. Pálsson and Edwards 46-47) and S 86/H 74 (ÍF I 127-8). As Pálsson and Edwards’ choice of title for this narrative suggests, Chapter Eighty-Six describes the settlements of two siblings, Geirrod and Geirrid, and much of this section focuses upon the descendants of these individuals.
The account begins in a seemingly prosaic manner: The first two sentences are grammatically, syntactically and substantively formulaic in introducing their grammatical subject as both the nominative predicate of a noun (usually “maðr” [“man”] but in this case, “her-konungr” [“host-king”]) and the son of an individual who himself is the son of a man, etc. (i.e., the signified of a subject pronoun that is then modified by several genitives indicating that, substantively, he is the direct descendant of various men). The narrative continues formulaically in detailing the grammatical subject’s geographical journey and destination. And true to form, the account then identifies its grammatical subject’s spouse, the latter’s antecedents and the offspring that he and his spouse produce.

Yet in this particular case, the opening formulæ inherently undermine their own conventionality. For one thing, the grammatical subject settles in Dublin instead of establishing residency in Iceland. But for another, the grammatical subject of the narrative’s first sentence is not synonymous with the entry’s narrative subject as is often the case, and more to the point, the entry initially contextualizes the latter as the spouse of the grammatical subject. That is, Landnámabók initially posits Auðr as the wife of Anlaf the White which is to say that the work initially fails to distinguish her from the other women it conventionally defines as the wives of landnámsmenn. This positioning sets Auðr apart from many of the landnámsmenn among whom she takes her place. Of Auðr’s thirty-eight peers, twenty-three are the grammatical and
substantive subjects of the first sentences of the narratives that situate them as protagonists in relation to their respective land-takings.

Yet Auðr is like fifteen of “þesser land-náms-menn hafa gaofgaster vereð” in that she is not the grammatical and substantive subject of the first sentence of the first or only chapter that contextualizes her landnám 59; and it is worth noting that the beginnings of a few of the accounts concerning these fifteen men share a structural commonality with the opening of Landnámabók’s description of Auðr beyond the fact that the landnámsmaðr upon whom they ultimately focus is not the grammatical or narrative subject of their first clauses, as follows:

ALWE THE WHITE was the name of a man, the son of Os-wald, son of Oxen-Thore. he was a lend-man or thegen, and dwelt at Elmdale. He fell out with earl Hacon, Grit-gard’s son, wherefore he went forth to Yria, and there he died; but Thor-stan the White, his son, came to Iceland, and put into Weapon-frith in his own ship, after the settlement. (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 173) 60

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59 Ingolf, Hastein Atlason, Skalla-grim, Hrosskell, Sel-Thorir, Geirmund Hell-skin, Audun Shaft, Ingimund the Old, Helgi the Lean, Eywind son of Thorstein, Thorstein the White, Hrollaug, Brynjolf the Old, Hamund Hell-skin and Ozur son of Asbjorn. The latter jointly claims land with his brothers and mother in Sturlubók (“Thorgerd and their sons completed the voyage and took possession of the whole of the Ingolfshofdi district between Kvia and Jokuls Rivers” [trans. Pálsson and Edwards 122/ “Þorgerðr. . .ok synir þeira kómu út ok námu allt Ingólfs-hofðahverfi á milli Kvíár ok Jokulsár. . .” [ÍF I 320]). In Vigfusson and Powell’s edition of Hauksbók, only Thorgerd claims land (“Then Thor-gerd took in settlement land over all Ing-wolf’s-head-wharf, between Foldsworth and Ickle-river. . .” [trans. Vigfusson and Powell 191]/ “þórgerd nam þar land um allt ingolf-ðaða-hverfe, á miðle Kví-ár ok laokuls-ár. . .” [Hauksbók IV. xv. iii]).

60 “OLVER enn HVÍTE hét maðr, Ósvallz son, Æxna-bóris sonar; hann vas lendr maðr, ok bió í Almdaolom. Hann varð ósáttr við Hákon iarl Gríotgarz son: hann fór á Yrjar, ok dó þar. En bórstvinn enn Hvít, son hans, fór til Íslánnz, ok kom skipe sín í Vápna-fiaordr efter land-naom” (Hauksbók IV. iii. i). Sturlubók’s version of Thor-stan’s landnám differs from Hauksbók’s in that the former contains a longer genealogy than the latter.
HAROLD GOLD-BEARD was the name of a king in Sogn. He had to wife Sel-ware, the daughter of earl Hound-wolf, the sister of earl Atle the Slim. Their daughters were these: Thora, whom Half-dan the Black, the king of the Uplanders, had to wife; and Thor-rid, whom Cetil Cave-flag had to wife. Harold the Younger was the son of Half-dan and of Thora. To him king Harold Gold-beard gave his name and realm. King Harold died first of them, and then Thora, and Harold the Younger last. Then the kingdom passed under king Half-dan, and he set earl Atle the Slim over it. Afterwards Half-dan took to wife Reginhild, the daughter of Sigurd Hart, and their son was Harold Fairhair.

2. When king Harold came to his kingdom in Norway, and was become kinsman-at-law to earl Hacon Gritgardsson, he gave Sogn-folk to earl Hacon, his father-in-law, when the king went east into Wick. But earl Atle would not yield the earldom till he had seen king Harold. The two earls stood firmly upon their rights, and gathered each an host and met at Fiola in Staff-ness-voe, and fought there; and earl Hacon fell and Atle was wounded, and he was moved to At-ley, and there he died of his wounds. And after that HEAH-STAN or HA-STAN his son held his father's earldom till king Harold and earl Sigurd [Hacon’s son] gathered together an host against him. Then Ha-stan made off and got ready to go to Iceland. (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 219-220) 61

61 “HARALDR GOLL-SKEGGR hét konungr í Sogne: hann átte Solvoro dóttor Hundolfs iarls, systor Atla iarls ens Mióva: þeirra dóttor vóra þær þóra, es átte Halldan Svarte Upplendinga konungr, ok þórrör, es átte Ketill Helloflage; Halldr Unge vas son þeirra Halldanar ok þóra; hónum gaf Halldr konungr Goll-skeggr nafn sitt ok rike. Halldr konungr andaðesk fyrrst þeirra; en þá þóra; en Halldr Unge síðast. Þá bar riket under Halldan konung; en hann settu yfer þat Atla iarl enn Mióva. Siðan feck Halldan konungr Ragnilldar, dóttor Sigurðar Hiartar; ok vas þeirra son Halaldr enn Harfgre.

2. Þá es Haralldr konungr geck til rikes í Norege, ok hann mægðesk við Hákon iarl Griótgarz son, feck hann Synga-fylke Hákon-eiarla mage sinom, es konungr fór í Vik austr; en Atle iarl vilde eige af láta rikeno, fyr an hann fynde Halldan konung. Iarlarnar þrátt Mormons þetta með kappe, ok drógo her saman. þeir fundosk á Fiolum í Staфа-ness-vás, ok baorðosk þar; ok fell Hákon iarl, en Atle varð sárr, ok vas hann fluttr í Atla-ey, ok dó þar ór saorm. En ef þat hélta Hásteinn son hans rikeno, þar til es Haralldr konungr ok Sigurðr iarl drógo her at hónum.
The passages above pertain to the landnám of Thor-stan the White and Ha-stan Atlesson, as signaled by the clauses referring to their respective departures for Iceland. What narratively precedes any mention of emigration explains Thor-stan’s and Ha-stan’s reasons for going to Iceland: in both cases, political exigencies compel the two men to leave Norway, and the opening lines of both accounts hint at the social complexities that result in the settlers’ decisions to go overseas. 62

The first three sentences of Hauksbók II. xiv have a similar function to that of the beginnings of Hauksbók IV. i–ii and V. xi, and like the latter posit the implicit causes of exodus within a seemingly conventional genealogy. According to Hauksbók II. xiv, it is as both a foreigner and a conqueror that Anlaf the White accedes to the throne in Dublin. The paternal lineage provided for Auðr in this section, along with the maternal line described in I. iv. v, reinforces her position as Anlaf’s wife—in i.e., as the spouse of the imperialist ruler and therefore a party to the encroaching power—in that it emphasizes her status as an ethnically Scandinavian person in Dublin. Thus when Anlaf dies in combat, it goes without saying that as a defenseless widow in enemy territory, Auðr has no choice but to abandon Ireland: “. . . Aud and [her son Thor-stan [the Red] went then to the Southreys” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 76). 63 The same dynamics underlie Auðr’s position in Scotland where her son Thor-stan emulates his father in imposing his rule as an imperialist victor; and when he, too dies in conflict as a result of betrayal, Auðr’s vulnerability as the

62 Implicit in Hauksbók IV. iii. i is that Hacon’s tensions with Alwe extend to Thor-stan by virtue of the region’s bloodfeud culture, thereby forcing the latter to leave the area. Although the genealogies that commence Hauksbók V. xi initially seem pro forma, they map out the family dynamics that culminate in Hacon’s battle with Atle and its aftermath which ultimately leads to Ha-stan’s flight to Iceland.

63 “. . . en (þau) Auðr ok Þórsteinn fóro þá í Suðreyjar. . .” (Hauksbók II. xiv. i).
mother of Scotland’s recently deposed king motivates her departure first to the Orkney Islands and then to Iceland.  

In fact, the anomalous nature of Landnámabók’s reintroduction of Auðr becomes even more evident when we consider the work’s treatment of both the prominent settlers with whom she has been grouped and the other landnámskonur. For one thing, Auðr is not the only landnámskona whose settlement narrative initially and explicitly positions her as a wife:

AS-BEORN or OS-BEORN was the name of a man, the son of Heyang Beorn, lord or herse of Sogn. He was the son of Helge, the son of Helge, the son of Beorn Buna. He died in the sea of Iceland as he was on his way out; but THOR-GERD, his wife, reached Iceland and their sons with her. (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 190-91)

64 “Thor-stan became Host-king, and joined fellowship with Sig-roð the mighty earl, the son of Ey-stan Glumra. They won Cata-ness [Caithness] and Sutherland, Ros [Ross] and Morævi [Moray], and more than half Scotland. Thor-stan was king over [these lands] till the Scots betrayed him, and he fell there in battle.

2. Aud was in Caithness when she heard the news of the fall of Thor-stan. She had a cog made in a wood in secret; and when she was ready she held her course out to the Orkneys.

...After that Aud went out to seek Iceland” (Vigfusson and Powell 77) / “Þórsteinn gœrðesk herkonungr, ok résk til lags með Sigroðe iarle enom Ríka, syne Eysteins Glumro. Þeir unno Cata-nes ok Suðrland, Ros ok Mærøi, ok meírr an halft Skotland; vas Þorsteinn þar konungr yfër, áðr Skottar sviko hann, ok fell hann þar í orrosto.

Auðr vas þá á Cata-nese es hon spurðe fall Þórsteins. Hon let gœra knaorr í skóge á laun; en es hon vas buen, hélt hon út í Orkneyjar . . . .Eftir þat fór Auðr at leita Íslannz. . . .” (Hauksbók II. xiv. i-ii).

It should be noted that while the details of Hauksbók’s and Sturlubók’s depictions of Auðr thus far reflect no discrepancies, there are some minor textual differences (aside from orthography) between the two versions. For example, Sturlubók’s rendering of the first sentence quoted in this note is as follows:

Þorsteinn gerðisk herkonungr; hann rézk til félags með Sigurði (jarli) enum ríka, syni Eysteins glumru” (my italics; ÍF I 136).

65 “ASBIORN hét maðr, son Heyangrs-Biarnar, hersiss or Sogne; hann vas son Helga, Helga sonar, Biarnar sonar Buno. Hann andaðesk í Íslannz hafe þá es hann vilde út fara; en børgerðr kona hans fór út ok syner þierra” (Hauksbók IV. xv. i). It should be noted that Hauksbók’s version of this landnám diverges from Sturlubók’s with respect to certain details that are pertinent to my discussion of Landnámabók. I will be discussing these particulars later in this chapter. See also note 59.
For another, she is not the only woman spouse-turned-settler whose *landnám* occurs as a consequence of previous events. As in Auðr’s case, political hostilities motivate the emigration of Asc the Dumb’s daughter As-gerd:

UNFEY was the name of a nobleman in Ream-dale-folk. He was at odds with king Harold, wherefore he made ready to go to Iceland. He had to wife As-gerd, the daughter of Asc the Dumb. When he was bound to Iceland, king Harold sent a man to him and had him slain, but As-gerd went forth with their children, and with her her bastard brother, whose name was Thor-wolf. As-gerd took land in settlement between Shiel-lands-mull and Mark-fleet, and all Lang-ness up to Mare-rock, and dwelt north on Caith-ness. (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 202) 66

Yet if *Landnámabók* suggests a parallel between Auðr and the two women in the passages quoted above, it simultaneously distinguishes her from Thor-gerd and As-gerd in a way that reasserts its identification of her with “þesser land-náms-menn hafa gaofgaster vereð” (*Hauksbók* V. xvii. ii / “those [who] have been the best-

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66 “Ófeigr hét maðr ágætr í Raums-dœlafylki: hann varð missáttr við Haralld konung, ok biósk af því til Íslannz-ferðar. Hann átte Ásgerðe, dóttor Ascs ens Úmálga. En es hann vas buenn til Íslannz, sende Haralldr konungr menn til hans; ok lét drepa hann. En Ásgerðr fór út með baorn þierra, ok með henne bróðer hennar laun-getenn, es Þórolfr hét. Ásgerdr nam land miøle Selja-lanz-múla ok Markar-fljótz; ok Langa-nes allt upp til Ioldo-steins; ok bió norðan i Cata-nese” (*Hauksbók* V. iii. iv). *Sturlubók’s* version of this narrative is identical to *Hauksbók’s* with respect to the events that both manuscripts record; however, *Sturlubók’s* wording differs slightly from *Hauksbók’s*—in the former, Unfey hails from “Raumsdœlafylki” rather than from “Raums-dale,” for example—and there are a few minor discrepancies between the two accounts with respect to the order in which they relate the happenings to which they allude (for example, *Sturlubók* tells us that Unfey marries As-gerd before mentioning the former’s tension with Harold). In addition, this narrative exists in the few extant pages of *Melabók* which follows *Sturlubók’s* order of events and like *Hauksbók* features minor differences from *Sturlubók* with respect to its wording and accidentals. However, *Melabók’s* recitation of Unfey and As-gerd’s descendants differs from those of *Sturlubók* and *Hauksbók*, according to which the aforementioned couple are the parents of “Thorgerl Gollnir, Thorstein Flask-Beard, Thorbjorn the Quiet and Alof Ship-Shield” (trans. Pálsson and Edwards 129), the latter marries Thorberg Kornamuli, with whom she has two children named Haithora (who in turn marries Eid SkeggiJason) and Eystein, and Unfey alone is father to Thorgerl who becomes the wife of Finn Otkelsson. According to *Melabók*, Thorgerl is one of Unfey and As-gerd’s five children; the fifteenth-century manuscript does not mention Alof’s husband, children or son-in-law.
born settlers” [trans. Vigfusson and Powell 234]). As the aforementioned passages both indicate, neither Thor-gerd nor As-gerd instigates her respective departure from Norway: the wording of *Hauksbók* IV. xv. i implies that it is As-beorn who sets out for Iceland and that Thor-gerd and their children accompany him on this voyage while *Hauksbók* V. iii. iv definitively states that Unfey himself prepares for the journey that he and his family will make; in “[going] forth” after Unfey is murdered, As-gerd merely implements her husband’s plan for their family’s escape from Harold, and it is only on account of the untimely deaths of their respective spouses that Thor-gerd and As-gerd end up as primary settlers. By contrast, there is no indication that Anlaf the White has any intention of leaving Ireland with his family before he dies; and if Auðr resembles Thor-gerd and As-gerd in that all three women go to sea in the company of family members, she resembles them less than she does Thor-stan the White and Ha-stan in that her emigration, like theirs, reflects her own volition.

These details are subtle; what cannot be missed, however, is the thematic underpinning of the narratives that respectively foreground Auðr, Thor-gerd, As-gerd, Thor-stan the White and Ha-stan. I have already alluded to the fact that political tensions compel these individuals, with the exception of Thor-gerd, to go into exile abroad. As the circumstances surrounding these four figures intimate, political friction is inextricable from the threat or expression of conflict. And on a salient level, there seems to be little to distinguish Auðr, As-gerd, Thor-stan the White and Ha-stan from one another along gendered lines with respect to the issue of war. None of these people is the original target of his potential aggressors; and faced with the possibility of violence, each one flees.

But the particulars of each entity’s account do in fact differentiate them, and in so doing, they reinforce the text’s broader framework with respect to Auðr’s status as a woman among men, as it were.

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67 As I mentioned earlier, after Anlaf the White dies in Ireland, his wife goes with their son, Thor-stan the Red, to Scotland and after the latter’s death sails to Iceland by way of the Orkney Islands. Several of Auðr’s grandchildren accompany her to Iceland.
Landnámabók posits As-gerd as the spouse of one man (Unfey) and Thor-stan the White as the son of another (Alwe the White) who respectively die and go into exile overseas as a result of their individual feuds with a particular authority figure (king Harold, in Unfey’s case; earl Hacon, in Alwe’s). That is, The Book of Settlements portrays Unfey and Alwe the White as victims of their nemeses, and by virtue of the fact that As-gerd and Thor-stan the White feel compelled to flee Norway as, respectively, the wife of one target and the son of another, the text depicts these two settlers as indirect quarry of Harold and Hacon. Similarly, Landnámabók contextualizes Ha-stan as the inheritor of his father’s quarrel with earl Hacon and king Harold, a dispute in which Atle the Slim’s role is arguably one of self-defense: having attained “earldom” over Sogn-folk legitimately when the former king (Half-dan) gave it to him, Atle refuses to give up Sogn-folk before meeting with Harold Fairhair who has transferred authority over it to his wife’s father Hacon; and although a battle ensues in which Harold’s father-in-law and Atle meet as putative equals in order to insist “upon their rights,” the text’s omission of any response to the latter’s very reasonable demand for an audience with the king tacitly identifies Hacon as the aggressor in this situation.

By contrast, The Book of Settlements begins its narrative of Auðr’s landnám by defining her in terms of her husband, Anlaf the White, whose viking raids and eventual subjugation of Dublin underlie his status as a “her-konungr” (“warrior-king”). That is, Landnámabók not only associates Auðr with unprovoked aggression in situating her, as I mentioned earlier, as the wife of a conqueror and therefore as an accessory to Anlaf’s “imperialism” (for lack of a better term), but also identifies her with an occupation (i.e. that of being a Viking) that embodied notions of Germanic masculinity during the medieval period—and that defines the identities and activities of several other Icelanders who have been deemed “best-born settlers.” One of those
individuals is Ingolf, whom *Landnámabók* acknowledges as “the most famous of all the Settlers” on account of his status as Iceland’s first *landnámsmaðr*, and who perhaps because of this stature is also the subject of that which is almost certainly the second-longest *landnám* account in *The Book of Settlements*. The first line of the first paragraph that establishes Ingolf as its narrative (and, in this case, its grammatical) subject in *Landnámabók* alludes to the fact that he and his second cousin, Leif, “fóro í hernað” ([*Hauksbók* I. iii. ii]/*[go] a-warring* [Vigfusson and Powell 19])” with Ha-stan Atlesson and his brothers one summer.

Interestingly, *Landnámabók*’s narrative of Ingolf’s *landnám*, which is, of course, the first settlement that it (the text) describes, anticipates that of Auðr’s *landnám* insofar as there are certain parallels between the two Icelanders. As with Auðr, *The Book of Settlements* first associates Ingolf with violence by virtue of his familial connections: Ingolf’s grandfather, Bjornolf, and great-uncle, Hroald, put down roots in western Norway after departing from Telemark in the eastern part of the country “by reason of manslaughter” ([*Vigfusson* and Powell 19].

And although it is in response to a prophecy that Ingolf ultimately departs for Iceland with the intention of remaining there, certain events arguably precipitate this voyage just as Anlaf the White’s and Thor-stan the Red’s respective conquests and subsequent deaths in the midst of conflict lead to Auðr’s departure for Iceland, and Ingolf’s involvement in these incidents further reinforces his status as an aggressor. Two seasons after they go “a-warring” with Ha-stan Atlesson and his brothers, Ingolf and Leif host a banquet for the trio at which Holm-stan Atlesson declares that he shall wed Ingolf’s sister Helga. This declaration leads to a falling out between Holm-stan and Leif (whose eventual marriage to Helga explains why his and Ingolf’s friendship with Ha-stan and his brothers deteriorates into enmity after Holm-stan

68 Other “best-born settlers” who go on viking raids include Geirmund Hellskin ([*ÍF* I 152/ *Hauksbók* II. xvii. iii]); Ingimund the Old ([*ÍF* I 217/ *Hauksbók* III. v. ii]); Ævar ([*ÍF* I 224/ *Hauksbók* III. vi. i]; and Sæmund (see [*ÍF* I 217/ *Hauksbók* III. v. ii]).

69 “Ingolf es frægastr allra lannáms-manna. . . .” ([*Hauksbók* I. iii. ix]). The corresponding statement in *Sturlubók* deploys “var” instead of “es.”

70 “. . .fyr víga saker. . . .” ([*Hauksbók* I. iii. i].
announces his intentions toward her); and when Leif and Ingolf prepare to go plundering abroad once again, they are “minded to go and meet the sons of Earl Atle” (Vigfusson and Powell 19). 71 “[A]t fara til mótz við,” which Vigfusson and Powell have rendered here as “to go and meet,” consists of an infinitive (“at fara”) and an idiomatic construction (“til mótz við”). The latter conventionally translates as “towards” or “against” (Cleasby, Vigfusson and Craigie 436), the second of which meanings is implicit in the infinitive “to encounter,” one of the standard English equivalents for “at fara til mótz við” (Cleasby, Vigfusson and Craigie 436), and “to encounter” is to “meet as an adversary; to confront in battle, assail” (“Encounter,” def. 1a).

That is, Ingolf and Leif seek out their former friends in order to assault them, a motivation that distinguishes them as the instigators of the conflict that ensues despite the fact that Earl Atle’s sons actually start it and that Her-stan’s desire to get revenge for Holm-stan’s death in this mêlée leads to another skirmish and his own slaying. In any case, the truce that Ingolf and Leif negotiate (via envoys) with Earl Atle and his remaining son, Ha-stan, after Her-stan’s death leaves the cousins landless. This lack implicitly informs their decision to sail to Iceland where they remain for a single winter before returning to Norway: having been deprived of their estates, Leif and Ingolf journey to the island for the purpose of ascertaining its suitability to permanent settlement (which would obviously allow them to claim land there as a substitution for what they had forfeited in Norway), as their assessment of it suggests. 72 That Ingolf spends his time back on Norwegian soil preparing to sail out to Iceland again—before his trip is prophesied—affirms the consequential nature of his second and final voyage.

Leif goes out to sea again between his return to Norway and his second journey to Iceland (he too, like Ing-wolf, ultimately emigrates to the island, but this time around, the two men travel in separate

71 “Um váret efter bioggosk þeir fóstbrœðr í hernað, ok) [my parentheses] ætluðo at fara til mótz við sono Atla iarls” (Hauksbók 1. iii. ii). The corresponding sentence in Sturlubók reads as follows: “Um várit eptir bjoggusk þeir fóstbræðr at fara í hernað ok ætluðu til móts við sonu Atla jarls” (ÍF 140).
72 “Þeim virðesk landet betr suðr an norðr” (Hauksbók 1. iii. iii)/ “They thought the land was better south than north” (Vigfusson and Powell 20).
ships); and his activities abroad, in light of his relationship with Ingolf, reinforce the similarities between the latter and Auðr. As I mentioned previously, Ingolf and Leif are second cousins, and as a result of the latter’s marriage to Helga, the two men are also brothers-in-law. Early on, however, Landnámabók refers to Ingolf and Leif as “fóstbrœðr.” One conventional translation of this word is “brothers-in-arms” (Cleasby, Vigfusson and Craigie 168), which Ingolf and Leif’s history certainly proves them to be. Yet another meaning of “fóstbrœðr” is “foster brothers” (Cleasby, Vigfusson and Craigie 168), a term that has particular resonance given the importance of the fosterage system within medieval Icelandic society, and the implications of which arguably inform Ingolf’s connection to Leif. As an institution whose purpose was to facilitate “peace-keeping among men notoriously prone to the paradox of violent dispute resolution” (Parks and Caldwell 130), fosterage was grounded in pragmatics. Given that children traditionally lived with their foster families between the ages of seven and sixteen, however, it is not surprising that medieval Icelanders considered fosterage to be an “often profound affective commitment, one held to be virtually equivalent, and often superior, to that of blood-kinship” (Parks and Caldwell 131). In this particular case, Ingolf and Leif are in fact related by blood, but Landnámabók’s reference to them as “fóstbrœðr” suggests that their emotional intimacy is that of two siblings rather than that of two cousins. That is, The Book of Settlements intimates that from a qualitative perspective, Ingolf and Leif share a primary familial bond, and it is through this connection that the text implicates Iceland’s first settler, as it does Auðr via her marriage to Anlaf, in the pillage of Ireland. During the time that Ingolf outfits himself in order to emigrate to Iceland, Leif “[harries] far and wide in Ireland and [gets] great booty there” where he also “[takes] captive ten thralls that were

71 “Legal fostering is when a man takes a child of eight winters or younger and brings him up until he is sixteen” (trans. Dennis, Foote and Perkins, Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás I 151).

74 Archaeological evidence supports the idea that emotional connections between immediate family members were stronger than those between less closely-related individuals in medieval Scandinavia: “Runic inscriptions confirm the narrow range of the family relationships that mattered. In Västergötland, for example, there are at least forty-five Viking-age inscriptions commemorating fathers, sons, husbands, wives or brothers, but only one raised to a cousin, and three for relations by marriage other than wives” (P. H. Sawyer 45).
called Duf-thac [Dubh-thach] and Geir-rod, Sceald-beorn, Hall-dor and Draf-drit” (Vigfusson and Powell 20).  

The correspondence between Ingolf and Auðr is not the only parallel that Landnámabók establishes in the first paragraph of its account of the latter’s settlement; and the one it constructs between her and Anlaf not only affirms her association with assailing violence via her connection to him but also points to the way in which she herself is an allegory of war even as it simultaneously reinforces her place among the other landnámskonur. The Book of Settlements begins its narrative of Auðr’s landnám, as I have already discussed, by introducing the man who turns out to be her husband, and it is as his wife that the text first mentions Auðr as a major narrative figure. This allusion to her directly follows a reference to Anlaf’s viking exploits (which culminate in his subjugation of Dublin), thereby narratively adjoining his marriage to his imperialist activities. But more significantly, Landnámabók emphasizes its identification of Auðr with Anlaf when it introduces her in Hauksbók II. xiv. i.  

Anlaf weds “Auðar ennar Diúp-úðgo” (“Aud the deep-minded”), a woman whose nominative identity echoes her spouse’s insofar as both consist of a first name and an epithet. Indeed, this parallel is all the more striking given that Anlaf’s and Auðr’s respective nicknames superficially distinguish them from one another even as both monikers reinforce the text’s identification of Auðr with war. Denotatively, “enn Hvíte” (“the White”) refers to Anlaf’s physical coloring—i.e., that he is blond and fair-skinned. However, the historical context in which “enn Hvíte” became a commonplace description connotatively emphasizes Anlaf’s status as an invader—and, by virtue of her position as Anlaf’s wife—Auðr’s as well: the vikings apparently began to append “enn Hvíte” to each other’s names with some regularity when they were in Ireland and Scotland, a practice that reflected their perception that their own

75 “Híaorleifr herjaðe vída um Írland ok feck þar miket her-fang. Þar tók hann þræla tio, es svá héto: Dufþaer, ok Geirroðr, Scialldbeorn, Halldor, ok Drafdrit” (Hauksbók I. iii. iv). Hauksbók substitutes “her-fang” for Sturlubók’s “fé” (ÍF 1 42).

76 This section corresponds to the beginning of Sturlubók 95.
coloring was light relative to that of individuals who were native to both regions (Jochens, “Race and Ethnicity in the Old Norse World” 84).

“[E]nner Diúp-auðgo” or “in djúpúðga,” as it is conventionally spelled, consists of the definite article and a compound adjective fused from the noun “djúp” (“the deep” [Cleasby, Vigfusson and Craigie 100]) and the adjective “auðigr” (“rich, opulent” [Cleasby, Vigfusson and Craigie 31]). Vigfusson and Powell’s rendering of this term as “the deep-wealthy,” which reflects the denotative meaning of “in djúpúðga,” ascribes to its bearer a quality that seems to reflect her material circumstances. At the same time, Cleasby, Vigfusson and Craigie explicitly define “djúp-auðigr” as the “cognom. of Auda, Landn.” and assert that the term likely corresponds to “the wise, deep” (100). Indeed, most English translations substitute “the deep-minded” for “in djúpúðga” (Taylor 200). In any case, whether translated as “the deep-wealthy” or “the deep-minded,” “in djúpúðga,” unlike “enn Hvíte,” does not associate Auðr with any particular physical attribute.

In conjunction with her first name, “in djúpúðga” goes beyond connecting Auðr to conflict: it situates her as an allegory of it. Albert Morey Sturtevant’s examination of the Old Icelandic ending “nn + r” and its derivative, “-ðr,” 77 underscores that which is implied by Laxdæla saga’s reference to Auðr as “Unnr,” namely that the two appellations “are curious variants of each other” (Taylor 200). That “Auðr” and “Unnr” are interchangeable therefore associates the former with the signification of the latter. Insofar as “sword” is one of the primary denotations of “Unnr,” the name identifies its bearer with the figure of the valkyrie, 78 an identity that not only implicates her in war but situates her as the manipulator of its outcome: according to Snorri Sturluson’s Edda, “Odin sends [the valkyries] to every battle” where “[t]hey allot death to men and govern victory” (trans. Faulkes 31). 79 Yet as Snorri’s description makes clear, identification with the

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77 “Many divergent opinions have been expressed as to the development of Old Norse –ðr from an earlier *-nn + r” (Sturtevant, “Old Norse –ðr from –nn + r” 78).
74 “De Vries gives as a first meaning for unnr schwert “sword” (a woman whose name designates a sword can be presumed to be or reflect the identity of a valkyrie . . .” (Taylor 200).
79 The estimated date of composition for Snorri’s Edda is 1220 A.D. (Faulkes, “Chronology of Early Icelandic Literature” ix). However, because Snorri’s narratives derive from earlier ones that “have their
valkyrie implies connection to Odin, and in fact, “Unnr” is but one of the many appellations by which the most prominent deity in Norse mythology refers to himself. 80 Indeed, Auðr’s moniker reinforces this link between her and Odin. “[I]n djúpúðga” is indicative of the fact that Auðr’s “mind cuts deep into problems” (Taylor 201). 81 This ability, I would argue, is reflective of that what we call wisdom in that it is indicative of the “[c]apacity of judging rightly in matters relating to life and conduct” (“Wisdom,” def. 1.a)—a category that obviously includes resolving challenges—and wisdom is one of Odin’s defining traits. 82

As mentioned, “in djúpúðga” also translates as “the deep-wealthy,” and in light of Taylor’s assertion that the name “Audunn” “is an appropriate by-name for the god Oðinn” by virtue of “its meaning [of] ‘generous friend’ or ‘friend of wealth’ ” (199-200), it is reasonable to suggest that “the deep-wealthy” origin in primitive pagan times” (Faulkes, Introduction to Snorri Sturluson’s Edda xi), the fact that some of the material in Hauksbók and Sturlabók may predate 1220 does not make my argument’s reliance upon Snorri’s Edda anachronistic. The same point will apply imminently to my references to Snorri’s Heimskringla (The Chronicle of the Kings of Norway (c. 1225-30 [Whaley, Heimskringla [: An Introduction 33])) and to the anonymous Poetic Edda (c. 1270-79 [Larrington xi]).

80 Taylor states only that “unnr is also a name for Oðinn” (200). Snorri’s Edda provides a list of the names by which Odin goes or by which others refer to him: “ ‘Odin is called All-father, for he is father of all gods. He is also called Val-father [father of the slain], since all those who fall in battle are his adopted sons. . . .He is also called Hanga-god [god of the hanged] and Hapta-god [god of prisoners], Farma-god [god of cargoes], and he called himself by various other names on his visit to King Geirrod:

(trans. Faulkes 21-22)

81 Taylor attributes the implications of “in djúpúðga” to Jan de Vries (see Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch (Leiden, Brill 1962).

82 In the prologue to Grífsaginning, the first major section of his Edda, Snorri states that Odin “is an outstanding person for wisdom and all kinds of accomplishments” (trans. Faulkes 3). Similarly, Snorri tells us in Heimskringla (The Chronicle of the Kings of Norway) that “Óthin [has] with him Mímir’s head, which [tell] him tidings from other worlds” as well as “two ravens on whom he [has] bestowed the gift of speech” who “[flying] far and wide over the lands and [telling] him many tidings. By these means he [has become] very wise in his lore” (trans. Hollander 11). Snorri’s allusion to Mímir in Heimskringla reinforces Odin’s association with wisdom: “Voluspa” (“The Seeress’s Prophecy”), the first poem in the anonymous Poetic Edda, mentions that Odin has concealed his “ ‘eye in the famous well of Mimir’ ” (trans. Larrington 7) which according to Snorri’s prose Edda is a font of “wisdom and intelligence” from which Odin drinks after leaving one of his eyes in it “as a pledge” (trans. Faulkes 17).
further cements *Landnámabók’s* identification of Auðr with Odin. I would argue, however, that this definition, in conjunction with the fact that “Ice-landers understand unnr/udhr as ‘wave’ ” and that “Unnr is [also] ‘deep-minded’ because her name reflects deep waves and billows” (Taylor 201), ultimately reinforces Auðr’s identification with her peers by affirming, as I shall shortly explain, the etymological identification of “Auðr” with “Odin.” In *Heimskringla*, Snorri relates that Odin “[is] a great warrior and fare[s] widely, conquering many countries” (trans. Hollander 7) and that following his demise, the cremation of his body atop a pyre occurs “with great splendor” (trans. Hollander 12-13). The rites attendant upon Odin’s death echo those that he ordained after settling in “the Northlands”:

In his country Óthin instituted such laws as had been in force among the Æsir before. Thus he ordered that all the dead were to be burned on a pyre together with their possessions, saying that everyone would arrive in Valholl with such wealth as he had with him on his pyre and that he would also enjoy the use of what he himself had hidden in the ground. (trans. Hollander 12)

Valhalla, as Snorri informs us in his *Edda*, is one of the two destinies of those who die in the midst of conflict. That is, Valhalla is the immortal home of all warriors. The riches that these men bring with them to Valhalla, then, implicitly consist of spoils. Heimskringla’s depiction of Odin as a “great warrior” thus contextualizes the “great splendor” of his own funeral as plunder. Similarly, if “in dýpúðga” denotatively associates Auðr with the seeming neutrality of natural phenomena, those phenomena—which are not simply “waves” but “deep waves and billows,” the kind that typically compose the sea—collectively identify her with that which Snorri in *Skaldskaparmál* calls, among other things, the “land...of ships and of

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83 “Æsir” is the collective term for most of the Norse deities; others, such as Freyia, are “Vanir.”
84 The other is Vingolf, the gorgeous “sanctuary that [belongs] to the goddesses” (trans. Faulkes 16).
85 In *Skaldskaparmál* (*The Language of Poetry*), one of the sections encompassed by his *Edda*, Snorri asserts that “Ægir” (“ocean”), whose name is a synonym for “sea” (trans. Faulkes 139), has nine daughters, one of whom bears the name “Unn” (trans. Faulkes 141) which translates as “wave” (trans. Faulkes 161).
terms for sea-ship” (trans. Faulkes 91): that is, *Skaldskaparmal* defines the sea (and, therefore, the waves it comprises) as the medium through which ships travel from one land mass to another, and ships, of course, were the vikings’ usual mode of transport. In short, then, “in djúpúðga” affirms Auðr’s identification with imperialist conquest which in turn underscores the etymological connection of “Unnr” to conflict via Odin. “Unns” or “Unnar” is the genitive singular of “Uþr,” which notably “appears both as a proper name and as an appellative in kennings pertaining to war” (Sturtevant, “Etymologies of Old Norse Proper Names Used as Poetic Designations” 487) and “Uþr” itself is possibly a later variation of “*wunn-ær*” which translates as “strife, pain, suffering” (Sturtevant, “Etymologies of Old Norse Proper Names Used as Poetic Designations” 487), three entities that war intrinsically connotes.

Furthermore, Auðr’s status as the mother of Thor-stan the Red also reinforces her identification with Odin. “Thor-stan” is a variation of “Thor,” the significance of which lies in the fact that it is the name of Odin’s eldest son. Significantly, Thor’s propensity to engage in extraordinary violence distinguishes him, as Snorri’s descriptions in *Gylfaginning* and *Skaldskaparmal* of a trait and a possession that characteristically define the god implicitly make clear: Thor, the “strongest of all the gods and men” (trans. Faulkes 22), is the “ruler and owner of Miollnir” (trans. Faulkes 72), a hammer that is unsurprisingly “well known to frost-giants and mountain-giants when it is raised aloft” given that “it has smashed many a skull for their fathers and kinsmen” (trans. Faulkes 22). Thor-stan the Red, as I have mentioned previously, connects Auðr to violence by virtue of the fact that he subjugates Dublin, and on the surface, the motive that underlies his aggression—a desire for political and territorial power--is different from those that underlie Thor’s, which

86 Sturtevant lists the following as his source for this information: “cf. Sijmons-Gering, op. cit., I, 211” (“Etymologies of Old Norse Proper Names Used as Poetic Designations” 487).
include gratuitous violence; revenge; and defence of the Æsir. Yet Thor’s hammer links him to mortal warfare, if somewhat paradoxically so, insofar as medieval Scandinavians who worshipped Thor “[wore miniatures of his] hammer as a sign of his protection” (Davidson 9), and some of those who habitually did so were fighters (Davidson 12). In addition, Thor as depicted in the Norse mythological narratives, sports a “red beard” (Davidson 3). Although William Sayers translates Thor-stan’s epithet, “raubr” (which apparently is an example of Norse nicknames that were both “obvious and ordinary” [Whaley, “Nicknames and Narratives in the Sagas” 123]), as “ruddy” (“Unique Nicknames in Landnámabók

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87 For example, in Gylfaginning, Snorri mentions that Thor has “gone away into eastern parts to thrash trolls” (trans. Faulkes 35).
88 The following example also comes from Gylfaginning: Snorri relates how a ruler by the name of Utgarda-Loki challenges Thor to pick up his cat. After it becomes apparent that Thor cannot achieve this feat, Utgarda-Loki explains that that which has appeared to be a cat is in reality the Midgard serpent. Consequently, Thor goes fishing and, using an ox-head as bait, gets his “hook stuck into the roof of the serpent’s mouth” and then “[hauls it] up to the gunwale” in order to bludgeon it with his hammer, which he is about to do when his fishing companion, the giant Hymir, frightened by his own proximity to the snake and by the amount of sea water whooshing through his boat, severs the god’s “line from the gunwale,” allowing the reptile to “[sink] into the sea” (trans. Faulkes 47).
89 During the time that Thor is absent from Asgard, the rest of the Æsir hire a contractor to erect a wall within one winter that shall be “reliable and secure against mountain-giants and frost-giants even though they should come in over Midgard” (trans. Faulkes 35). The Æsir and the contractor agree to the following stipulations: that no person shall aid the latter in putting up the wall, and that he shall not receive his negotiated remuneration—Freyia, the moon and the sun—if he does not complete the job by the end of the last day of winter. Permitted by the Æsir to make use of equine labor in the form of his horse, Svadilfæri, the contractor comes within seventy-two hours of finishing the wall when the gods balk at having to fulfill the terms of the stipulation, and having decided that one of the gods in particular, Loki Laufeyiarson, engineered the negotiations, the others threaten to kill him if he does not “find a scheme whereby the builder would forfeit his payment. . .” (trans. Faulkes 36). Loki then takes the form of a mare in order to distract Svadilfæri from his labors which he succeeds in doing; the contractor, comprehending that the wall will not be finished before the end of the winter and that he therefore will receive neither Freyia nor sun nor moon, becomes (justifiably) angry; and the Æsir, in response, entreat Thor to return to Asgard who with Miollnir in hand “[pays] the builder’s wages” by “[striking] the first blow so that [the contractor’s] skull [is] shattered into fragments. . .” (trans. Faulkes 36).
90 Indeed, some of the sagas support Davidson’s assertion concerning Thor’s coloring. In Eiríks saga rauða, for instance, Thorhall Gamlason’s query as to whether “‘Old Redbeard [has proven] to be more help than . . . Christ’ ” when he and his shipmates come upon a “beached whale” after a scarcity of resources causes them to go without eating for a few days and his own rejoinder that the mammal is “‘payment for the poem [he] composed about Thor, [his] guardian, who’s seldom disappointed [him]’ ” (trans. Kunz 668) implicitly describes the deity as a figure with red hair.
and the Sagas of the Icelanders: The Case of Þorleifr kimbi Þorbrandsson” 50), Snorri’s description of King Hálfdan the Black in Heimskringla 91 suggests the possibility that “rauðr” may refer to the color of Thor-stan’s hair as much as or instead of to his complexion, which is to imply that we may identify Auðr’s son with the Norse god insofar as they may share the same hair color. Perhaps more tellingly, Thor-stan’s epithet arguably alludes to the amount of bloodshed—and, therefore, to the intensity of violence—that characterize his invasion and subdual of Scotland, evidence of aggression that affirms a parallel between him and his godly namesake. And insofar as Odin and Auðr are, respectively, the progenitors of Thor and Thor-stan, they are equally progenitors of war.

Indeed, beyond its allegorical and associative import, Auðr’s nominal identity ties her more closely, on a superficial level, to those whom Landnámabók has deemed her peers by virtue of the fact that nearly half of those landnámsmann bear a nominal identity that consists of both a first name and an epithet 92 and, more pertinently, that war as a participatory experience is an exclusively male domain. And a few of those settlers, namely Hrafn the Foolish and Ketil the Foolish, bear epithets that, like Auðr’s, seem to reflect personal qualities that are grounded in something other than their physical traits. Yet “Auðr in djúpúðga” simultaneously fails to distinguish the individual it names from the other landnámskonur insofar as a few of these women are also known by a first name and an epithet. Indeed, one of these individuals, Steinunn the Old, shares her nickname with four of Iceland’s “best-born settlers” (Orlyg, Kolgrim, Ketilbjorn and

91 “At an early age [Hálfdan] was large and strong, and he had black hair. He was called Hálfdan the Black” (trans. Hollander 51). Jochens cites the same passage (albeit via Viðar Hreinsson’s English-language edition of The Complete Sagas of Icelanders Including 49 Tales (Reykjavík 1997)) in making the point that “[a] few Norwegian men did earn the nickname “the Black” derived from their looks without apparent genetic input from foreigners”: the future monarch “‘quickly became large and strong and had black hair and for that reason he was called Hálfdan svarti,’ as Snorri Stuluson relates” (“Race and Ethnicity in the Old Norse World” 82).

92 Orlyg the Old, Kolgrim the Old, Bjorn the Gold Bearer, Onund Broad-Beard, Hrafn the Foolish, Sighvat the Red, Ketilbjorn the Old, Bjorn the Easterner, Thorolf Mostur-Beard, Geirmund Hell-skin, Ulf the Squint-eyed, Ingimund the Old, Helgi the Lean, Hrafnikel the Priest, Bodvar the White, Ketil the Foolish, Leidolf the Champion.
Ingimund), and I would argue that to the extent that aging is a physiological phenomenon, “Old” describes a particular physical characteristic. But three of the landnámskonur bear nicknames indicating traits that are not rooted in external appearance—Thurid Grunt-Sow, Thurid the Sound Filler and Arndis the Wealthy—and it is worth noting that the latter’s epithet, “en Auðga,” is closer in orthographical form and in meaning to “in djúpúðga” than any of the nicknames borne by Iceland’s most prominent landnámsmenn.

III. “There she gave in marriage Gruoch. . .”

In any case, Thor-stan’s death, as I have stated previously, impels his mother to leave Scotland, just as Anlaf’s drove her to leave Ireland with her son years before:

Aud was in Caithness when she heard the news of the fall of Thor-stan. She had a cog made in a wood in secret; and when she was ready she held her course out to the Orkneys. There she gave in marriage Gruoch, the daughter of Thor-stan the Red. She was the mother of Gre-lad [Gre-liath], whom Thor-fin Scull-cleaver had to wife.

After that Aud went out to seek Iceland. She had on board with her twenty freedmen.

(trans. Vigfusson and Powell 77).

As Landnámabók’s reference to Gruoch indicates, Thor-stan’s death does not leave Auðr bereft of descendants—indeed, before relating his conquest of Scotland, the text informs us that the “Host-king” and his spouse, Thor-rid, have produced a son (Anlaf Feilan) and five other daughters in addition to Gruoch (Wig-dis, Thor-hild, Olof, Thor-gerd and Osc)—and when she leaves Scotland, she sets out accompanied

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91 “Auðr vas þá á Cata-nese es hon spurðe fall Þórsteins. Hon let goera knaorr í skóge á laun; en es hon vas buen, hélt hon út í Orkneyjar; þar gifte hon Gró döttor Þórsteins Rauðs; hon vas móðer Greladar, es Þórfinnr Hausa-kliúfr átte. Efter þat fór Auðr at leita Íslannz; hon hafðe áðó skipe með ser tottogo karla frialsa” (Hauksbók II. xiv. ii). The corresponding section in Íslensk fornrit I from which these lines come is S 95/ H 82.
by family. Auðr’s betrothal of Gruoch establishes a paradigm that continues with four of her other granddaughters: on her way to Iceland, Cetil Flat-neb’s daughter stops in the Faroes where she marries off Olof; in Iceland proper, she “[gives] Thor-hild, daughter of Thor-stan the Red, to wife to Ey-stan Mein-fret, the son of Alf of Osta” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 82); Osc she weds to Hallstein the Priest; and last, but not least, she matches Vigdis with Kampa-Grim.

What is significant about Auðr’s role in engineering these unions is that it serves as yet another example of how she transcends her biological and social status as a woman. The “Betrothals Section” of Grágás consists of a hierarchical listing of those who may legally contract a woman’s betrothal. If a given woman lacks, in the following order, a son—whose natal status must not be that of a slave and who must also be legitimate, at least “sixteen winters old” and intellectually capable of managing that which he is bequeathed; a son-in-law; a father; and a brother who shares the same pater, her mother may arrange a marital union for her. But if the same woman is also motherless, the following individuals, in this order, have the right to negotiate a marriage on her behalf: a brother-in-law whose wife is the potential bride’s sister on their father’s side; a brother who shares the same mother; and a brother-in-law whose wife is the potential bride’s sister on their mother’s side. Should none of these eligible matchmakers be in existence, the husband of the woman’s nearest female relative has the right to negotiate a marriage for her. And should

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94 Landnámabók says that Koll, Auðr’s co-commander, “[has] to wife Thor-gerd, daughter of Thor-stan the Red” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 77/ “Collr átte Þórgerðe, dóttor Þórsteins Rauðs” [Hauksbók II. xiv. iii]--The corresponding chapter in Íslenzk fornrit I from which these lines come is S 96/ H 83). The language here is formulaic, and given that The Book of Settlements does not explicitly state that Auðr marries off her granddaughter Thor-gerd to Koll, we may assume that she does not do so.

95 “Auðr gaf dóttor Þórsteins Rauðs, Þórhilde, Eysteine Meinfret, syne Alfs or Osto” (Hauksbók II. xv. xi). The corresponding chapter in Íslenzk fornrit I from which this sentence comes is S 107.

96 Grágás (“Grey Goose”) comprises the collective statutes that constituted Icelandic law from their inception in 1117-18 until 1271 when the King of Norway, to whom Iceland had ceded its autonomy between 1262-64, imposed the set of laws known as Járnsíða.
this individual not exist, the woman’s nearest legitimate male relative, one who qualifies to inherit from her and who is physically within the same land, has the right to do so.

To begin with, Grágás stipulates that instances in which a mother contracts a marriage for her daughter are “the only [cases] where a woman betroths a woman” [my italics]. As a figure in a work that may have come into existence as late as the same year in which the first version of Grágás was begun and that therefore is arguably informed by the same sociopolitical conventions underlying that code, Auðr technically has no right to marry off Thor-stan’s daughters because she is their grandmother, not their mother.

Auðr’s transgression of this standard is, however, all the more conspicuous in light of the fact that in Iceland, if not in the Orkneys or the Faroes, circumstances are such that compliance with the law would have been possible. Prior to her marriage, Thor-hild is a single woman who has never been divorced or widowed and one of seven full siblings, including one brother, whose deceased father seems to have been an only child. Accordingly, Thor-hild has no son, son-in-law or father to negotiate a marital union for her. Although she does have a brother, Landnámabók’s remark that Auðr raises her grandson—a comment that immediately follows mention of Vigdis’ marriage to Kampa-Grim and their descendants—suggests that Anlaf Feilan is a child at the time of his sisters’ marriages and, as such, incapable of deciding whom they should respectively wed. 97 The Book of Settlements is unclear as to whether or not Thor-stan’s widow, Thor-rid, accompanies her children and her mother-in-law to Iceland. 98 Thor-hild does have two brothers-in-law

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97 “Before the age of sixteen, one could not hold property, have care of others, or even make any decisions about where, and with whom, one was going to live each year” (Percivall 135). Obviously, someone whose status as a minor legally precludes him from exercising guardianship over another person has no authority to decide whom a given woman will marry.

98 Landnámabók mentions Thor-rid twice in relating Auðr’s settlement. The first of these instances simply introduces her as the woman whom Thor-stan marries, the mother of their children, the “daughter of Eywind the Eastman, [and] the sister of Helgi the Lean” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 77/ “döttor Eyvindar Austmannz, systor Helga ens Magra. . .” [Hauksbók II. xiv. i]. The corresponding section in Íslenzk fornrit I from which this phrase comes is S 95/H82). More intriguingly, Landnámabók tells us that Auðr purchases a woman, Muir-gheal, who has been enslaved by Earl Sigurd since his and Thor-stan the Red’s subjugation of
from the earlier marriages of her sisters Gruoch and Olof, but their residence outside of Iceland rules them out. 99

By default, then, Thor-hild’s matchmaker must be a resident Icelander who has reached the age of majority and who falls in her line of inheritance, and according to the rules of the same stipulated by Grágás, the hierarchy of those who, having been identified as relatives, would inherit from Thor-hild is as follows: Anlaf Feilan; her mother; her sisters; her grandfather, Eyvind the Easterner; her grandmother, Auðr; her uncle, Helgi the Lean; her first cousins, Hrolf, Ingjald and Ingunn 100; and her “closest legitimate kinsman.” Helgi the Lean would seem to qualify for this position, given Anlaf Feilan’s disqualification on account of his age and the fact that Eyvind never sets foot in Iceland, 101 although because Landnámabók is mostly reticent with respect to the order in which immigrants come to the island and claim land 102 beyond distinguishing Ingjolf as the country’s very first permanent resident, the whereabouts of Helgi and his family—in Iceland Scotland. Auðr pledges to liberate Muir-gheal on condition that she be as faithful an attendant to Thor-ríð as she has been to Earl Sigurd’s wife, after which Muir-gheal (and her son) emigrate from Scotland and arrive on Iceland’s shores with Auðr (see Hauksbók II. xiv. iv and its corresponding chapter in Sturlubók, S 96/H 83). This sequence of events would seem to imply that Thor-ríð does emigrate to Iceland with most of her children and Auðr. But because the text does not specify whether or not Auðr acquires Muir-gheal before Thor-stan the Red’s death, and because it does not explicitly say whether or not Thor-ríð goes with her mother-in-law and her children to Iceland, the possibility exists that Thor-ríð never leaves Scotland, which in turn raises the possibility that she, like her husband, has also died there.

99 Jochens’ description of the rituals concerning the arrangement of nuptials in medieval Iceland, which conventionally consisted of a call upon the prospective bride’s father from her prospective father-in-law, another male representative from his family or the potential husband himself “in the company of nine to eleven kinsmen and friends” (Women in Old Norse Society 25), implies that contracting a marital union had to be done in person.

100 Hauksbók refers to Helgi’s offspring in III.xiv.i, as follows: “Sídan fór Helge til Íslannz með kono sina, ok baorn, Hrólf, ok Ingialld, ok Ingunne. . .” Having already pointed out in S 217 that Helgi has two sons whose names are Hrolf and Ingjald, Sturlubók goes on in S 218 to say that “Helgi enn magri fór til Íslands með konu sina ok born; þar var ok með honum Hámundr heljarskinn mágr hans, er átti Ingunni dóttur Helgá” (ÍF I 250).

101 See Hauksbók III. xiii. i-ii and S 217.

102 “Landnámabók’s model of the settlement process is defined more in terms of social actions than fixed chronology. Thus the distribution of settlers across the landscape, the areas of their land claims, their alliances, who gave land and who received it are described in detail. In contrast, information on the sequence of settlers’ arrivals or the spread of settlements across the landscape is only sketchily developed and may be contradicted in different versions of the document” (Smith 321).
or not—at the time of Thor-hild’s wedding cannot be established with any certainty. What is certain is that Auðr’s two legitimate, full brothers, Helgi Bjolan and Bjorn the Easterner, (about whom I will have more to say later) are living in Iceland when she reaches its shores,\(^\text{103}\) and that Bjorn is the father of a legitimate son named Kjallak the Old who takes over his father’s Icelandic property after the latter’s death.\(^\text{104}\) Kjallak’s epithet suggests that he lives a comparatively long life, and in light of the fact that he is Auðr’s nephew and therefore in the generation behind hers, it can plausibly be argued despite the longevity of his aunt’s own life\(^\text{105}\) that he, if not his father, would have been able to marry off Thor-hild in accordance with Grágás’ regulations concerning betrothal. In any case, when Thor-hild marries, her as yet unmarried sisters gain a brother-in-law, and he certainly would have met the criteria for serving as their matchmakers.

IV. “She had a cog made in a wood in secret”

The last few paragraphs speak to the gender implications of seemingly mundane details; and those concerning Auðr’s literal journey from Scotland to Iceland emphasize not only the extent to which Landnámabók appropriately groups her with “þesser land-náms-menn hafa gaofgaster vereð” (“those [who] have been the best-born settlers”) but also the extent to which that categorization links her to war. As the passage that I have quoted above indicates, Auðr departs Scotland in a ship that she has had clandestinely built. Notably, the term that both Hauksbók and Sturlubók deploy for that sail is “knaorr”\(^\text{106}\) which corresponds to a “medium-to-large-sized deep-sea vessel, capable of transporting both men and goods” (Sayers, “The Etymology and Semantics of Old Norse Knorr ‘Cargo Ship’ ” 279), and not surprisingly, this

\(^\text{103}\) See Hauksbók II. xiv.vi and S 97.
\(^\text{104}\) See Hauksbók II. ix. i-iii and S 84/H 72.
\(^\text{105}\) See Hauksbók II. xv. xv and S 110.
\(^\text{106}\) Sturlubók’s orthography (“knorr”) differs slightly from Hauksbók’s here.
description affirms the denotive definition of “knaorr” as a “ship, esp. a kind of merchant-ship, opp. to langskip” (Cleasby, Vigfusson and Craigie 347). Yet despite the implication inherent in this definition—namely, that the knaorr’s function as a commercial carrier precluded its use within the context of battle—adoption of the word into Middle Irish and Anglo-Saxon attests to its sense as a term for ships that served as transport for invading Norsemen:

Medieval Scandinavian nautical technology had a profound impact on Irish ship-building and some thirty terms for ships’ parts and tackle found a home in the lexicon of Middle Irish (Marstrander 1915, Sayers forthcoming). Two general designations for Viking ships, knorr and karfi, are reflected in Irish cnairr and carfi, now with less exclusive reference to trading vessels. . . . While the terms appear in anachronistic contexts such as the Irish translation of Lucan's Pharsalia (In Cath catharda) and in the legendary Lebor Gabála Érenn (Book of the Invasions of Ireland, legendary pre-Viking immigration), they are also attested in historical works such as Caithrém Ceallachain Caisil dealing with a tenth-century Leinster king who opposed the Norse incursions: “O romudhaighedh in milid 7 o rofadhbudh in firlaec ider na freachghallaib rodicennsad an deighthear 7 rothocbhatar a cenn ar cuirr na cnairre” [When the furious foreigners had slain and stripped that true hero (Failbe), they struck off the brave man's head and raised it upon the prow of the ship].

Old English lexicon displays a much more limited imprint of Viking activity, but ON knorr is here found as cnearr. [13] In 937 Aethelstan won a victory over Constantine of Scotland and his North British and Norse allies at the Battle of Brunanburh. In the celebratory poem that is preserved in a recension of The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle the term is appropriately employed for the attacking Viking ship: "paer geflemed wear[eth] / Nor[eth]manna bregu, node gebeded, / to lides stefle litle weorode; / cread cnear on riot, cyning ut gewat / on
fealene flod, forh generede” [There the leader of the Northmen was put to flight, driven
to the prow of the boat with a small troop; the ship hastened to sea; the king went out on
the dark flood, saved his life]. (Sayers 284-86)

In fact, Landnámabók itself positions the knaorr as a medium of conflict in narrating the landnám of
Scalla-Grim, one of the “best-born settlers” in Iceland’s western Quarter, and insofar as the account of this
man’s land-taking is earlier in the text than that of Auðr’s settlement, the former, which I have partially
summarized as follows, arguably anticipates and informs the significance of Auðr’s sail. According to
Hauksbók I. viii. i, 107 King Harold Fairhair orders the murder of Scalla-Grim’s brother Thor-wolf on
account of some insults voiced by some men identified as the Hildridarsons and then declines to compensate
Scalla-Grim and his father, Qweld-wolf, for the killing after it happens. Qweld-wolf and his remaining son,
Scalla-Grim, prepare to emigrate to Iceland, which involves stocking a ship with equipment and goods.
Scalla-Grim and his father decide to depart from Solmund Isles where they seize the “cog which king [sic]
Harold had had taken from Thor-wolf when his men were just come from England” and “[slay] there Hall-
ward Hard-farer and Sig-tryg Fast-farer who [are] in command of her” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 36). 108
Scalla-Grim and Qweld-wolf then kill “the son of Guth-thorm, the son of Sigrod Hart, the first cousin of the
king, and all the ship’s crew save two men, whom they [send] to tell the king the tidings” (trans. Vigfusson
and Powell 37) 109 after which they complete preparations for taking sail and set out for Iceland with Scalla-
Grim on board the ship he and his father have already outfitted and the latter “[commanding] the one which
they [have] taken there” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 37). 110

107 Sigfusson and Powell include a note in their translation indicating that Hauksbók sections I. viii. i through
I. x. iv come from Sturlubók. The corresponding section in Íslensk forntít I for Hauksbók I. viii. i is S 29.
108 “Par tóko þeir knaorr þann es Haraldr konungr lét taka fyre Þórolbe, þá es menn hans vóro ný-komner af
Englande, ok draopo þar Hallvarð Harðfara, ok Sigtrygg Snarfara, es þvi haofðo valdet” (Hauksbók I. viii. i).
109 “Dær draopo þeir ok sono Guthorns, Sigurðar sonar Hiartar, broðr-unga konongs, ok alla skips-haofn
 þeirra; nema tvá menn es þeir léto segja konunge tíðenden” (Hauksbók I. viii. i).
110 “...stýrðe Kveld-Úlbr þvi es þá vas lenget” (Hauksbók I. viii. i).
Landnámabók deploys the (compound) noun “kaup-ship” in referring to the craft that Scalla-Grim and his father originally equip for their journey to Iceland; medieval Scandinavians understood this word, as Sigfusson and Powell’s rendering of it as “merchant ship” (36) affirms, as a “general term for [a] merchantman” (Foote and Wilson 236). The text then alludes to the vessel that Harold seizes from Thorwolf—and that his brother and father later recover-- as a “knaorr,” a distinction with two significant implications. In defining Thor-wolf’s ship as a “knaorr,” The Book of Settlements associates this noun with a sail that contextually serves not only as an actual site of conflict but also as a trophy of revenge. But when Qweld-wolf outfits Thor-wolf’s ship so that it may serve as transport from the Solmund Isles to Iceland, the work collapses the binary between the commercial vessel and the warship. What is more, Landnámabók also undermines the distinction between combatant and potential settler which implicitly informs our conception of Auðr. Qweld-wolf shares the captaincy of Thor-wolf’s ship with another man, Grim the Haleygoman. Landnámabók casually indicates that Auðr’s status on board her own knaorr is equal to Qweld-wolf’s in the midst of a brief paragraph that focuses upon her co-captain: “There was a man whose name was COLL, the son of Wether-grim, the son of Ase the herse. He had the command with Aud, and was held in great esteem by her. Coll had to wife Thor-gerd, daughter of Thor-stan the Red” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 77). 111

V. “Auðr cam ashore at Pumice-links. . .[and] went to Keel-ness to Helgi Beolan”

Auðr wrecks her ship at Vikarskeid,112 an action that is slightly notable insofar as it is one more detail that creates similarity between her landnám and those of established peers: she reaches Iceland’s coast

111 “Collr hét maðr, Veðrar-Gríms son, Ása sonar hersiss: hann hafðe forrað með Auðe, ok vas mest virðr af henn: Collr átte Þórgerðe, dóttor Þórsteins Rauðs” (Hauksbók II. xiv. iii). There is no real substantive difference between this sentence and its counterpart in Sturlubók although in the latter, the order of “mest” and “virðr” is reversed.
112 See Hauksbók II. xiv. vi and S 97/H84.
in the same manner that Ha-stan Atlesson does. In any case, as Clunies Ross has observed, other family members related to Auðr in the first degree have preceded her arrival in Iceland:

She went to Keel-ness to Helgi Biolan, her brother. He bade her stay with him, and half her company with her; but she thought that was but a mean offer, and said that he was a poor fellow as he had always been. She then went west to Broad-frith to her brother Beorn. He came to meet her with his house-carles; for he said he knew his sister’s proud heart, and he bade her to his house with all her men; and she accepted this offer. (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 78)

These lines, according to Clunies Ross, are intended “as an exemplum of the way in which siblings should behave toward one another” (176) whereby we are invited to contrast Helgi’s treatment of Auðr with Beorn’s. At the same time, the passage above certainly reflects Auðr’s attitude towards hospitality which she herself later demonstrates when she hosts a banquet lasting six nights for her family members—namely, that one should be as generous as possible in receiving one’s guests—and the significance of this stance lies in the way in which it aligns her with other female settlers and her acknowledged male peers. Given that women in medieval Iceland were responsible for preparing meals and edible reserves, putting food and drink before their husbands, children and other relations and catering to visitors (Jochens, Women in Old

113 See Hauksbók V. xi. ii and S371/H326.
114 “Fór hon á Kialar-nes til Helga Biolo bróðor síns. Hann bauð henne þar með helminge liðe síns; en henne þótte þat vesa [my italics] van-boðet, ok kváð hann lenge lítil-menne vesa mondo [my italics]. Hon fór þá vestr á [my italics] Breiða-fjarð til Biarnar bróðor síns; hann geck móte henne með húskarla sína; ok létzk kunna veg-lynde systor sinnar, ok [my italics] bauð henne með alla sína menn. þat þá hon [my italics]” (Hauksbók II. xiv. vi). The corresponding passage from S 97/ H84 is as follows: “Fór hon þá á Kialarnes til Helga bjólu bróður síns. Hann bauð henne þar með helming liðs síns; en henne þótti þat varboðit, ok kváð hon [my italics] hann lengi mundu [my italics] lítil-menni vera. Hon fór þá vestr í [my italics] Breiða-fjord til Bjarnar bróður síns; hann geck möt henni með húskarla sína ok lézk kunna veglyndi systur sinnar; bauð hann [my italics] henni þar með alla sína menn, ok þá hon þat [my italics]” (ÍF I 139). While I have not noted differences between Hauksbók’s and Sturlubók’s versions of the text quoted above that are strictly orthographical, I have italicized words reflecting slight substantive distinctions, additions/omissions and changes in word order.
Norse Society 125-26), it is not surprising that Auðr should be associated with the realm of domesticity or that her liberality as a host is a trait that she shares with other women of the period—in The Book of Settlements, with the other landnámskonur. Gar-rid, whose brother Gar-rod arrives in Iceland before his sister just as Helgi Biolan and Beorn get there before Auðr, is one of them:

Gar-rid was the name of a sister of Gar-rod, a widow after Beorn, the son of Bale-work Blindinga-triona [prow-fixing]. Thor-wolf was the name of their son. Gar-rid and Thor-wolf went to Iceland after the death of Beorn, and were the first winter at Eyre. In the spring Gar-rod gave his sister a homestead in Borg-dale-land. Thor-wolf went abroad, and lay out on wicking-cruises. Gar-rid did not spare her food, but had her hall built across the highway. She used to sit on a stool outside and bade guests in, and a board or table was always standing indoors with meat upon it. (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 70)

Thurid Sound-filler is another landnámskona whom Landnámabók connects to the sort of largesse that is reflective of Norse ideals of hospitality, even if the context of her munificence renders it fanciful from a twenty-first century perspective:

THURID or Thor-rid Sound-filler, and SYBIL-STAN, her son, came from Haleygo-land to Iceland, and took in settlement Waterlogs-wick, and dwelt at Water-ness. She was called

115 I have spelled this name as “Geirrid” elsewhere in this chapter following the orthography of Pálsson and Edwards.

116 Geirrœðr hét systar Geirrœðar, es átt hafðe Biaorn, son Bolverks Blindinga-trióno. Þórolfr hét son þeirra. Þau Geirrœðr fóro til Íslannz, efter lát Biarnar ok vóro enn þyrsta vetr á Eyre. Um váret gaf Geirrœðr systor sinne bú-stað i Borgar-dale; en þórolfr fór útan ok lagðesk i viking: Geirrœðr spóðe ecke mat við menn, ok lét göra skála sínnum þóð-braut þvera; hon sat á stóle, ok laðade úte geste, en bard stóð ínne íamman ok matr á” (Hauksbók II. xi. iv). The corresponding section in Sturlubók, S 86/H74, is substantively identical to Hauksbók II. xi. iv except for the fact that S86/H74 reads “eiptir andlát Bjarnar” instead of “efer lát Biarnar.”
Sound-filler, because she wrought by spells in a famine in Haleygo-land, that every sound should be full of herring. (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 109)

Yet if demonstrations of bounty liken Auðr to Gar-rod and to Thurid Sound-filler, they also reinforce the parallel between her and Ingolf that I have earlier discussed. As has been mentioned, Ingolf and his second cousin, Leif, provide a banquet for the Atlessons, Ha-stan, Holm-stan and Her-stan. Significantly, Ingolf and Leif fête the earl’s sons in the wintertime, after all five have spent the summer going on raids. To be sure, Ingolf and Leif’s generosity is intended to be an affirmation of their friendship with the Atlessons: the cousins return home after plundering abroad with intentions of repeating their experience in the brothers’ company the following summer. But given the timeline of this narrative, we may reasonably infer that Ingolf and Leif’s “a-warring” is the source of some or part of the largesse they provide, particularly in light of the fact that according to the *Annals of Ulster*, the Vikings “made a cattle-raid” (Byrne 609) among other things when they attacked Ireland in 798, which demonstrates their interest in seizing domesticated farm animals as spoils, and when medieval Icelanders, whose diets included both mutton and beef (Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* 129), first stepped upon the shores of that which would become their new homeland, they came to an island whose only mammalian resident, in all likelihood, was the “arctic fox” (Byock 10). Indirectly, then, through the munificence that Auðr shares with Ingolf, *The Book of Settlements* once again links her to war.

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117 ÞórThrúr Sunda-fyller, ok Volo-Steinn son hennar, fóro af Háloga-lande til Íslannz, ok naomo Bulungar-vík, ok bioggó í Vatz-nese. Hon vas því kaolloð Sunda-fyller, at hon seið til þess í hallære á Háloga-lande, at hvert sund vas fullt af sílð. . .” (*Hauksbók* II. xxiv. v). In *Sturlubók*, the corresponding word for “herring” is “fískum,” not “sílð” (see S 145/H116). For additional information about subtle differences between *Hauksbók* II. xxiv. v and S 145/H116, see note 33. As an aside, it is worth noting other similarities between Thurid Sound-filler and Auðr. Both women claim previously unclaimed land, and Auðr’s first migration after the death of her husband is in the company of her son just as Thurid comes to Iceland with hers. Also, Thurid’s byname, like Auðr’s, is reflective of something other than her physical appearance.
Furthermore, *Landnámabók*’s identification of Auðr with hospitality in turn emphasizes her status as an allegory of Odin whose own bounty as a host, as Snorri describes in his *Edda*, outdoes Thurid Sound-filler’s in its fantastical scope and duration:

Then spoke Gangleri: “You say that all those men that have fallen in battle since the beginning of the world have now come to Odin in Val-hall. What has he got to offer them for food? I should have thought that there must a pretty large number there.”

Then High replied: . . “there will never be such be such a large number that in Val-hall that the meat of the boar called Sæhrimnir will not be sufficient for them. It is cooked each day and whole again by evening.”

Then spoke Gangleri: “What do the Einheriar 118 have as drink that lasts them as plentifully as the food? Is water drunk there?”

Then said High: “This is a strange question you are asking, whether All-father would invite kings and earls and other men of rank to his house and would give them water to drink, and I swear by my faith that there comes many a one to Val-hall who would think he had paid a high price for his drink of water if there were no better cheer to be got there, when he had previously endured wounds and agony leading to his death. . . .There is a goat called Heidrun standing on top of Val-hall. . . .and from the goat’s udder flows mead with which it

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118 In his *Edda*, Snorri writes, “Odin. . .is also called Val-father [father of the slain], since all those who fall in battle are his adopted sons. He assigns them places in Val-hall and Vingolf, and they are then known as Einheriar” (trans. Faulkes 21).
fills a vat each day. This is so big that all the Einheriar can drink their fill from it.” (trans. Faulkes 32-33)

VI. “They took their day meal. . .[and] went inland. . .”

Auðr remains with Beorn until “the spring” when she “and her company [go] into Broad-frith to explore the land” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 78): 119

They took their meal at a place north [so S, but MS. south] of Broad-frith, which is now called Day-meal-ness. Afterwards they went inland through the island channels, and landed at the ness, where also Aud lost her comb, and this ness she called Comb-ness. (trans Vigfusson and Powell 78) 120

Clunies Ross singles out these details in order to point out how they distinguish her landnám from those of the landnámsmenn: “. . .[n]o supernatural events are recorded in connection with her land-taking activities. Instead, the place-names that celebrate various of her acts as she moves about exploring the territory are mundane, domestic, or personal in their scope” (176). Nevertheless, Clunies Ross’ own remarks inadvertently and indirectly point to the ways in which Auðr’s journey from Broad-frith

119 “Efter um váret fóro þau Auðr í Breiða-fiaorð inn í landaleitan. . .” (Hauksbók II. xiv. vii). In Sturlubók, the corresponding line in S 97/H 84 reads as follows: “Eptir um várit fór Auðr í landaleit inn í Breiðafjorð ok lagsmenn hennar. . .” (ÍF I 139). There is no real substantive difference between Haukr’s version of this line and Sturla’s: in Hauksbók, the fact that Auðr’s entourage accompanies her is implicit while Sturlubók mentions this detail explicitly. The order of “í Breiða-fiaorð inn í landaleitan” is reversed in Sturlubók.

120 “. . .þau aoto daogorð fyr sunnan Breiða-fiaorð þar sem nú heiter Daogórðar-nes. Síðan fóro þau inn um Eyja-sund. Þau lendo við nes þat es Auðr tapaðe kambe sínom—þat kallaðe hon Kambs-nes” (Hauksbók II. xiv. vii). In Sturlubók, the corresponding line in S 97/H 84 reads as follows: “. . .þau átu dogurð fyrir norðan Breiðafjorð, þar er nú heitir Dogurðarnes. Síðan fóru þau inn eyjasund; þau lendo við nes þat, er Auður tapaði kambí sínum; þat kallaði hon Kambnes” (ÍF I 139). While I have not noted differences between Hauksbók’s and Sturlubók’s versions of the text quoted above that are strictly orthographical, I have italicized words reflecting substantive distinctions and additions/omissions. The one major distinction here, as Vigfusson and Powell’s bracketed remarks in their translation point out, is that Hauksbók deploys “sunnan” (“south”) for that which in Sturlubók (correctly) reads “norðan” (“north”). Vigfusson and Powell’s own translation accordingly follows Sturlubók here.
underscores similarities between her landnám and that of her acknowledged peers. Clunies Ross notes, as the passage above implies, that “Day-meal-ness” acquires its name from the fact that it is where Auðr “and her companions [eat] their first breakfast while looking for land” (176) and that she gives “Comb-ness” its name because that is where she “[loses] her comb” (176). This phenomenon of naming places in commemoration of things that happen there (which is a commonplace in medieval Irish poetry and prose and in fact is the characterizing trope of the dindshenchas tradition in the medieval Irish literary corpus) is a feature not only of Auðr’s landnám but also of the land-taking of three of her equals. I have already discussed how Landnámabók’s narrative of Scalla-Grim’s settlement anticipates and informs its description of Auðr’s own; and it is worth observing that the “dindshenchas moment” in the former description heightens the connection between it and Auðr’s landnám. In Hauksbók I. viii. i, the naming occurs, as it does in Hauksbók II. xiv. vii (and for that matter in Hauksbók, when its protagonist is surveying the landscape of his new country, still yet to come across the soil that he will stake as his own:

Scald-Grim came ashore at the place that is now called Cog-ness in the Mire or Fen.

Afterwards he explored the land, and there was a great fen-land and broad shaws, far between fell and foreshore, and when they 121 journeyed inward along the frith they came on a ness where they found wild swans, wherefore they called it Elfets-ness [Wild-swan’s ness]. (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 38) 122

Some of the details leading up to the naming in The Book of Settlement’s recollection of the settlement of Cetil-beorn the Old parallel some of those comprised by the progression of Auðr’s land-taking: like Auðr, Cetil-beorn lives with a relative (in his case, his wife’s father, Thord Beadike) when he

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121 It isn’t quite clear as to whom “they” refers. I would argue that “they” likely alludes to his retinue.
122  "Skalla-Grímr kom þar at lande es nú heiter Knarrar-nes á Mýrom. Sídan kannaeð hann landet, ok vas þar mýr-lende miket, ok skógar víðer langt á midlæ fiallz ok fiaoro. En es þeir foro inn með firðenom, kómo þeir á nes þat es þeir fundo alfter—þat kaolloðo þeir Alfía-nes. . . ." (Hauksbók I. viii. i). The corresponding chapter in Íslenzk fornrit I from which these lines come is S 30.
initially comes to Iceland, and it is at the end of winter, when he is searching for suitable land to claim, that he encounters the two natural resources that he names:

. . .they 123 came to a river, which they called the river Axe-water, because they lost their axe there. They took up their abode for a while under the mull of the hill, which they called Trout-mull, for there they left behind [forgetting them] the river-trout that they took out of the river. (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 228) 124

Interestingly, this comparison between the two settlements covertly associates Auðr with war. Norse invaders often deployed the axe in mounting their attacks (Foote and Wilson 276).

Ingimund the Old also bestows a name upon a previously unnamed natural resource; 125 and he, too, does so before he has arrived at the site that he ultimately settles, and in the company of his followers, which in his case includes two friends, his wife’s brother and five serfs. And like Auðr and Cetil-beorn,

123 See note 121.
124 ...kóm fær at æ þeirre es þeir kaalłoðo CExa-ro, þvi at þeir týndo þar í æxe sinne. Þeir aotto dvoal under fiallz-múla þeim es þeir kaalloðo Reyðar-múla: þar laogo þeim after á-reyðar þær es þeir tóko or aonne" (Hauksbók V. xiv. ii). In Sturlubók, the corresponding lines in S 385/H 338 are as follows: “...kómu þeir at á þeiri, er þeir kolluðu Óxará; þeir týndo þar [i] oxi sinni. Þeir áttu dvol undir fiallsmúla þeim, es þeir nefndu Reyðarmúla: þar lágu þeim eptir áreyðar þær, er þeir tóku í ánni” (IF 1 385). While I have not noted differences between Hauksbók’s and Sturlubók’s versions of the text quoted above that are strictly orthographical, I have italicized words reflecting substantive distinctions and additions/omissions. There is no real substantive distinction between the two manuscript versions of these lines. However, Haukr includes a second version of V. xiv. ii in his manuscript. Haukr claims that this alternative passage is from Sturlubók, but as my previous comments in this note indicate, S 385/H 338 does not contain it: “[Double text. ‘But when they had gone a short distance they came to a frozen river, and cut an ice-hole in it, and their axe fell in, whence they called it Ax-water. This water was afterwards led into the All-men’s-rift, and now it runs down along the Ting-wall [Moot-field]. Then they went to where it is now called Trout-mull; there they lost their [catch of] trout, whence they called it Trout-mull.’ ” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 228)/ “[Sturl. S. vii. 12: ‘En es þeir vóro þaðan skamt farner, þá kóm þeir á ár-ís, ok hioggo þar á vaok, ok felldo í æxe sínno, ok kaalloðo hánna af því CExar-ao. —Sú ao vas síðan veitt í Almanna-giaxo, ok fellr nú eftir þingvelle.—Pá föro þeir þar til es nú es kelladr Reyðarmúla: þar urðo þeim after reyðar þær es þeir fóro með, --ok kaalloðo þar af því Reyðar-múla.’] ” (Hauksbók V. xiv. ii).
125 Ingimund and his party “[come] into a frith, where they [find] two rams, and [call] it therefore Ram-frith” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 127)/ “þeir kómó í fiaorð þann es þeir fundo hrúta tvá—þeir kaalloðo þar Hrúta-fiaorð. . .” (Hauksbók III. v. ii). The corresponding chapter in Íslensk fornrit I from which this quotation comes is S 179/H 145.
Ingimund is a guest for the duration of his initial cold season in Iceland. But perhaps most significantly, this commonality between Ingimund’s landnám narrative and Auðr’s once again links her to conflict by virtue of inviting comparison between her and an individual who has engaged in warfare. Ingimund’s military skills distinguish him; and having plundered abroad, he returns to Norway where he allies himself with King Harold in opposition to Thore Long-chin. Sybillic prophecies aside, Ingimund then goes to Iceland at Harold’s suggestion despite initial reluctance to do so. Notably, Harold advises Ingimund to leave Norway on account of the latter’s own complaints that he (Ingimund) “[can] find no peace” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 126/ “Ingimundr unðe hverge” [Hauksbók III. v. ii]). Ingimund’s immigration to Iceland is a geographical fleeing from violence, and as such it echoes Auðr’s departure from Caithness in that the secrecy with which she has her ship constructed reflects both an awareness of and a desire to escape from the threat of further violence.

The narratives of the other landnámskonur do not feature any such “dindshenchas episodes,” although a few of these settlers are the namesakes of specific places: Arnbjorg, of Arnbjargar Brook; Thorunn, of Thorumnrholt; Thorbjorg Pole, of Stangarholt; and Ljot, of Ljotarstead. But the fact that Auðr, too, is a namesake (of Audartoft) does not define her landnám in terms of gender because it is a commonplace in Landnámabók for settlers of both genders to be namesakes of geographical features, as are some of the “best-born settlers” including Ingolf, of Ingolfsfell; Bjorn the Gold-Bearer, of Gullberastead; Hastein (Ha-stan) Atlesson, of Hasteins Sound; and Auðr’s own brother, Bjorn (Beorn) the Easterner, of Bjarnarhaven.

And in fact, the seemingly innocuous circumstances that result in the naming of Comb-ness also tie Auðr to war, and do so, as I shall argue shortly, in a way that contextualizes her landnám as conquest. Norse wives typically obscured their hair, which they “gathered up into a knot at the back of the head” (Foote and

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126 A seer has foretold Ingimund’s settlement in Iceland. See Hauksbók III. v. i and S 179/H 145.
127 The corresponding chapter in Íslensk fornrit I from which this quotation comes is S 179/H 145.
128 “Pole” is the English translation of “stöng.”
Wilson 174) under a veil. Norse combs, as we may deduce from Sturtevant’s examination of “hor-,” 129 had, at the very least, the same basic purpose that they have in the twenty-first century. In light of these facts, I would argue that we may interpret Auðr’s loss of her comb as an event that disassociates her not only from the civilizing norms that govern regulations of appearance, among other things, but also from those societal strictures that define normative gender roles. Combless, Auðr’s hair is both free and wild, a condition that imbues it with the militaristic “symbolism of unkempt hair” (Speidel 180). Saxon gladiators perceived the Suebi as their adversaries, and one particular year in the late sixth century, six chiliads of the former took an oath “not to cut hair or beard until they avenged themselves” on the latter (Speidel 180). 130 Significantly, these fighters had a Norse counterpart in King Harold Hárfagri (“Fair-hair”) whose moniker “was Harold Unkempt until he conquered all of Norway” (Speidel 180). 131 Leaving aside the irony of the fact that Auðr’s hair identifies her with the very monarch whose tyranny is the cause of so many future Icelanders’ departure from Norway in both Landnámabók and the Íslendingasögur (“sagas of Icelanders”), 112 the point here is that the woman’s combless tresses identify her with warriors who have yet to achieve their first military victories, and I would argue that the narrative adjacency of her literal landnám to the loss of her comb—the former immediately follows the latter—posits the settlement itself as a metaphorical conquest, an interpretation that Landnámabók’s own structural parallels and deployment of language support. With respect to the first, Ingolf, Cetil-beorn and Ingimund each claim land after naming the topographical features they respectively encounter, and Auðr is no different. With respect to the second, it is worth noting that the Norse

129 “I refer the stem syllable hor- to the root *hazwa-> ON hor-r, OHG haro, ‘flax.’ This word is connected with the IE root *kes...‘to comb’ and evidently originally signified ‘that which was combed’ ” (Sturtevant, “Certain Old Norse Suffixes” [1928] 155).

130 Speidel’s own sources for this information are Paul the Deacon’s Historia Longobardorum and Gregory of Tours’ History.

131 Speidel’s sources for this information are Snorri Sturlusson’s Haralds saga Hárfagra, Höfler’s Runenstein and Rives’ Tacitus.

132 Generally speaking, the family sagas cite the tyranny of Haraldr Hárfagri (“Fair-hair”), who subjugated the territories comprised by Norway to his rule between 870-930, as the reason for emigration from Norway to Iceland.
equivalent of “lost” that *The Book of Settlements* deploys is the third person, preterite singular of the infinitive “tapa.” The primary meaning of this word is, obviously, “to lose” (Cleasby, Vigfusson and Craigie 625). The secondary meaning of “tapa,” however, is “to destroy, kill” (Cleasby, Vigfusson and Craigie 625).

VII. “Aud took in settlement all the Dale-lands. . .”

In any event, *Landnámabók’s* depiction of the actual moment of Auðr’s land-taking is superficially both anti-climatic and perfunctory in its adherence to *formulae*:

Aud took in settlement all the Dale-lands [here falls in the second blank in H; see Introduction], at the inward of the friths, from Day-meal-ness to Scram-leap-water. She dwelt at Hvam, on the Trout-water-oyce, at a place called Aud’s-tofts. (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 78-79)

Yet the very mundanity of this depiction is what paradoxically makes it interesting from an analytical perspective. The clause “[X] nam [Y]” (“[X] takes possession of [Y]”) is the formulaic expression that *Landnámabók* (typically) uses to describe the actual moment of land-taking in an entry for a given settler. “Auðr nam aoll Dala-laond í innan-verðam firðonum frá Daogorðar-ao til Skraumo-hlaups-ár” obviously follows this paradigm. The *landnám* narratives of thirty-three of Auðr’s male cohorts contain some version of this clause, 134 which is to say that the settlement accounts of approximately eighty-seven to eighty-nine

131 “Auðr nam aoll Dala-laond í innan-verðam firðonum frá Daogorðar-ao til Skraumo-hlaups-ár. Hon bió í Hvamme við Aurriða-ár-ós—þat heita Auðar-tofter” (*Hauksbók* II. xiv. viii). The corresponding section in *Íslensk fornrit* I from which these lines come is S 97/H 84.

134 These variations include basic constructions such as “[h]ann nam land. . .” (“he took land. . .”) and “[s]jóðan nam hann [Y]. . .” (“after that took he [Y]. . .”) where the antecedent of “[h]ann” is the name of the settler, and compound sentences in which the subject noun or pronoun denoting the settler is not adjacent to the third person preterite singular of the infinitive “nema” (“to take”) such as the following example from *Landnámabók’s* description of the settlement of Helgi Beolan in *Hauksbók* I. v. i: “Hann vas með Ingolfi enn fyrsta vetr, ok nam með hans ráðe Kiarlar-nes allt miðle Mógils-ár ok Mýdalsár . . .” (He was with Ing-wolf the first winter, and took at his rede all Keel-ness between Mo-gils-river and Midge-dale-water” [trans. Vigfusson and Powell 26]).
percent of the male “best-born settlers” not only deploy this syntactical construction but do so consistently in both Hauksbók and Sturlubók, and thirty-one of these thirty-nine landnámsmenn are the single claimants of the land they take, the exceptions being Ketil Thidrandsson and his brother Gruel-Atli who settle in Fleet-dale as joint claimants. By contrast, Hauksbók and Sturlubók deploy the clause “[X] nam [Y]” in order to describe the landnám of only one other landnámskona besides Auðr. That woman is As-gerd, and she is the only other woman whom the two manuscripts depict unambiguously as a single claimant of previously unsettled land. In light of these statistics, Landnámabók’s use of the clause “[X] nam [Y]” to describe the moment of Auðr’s actual settlement reinforces her place among the other “best-born settlers,” a categorization that both the denotative meaning of “nema” and Hauksbók’s portrayal of Thor-gerd’s landnám support. The equation of “nema” with “to take” is “limited, for taka (q. v.) is the general word, whereas nema remains in special usages” (Cleasby, Vigfusson and Craigie 452), one of which is “to take by force, seize upon” (Cleasby, Vigfusson and Craigie 452). Certainly, “[taking] by force” and “[seizing]” are actions that are intrinsic to war, and again, only men literally participated in battle during the Settlement Period.

But if much of my analysis here has emphasized the ways in which Landnámabók distinguishes Auðr from the other landnámskonur by showing how she, or the details of her settlement, resemble the most prominent landnámsmenn, or the particulars of their land-takings, Hauksbók’s depiction of Thor-gerd’s settlement calls attention to the way in which Auðr does not perform as a woman insofar as her actual land-taking contrasts with the former’s, although The Book of Settlements initially creates a limited parallel between the two women. Both are widows who have borne male offspring when they arrive in Iceland, and the work begins its account of Thor-gerd’s settlement by introducing her husband, As-beorn, in the same way that it commences its narrative of Auðr’s landnám by introducing her spouse Anlaf the White. But unlike Auðr

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135 The variance in percentage is reflective of the fact that Sturlubók identifies a total of thirty-eight “best born settlers” while Hauksbók identifies a total of thirty-nine of them (see note 52).

136 See Hauksbók IV. iv. i and S 278.
whose journey to Iceland is largely a reflection of her will and authority even if the death of her son Thor-
stan the Red, and the potential harm she might now face in his absence, underlie her decision to abandon
Scotand, Thor-gerd commences her voyage as the wife of a potential settler. She claims land when she sets
foot in Iceland only because As-beorn dies before she gets to the island in the company of their two sons
who obviously, unlike Thor-stan the Red, are alive. 137 And that settlement, as Hauksbók explicitly states,
conforms to the legal standards governing the acquisition of land by women 138:

2. Now it was held law, that a woman should not take in settlement more land than a
quae or heifer of two years old could go round on a spring day from sunrise to sunset, a
half-stalled neat, and well kept. Wherefore Thor-gerd led her heifer under Toft-fell a short
way from Fold-River in the south, and into Kid-point, hard by lockle’s-fell on the west.

3. Then Thor-gerd took in settlement land over all Ing-wolf’s-head-wharf, between Fold-
river and lockle-river, and dwelt at Sand-fell. (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 191) 139

VIII. “She had her prayer-place or oratory at Cross-hillocks”

Clunies Ross, as I mentioned earlier, distinguishes between the settlements of male Icelanders and
that of Auðr in djúpúðga based in part upon the fact that “neither rituals nor supernaturally sanctioned
symbols of her authority are mentioned” (176) and tentatively ascribes this omission to the text’s interest in

137 According to Sturlabók, Thor-gerd claims land jointly with her sons by As-beorn (see S 316).
138 Grágás says nothing about the land claims of women. However, this omission makes historical sense given
that Ari tells us in Íslendingabók that the final landnám occurred in 930, and Grágás did not come into
existence until 1117—i.e., such a law would have been obsolete by the early twelfth century.
139 “2. En þat vas mælt, at kona skylde eige víðara nema land an leiða mætte kvígo tvæ-vetra vár-langan dag
sól-setra miðle, half stalit naut ok haft vel. Íví leidde þórgerðr kvígo sína undan Tofta-felle skamt frá Kvi-ao
suðr, ok í Kiðjá-leit hiá laokuls-felle fyr vestan.

3. Þórgerðr nam þar land um allt Ingólfs-(haofða)-hverfe, á miðle Kvi-ár ok laokuls-ár; ok bió at Sand-
felle” (Hauksbók IV. xv. ii-iii).
demonstrating the woman’s Christianity while acknowledging that the “attribution of Christianity to a male settler was no bar to using the standard male settlement paradigm” (176). Indeed, the following lines immediately succeed those that (as I have just quoted and discussed above) announce the moment and parameters of her landnám: “She had her prayer-place or oratory at Cross-hillocks. There she had crosses set up, for she was baptized and of the true faith” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 79). 140 And The Book of Settlements says that she was “buried on the shore, below high-water mark, as she had ordered it herself; for she did not wish to lie in unhallowed ground, seeing that she was a baptized woman” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 84–85). 141 On the face of it, Auðr’s performative Christianity contradicts her allegorical paganism, although the idea that the manual gesture for Thor’s hammer may have come into existence as a variation on that for the Christian cross (Davidson 13), the fact that the latter symbol “undoubtedly” acquired the connotations of “defence and protection” that the former had embodied (Davidson 14) and the positioning of Christ “in Nordic sagas” as God’s “bravest fighter” (Speidel 269), collectively suggest that as a religious figure, the landnámskona may not be as paradoxical as she might otherwise seem. 142 Certainly the

140 “Hon hafðe bœna-hald sitt á Cross-hólom. Þar lét hon reisa crossa; því at hon vas skírð ok vel truoð” (Hauksbók II. xiv. viii). The corresponding section in Íslenzk fornrit I from which these lines come is S 97/H 84.

141 “. . . hon . . . vas grafen í floðar-mále, sem hon hafðe fyrer sagt; því at hon vilde eige ligga i óvígðre moldo, es hon vas skirð” (Hauksbók II. xv. xv). The corresponding sentence in Íslenzk fornrit I from which these lines come is S 110.

142 Contrary to the implications of both Auðr’s wishes concerning the disposition of her own remains and the rationale behind those requests, her burial seems less suggestive of Christian practices than of pagan ones. For example, some farmers on the Orkney Islands unearthed a Norse burial “by the seashore” in 1963 (Jesch 9) while the “movement of ritual practice and deposition of artifacts from watery locations such as bogs—a millennium-long practice—to the aristocratic hall coincided with conversion to Christianity” (Symonds 69). In any case, the fact that archaeologists routinely examine Norse bones and the items with which they were buried in order to discern whether the former are those of a man or a woman (Jesch 13) implies that whatever Landnámabók’s description of Auðr’s interment might suggest about the nature of Christianity in medieval Iceland, it says nothing with respect to the issue of gender. That Landnámabók details Auðr’s burial in the first place does, however, reflect its esteem for her in that it rarely mentions the deaths of the settlers it concerns, let alone describes their burials. More pertinent, the text’s references to Auðr’s death and interment distinguish her from the other landnámskonur while reasserting her status as one of the “best-born settlers.” The only other landnámskona whose death The Book of Settlements specifically mentions is Geirrid. The text alludes to her demise, however, not as an event in and of itself but rather
associations of Christianity with warfare, whether as an offensive or a defensive measure, reinforce Auðr’s identification with the same. In any case, the significance of Auðr’s faith has less to do with its specific nature than with how it affirms or undermines her status as Landnámabók has explicitly defined it, and, as shall shortly become clear, that she is Christian matters less than the fact that religiosity is a defining component of her landnám. I have mentioned that right before they end, both Sturlubók and Hauksbók identify those settlers who have been baptized, which is to say that the two manuscripts identify those settlers who are Christians. The two versions of Landnámabók specifically name the following individuals as such: Cetil the Beguiler, Ead the Deep Wealthy, Aurlyg the Old, Helge the Lean, Helge Beolan and Eorwendum the Christian. Once again, Landnámabók situates Auðr among men insofar as she is the only female Christian so named. At the same time, the text affirms Auðr’s position amongst the island’s “best-born settlers” in that each of the above named individuals, with the exception of Eor-wendum the Christian, is one of them. And indeed, if we consider religion in general as a non-peripheral aspect of certain settlements, mentions it casually, almost in passing, as an explanation for the return of Geirrid’s son from abroad: “Thor-wolf came back to Iceland after Gar-ríd’s death” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 70/ “Þórolfr fór til Ísland z after andlát Geirríðar” [Hauksbók II. xi. iv]. The corresponding clause in S 86/H 74 substitutes “kom” for “fór”). By contrast, S 84/H 72 and Hauksbók II. ix. ii situate the death of Bjorn the Easterner as an individual narrative event and describe where and how he is buried, while elsewhere in its pages, Landnámabók identifies the final resting places of “best-born” Sel-Thorir (see S 68/ Hauksbók II. v. iv) and Eyvind son of Thorstein (see S 247/ Hauksbók III. xix. i), though with respect to the latter, readers should note the erroneous substitute of “Ketill” for “Eyvindr” at the beginning of the third sentence of Hauksbók III. xix. i.

143 “Svá segja menn, at þesser hafa skírðir vereð land-námsmenn.

“Helge Magre; Ærlygr enn Gamle; Helge Beolan; Iorundr enn Cristne; Auðr en Diúp-auðga; Ketill enn Fílske; ok flestir þeir es kómo vestan um haf” (Hauksbók V. xvii. v). / “ Men say that these settlers were baptized:--Helge the Lean, Aurlyg the Old, Helge Beolan, Eor-wendum the Christian, Ead the Deep Wealthy, Cetil the Beguiler, and most of them that came hither from the west of the sea” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 236). Sturlubók reads as follows: “Svá segja vitrir menn, at nokkurir land-námsmenn hafi skírðir verit, þeir er byggt hafa Ísland, flestir þeir, er kómu vestan um haf. Er til þess nefndr Helgi magri ok Órlygr enn gamli, Helgi bjóla, Jorundr kristni, Auðr djúpauðga; Ketill enn fillski ok enn fleiri menn, er kómu vestan um haf, ok heldu þeir sumir vel kristni til dauðadags” (ÍF I 396)/ “According to well-informed people some of the settlers of Iceland were baptized, mostly those who came from the British Isles. These are specially mentioned: Helgi the Lean, Orlyg the Old, Helgi Bjolan, Jorund the Christian, Aud the Deep-Minded, Ketil the Foolish, and a number of others who came from the west” (trans. Pálsson and Edwards 147).
then I would argue that Auðr’s landnám resembles those of some of the other “best-born settlers” in this respect, which again confirms her place among them. As one might expect given the text’s reference to those who have converted to Christianity, this religion is a significant theme with respect to the settlements of Aurlyg the Old and Cetil the Beguiler. The following passages concern Aurlyg’s journey to Iceland and land-taking:

AUR-LYG. . .was in fosterage with bishop Patrec, the saint in the Southreys. A yearning came upon him to go to Iceland, and prayed bishop Patrec that he would give him an outfit. The bishop gave him timber for a church and asked him to take it with him, and a plenarium, and an iron church-bell, and a gold penny, and consecrated earth to lay under the corner-posts instead of hallowing the church, and prelates to dedicate the church to Colum-cell [Columba o’ the Cells].

Then spake bishop Patrec: ‘Wheresoever thou turnest in to land, dwell only there where three fells can be seen from the sea and a frith running between each fell, and a dale in each fell. Thou shalt sail to the furthest [southernmost]; there shall be a shaw there, and further south under the fell thou shalt light on a clearing and three stones raised or set up there. Do thou raise thy church and homestead there.’

And in the spring Aur-lyg fitted out his ship, and sailed away with all that he had; and when he came south off Faxes-mouth, he saw the fells that had been spoken of to him, and knew them. And then the iron bell fell overboard and sunk in the sea. But they sailed in along the frith, and went in to the land at the place that is now called Sand-wick on Keel-ness, and there lay the iron bell in the seaweed.
Aur-lyg took up his abode at Esia-rock [Clay-rock], byt the rede of Helge Beolan his kinsman, and took land in settlement between Mo-gils-river and Os-wif’s becks. He built a church at Esia-rock, as was commanded him. (Trans. Vigfusson and Powell 27-28) 144

The following description comes from Landnámabók’s description of Cetil’s Icelandic settlement:

144 "ŒRLYGR. . .vas at fóstre með Patrece byscope enom Helga í Suðreyjom. Hann fýstesk at fara til Íslannz, ok bað Patriec byscop, at hann sæi um með hónum. Byscop feck hónom kirkjo-við, ok bað hann hafa með ser; ok plenarium; ok iarn-clocko, ok goll-pening; ok mold vígða, at hann skylde leggja under horn-stafe, ok hafa þat fyrer víglo; ok skylde hann helga Columcilla.

“Þá mælte Patrecr byscop: ‘Hvarg fyt ek land, þá bygðu þar at eins es sér priú faoll af hafe, ok fiaorð at sé á mól hvers fiall, ok dal í hverjo fialle. Bú skalt sigla at eno synsta fialle; þar man skógr vesa; ok sunnan under fiallendo montu riódr hitta, ok lagða upp, eðr reista, þrí steina: reistu þar kirkjo ok bú þar.’


“Hann bygðe under Esjo-berge at ráðe Helga Biolo frænda síns; ok nam land á miðle Mógils-ár ok Úsvifrs-lœkjar. Hann græðe kirkjo at Esjo-berge, sem hónom vas boðet” (Hauksbók I. vi. i, iii-iv). S 15 reads as follows: “Orlyg. . . var at fóstri með enum <helga> Patriek byskupi í Suðreyjum. <Hann> fýstisk at fara til Íslands ok bað, at byskup sæi um með honum. Byskup lét hann hafa með sér kirkjuvið ok jarnklukku ok plenárium ok mold vígða, er hann skyldei leggja under hornstafina. Byskup bað hann þar land nema, er hann sæi fjoll tvau af hafi, ok byggja undir enu syðra fjallinu, ok skyldei dálr í hvárungegja fjallinu; hann skyldei þar taka sér bústað ok láta þar kirkju gera ok eigna enum helga Kolumba. . . [E]n um várit þó Ørlygr skip sitt; en hásetar hans námu þar sumir land, sem enn mun sagt verða. Ørlygr siglði vestan fyrir Barð; en er hann kom suðr um Snæfellsjókúl á fjördinn, sá hann fjoll tvau ok dali í hvárungegja. Þar kenndi hann land þat, er honom var til visat. Hann helt þá at enu syðra fjallinu, ok var þat Kjalarnes, ok hafað Helgi bréór-ungr hans numit þar aðr. Ørlygr var með Helga enn fyrsta vetr, en um várit nam hann land at ráði Helga frá Mögilsá til Ósvif(r)lœkjar og þó at Esjubergi. Hann lét þar gera kirkju, sem mælt var” (ÍF I 52, 54). “[Orlyg] had a great desire to go to Iceland, and asked the Bishop for guidance. The bishop provided him with church timber, an iron bell, a plenarium, and consecrated earth which Orlyg was to place beneath the corner posts of his church. The bishop told him to settle at a place where from the sea he could keep two mountains in view, each with its valley. He was to make his home below the southern mountain where he was to build a house and a church dedicated to Saint Columba.

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“In the spring Orlyg got his ship ready to sail, but some of his crew settled down there, as will be described later. Orlyg journeyed east round Bard, and once he’d gone beyond Snæfellsness Glacier and sailed into the bay he could see two mountains, each of them with a valley cutting into it. Then he knew this was the place he’d been guided to, so he made for the southern mountain. This was Kjarlarnes, which his cousin Helgi had already claimed. Orlyg stayed the first winter with him, and in the spring with Helgi’s approval he laid claim to the land between Mogils River and Osvif Brook, making his home at Esjuberg where he built a church as he had promised” (trans. Pálsson and Edwards 23-24).
CETIL THE FOOL . . .went to Iceland from the Southreys, and was a good Christian. . . .

Cetil dwelt at Kirkby. The *papæ* had been settled there before, and heathen men might not dwell there. (Trans. Vigfusson and Powell 192)

As is obvious from the entries quoted above, *Landnámabók* defines Aur-lyg and Cetil the Beguiler in terms of an unambiguous Christianity. The *landnám* narrative of Helge the Lean, however, reveals him to be an ambiguous figure whose paganism dictates the location of his arrival in Iceland, as well as the directions he takes upon reaching that island, and to which he entrusts his protection during periods of difficulty and while travelling overseas even after converting to Christianity:

But when Helge gat sight of Iceland, he enquired of Thunder or Thor where he should go to land; but the oracle directed him to go to Ey-frith, and enjoined him earnestly neither to go thence to the west nor to the east. . . . But one winter later Helge flitted his household to Christ-ness, and dwelt there till his death day. He was very mixed in his faith. He put his trust in Christ, and named his homestead after him, but yet he would pray to thunder on sea voyages, and in hard stresses, and in all those things that he thought were of most account to him. (Vigfusson and Powell 148-150)
Juxtaposed with the narratives of Aur-lyg’s and Cetil’s settlements, *Landnámabók*’s description of Helge’s settlement not only expands the context of Auðr’s own landnám but also informs the figure of Auðr herself. That Auðr establishes an “oratory” and roots crosses in the soil reflects her conscious and deliberate embrace of Christianity, one that like Aur-lyg’s, is explicitly performative, and which may also resemble Cetil the Beguiler’s of whom *The Book of Settlements* says that he “is a good Christian” but does not detail how he demonstrates his faith. Auðr’s actions also connect her to Helge the Lean who, like her, reveals his faith through actual deeds which in his case is synonymous with bestowing the name of Christ upon his “homestead.” Yet, if, unlike Auðr, Helge the Lean consciously and deliberately performs as a pagan as well as a Christian, the contradiction he embodies serves as a reminder of the former’s ambiguity as a practicing Christian who allegorically embodies the pagan faith insofar as her name identifies her with Odin, the most important god in Norse mythology, and reaffirms her connection to war through that meaning. Helge consults Thor when it comes to those matters he deems most significant. As I have already discussed, Norse mythology very much identifies Thor with violence, and Thor is Odin’s eldest son.

Indeed, Aur-lyg, Cetil the Beguiler and Helge the Lean are not the only “best-born settlers” whose land-takings are imbued with religious significance, some in ways that would reinforce the points I have just made. But whether the accounts of these settlements are tangential to, or supportive of, the arguments I have posed above, these narratives, along with those of the three Icelanders I have just mentioned, collectively distinguish Auðr as one of the “best-born settlers” by virtue of numbers alone: religion plays no role whatsoever in the settlements of the other landnámkonur.

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147 These individuals include Ingolf (*ÍF* I 38, 40-46; *Hauksbók* I. iii. i-ix); Bodvar the White (*ÍF* I 310; *Hauksbók* IV. xii. i-ii); Ketilbjorn the Old (*ÍF* I 384-386; *Hauksbók* V. xiv. i-v); and Thorolf (*ÍF* I 124-126; *Hauksbók* II. x. i-v).
IX. “AUD gave land to her shipmates and freedmen”

I mentioned previously that Landnámabók’s depiction of Auðr’s land-taking is the only account that takes up more than a single chapter in Hauksbók and that it is, therefore, longer than any other landnám narrative within its pages. One of the reasons for the length of Auðr’s account has to do with the fact that in addition to relating the details of her pre-Icelandic history, her arrival in Iceland, her land claim and her post-settlement existence, it identifies those who accompany her to the island and provides their respective genealogies. Some of those individuals, of course, are her grandchildren and her co-captain Coll, as I have earlier discussed. Two others, Cetil and Haurd, are crewmen from her ship, and it is to them that Auðr first gifts land. That she does so is significant on two counts. First, the specific nature of Auðr’s largesse—that she endows Cetil and Haurd with land grants—distinguishes her from the other landnámskonur while putting her in the company of other “best-born settlers” whose generosity takes the same form. As I have already stated, As-gerd is the only other landnámskona besides Auðr whom Hauksbók and Sturlubók depict unambiguously as a single claimant of previously unsettled land, and although Steinnun the Old also gifts land, Auðr is the only landnámskona who according to Landnámabók both claims previously unclaimed land and endows someone else with the same. By contrast, landnámsmenn such as Scalla-Grim, Hrosskel, Ævar and Brynjolf are, respectively, the first and sole claimants of the land that they later disseminate to others.

Second, to the extent that the normative values of Norse culture inform what Auðr does, her acts of munificence arguably say as much about her status in medieval Iceland as they do about her personal

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148 Landnámabók’s narrative of Auðr’s landnám also identifies those who marry into her family or whose daughter does so.
149 Neither Hauksbók nor Sturlubók explicitly identifies Cetil as one of the crewmen from Auðr’s ship. However, because the text states that the landnámskona parcels out land to her “skipverjom” (“shipmates”) right before naming Cetil as the first recipient of that largesse, and because Haurd is the only person whom the work categorizes as a “skipver” (“shipmate”), it seems reasonable to conclude that Cetil is also one of Auðr’s crewmen.
magnanimity and in so doing strengthen her connection to war. The sögur testify to the fact that historically, unreciprocated gifts subjugated their recipients to the givers of the same (Gurevich 181), a consequence that in Landnámabók underlies the decision of several landnámsmenn to appropriate the land of others through violent means instead of accepting the same from another person (Gurevich 181). Notably, the relationship that exists between the unreciprocated gift-giver and his recipient—of which that between Auðr and her two crewmen is an example—parallels that between monarchs and their followers:

The link between the donor of wealth and its recipient is one of the leading motifs in the poetry of the skalds, who extolled the generosity of the kings and the loyalty of those retainers who served them in exchange for a distribution of gold, weapons and other valuables. Such favours bound the latter to their overlord by inseverable bonds and imposed upon them the obligation of preserving their loyalty up to and including death.

(Gurevich 182)

Cetil and Haurd are not, however, the only individuals upon whom Auðr bestows land; and if their relationship with their benefactor ties her to conflict by virtue of its analogy to that between rulers and members of their retinues, the relationship between Ketill Flatnose’s daughter and her other beneficiaries affirms her complicity in imperialist aggression and calls attention to the power she has derived from it while demonstrating the appropriateness of Landnámabók’s framing of her as one of the “best-born settlers” and separating her from the other landnámskonur. The other people to whom Auðr gifts land are Vifil, Hundi, Sokkolf and Erp, each of whom The Book of Settlements identifies as one of her “leysingjom” (“freedmen”). That is, Vifil, Hundi, Erp and Sokkolf are Auðr’s former slaves, and as the names of the first three leysingjum and/or background information pertaining to them suggests, the landnámshona’s former enslavement of them was a consequence of either her husband’s conquest of Ireland or her son’s conquest of Scotland. The first ex-slave upon whom Auðr bestows land is Vifil whose name defines him as a man with
Celtic roots while Hound, the second ex-slave to whom she gives land, is a “Skotzkr” (“Scottish man”). *Landnámabók* also relates that Auðr liberates Erp and provides him with “Sauðafellz-laond” (“Sheep-fells-land”). The text defines this figure as the “syne Mellduns i arls, es fyr vas geteð” (“the son of earl Mel-dun [Mael-duin], who was spoken of above”), alluding to its introduction of him earlier in its narrative of Auðr’s landnám. Significantly, that first reference to Erp emphasizes Auðr’s power as an agent of both subjugation and liberation. *The Book of Settlements* not only defines Erp as a “leysinge” (“freedman”) but also as the son of a man (the aforementioned earl Mel-dun) and a woman (Myr-giol whose father Glio-mal reigns over Ireland) who become literally enslaved to the foe who defeats the former in battle (Earl Sigrod, who in alliance with Auðr’s son Thor-stan the Red conquers Scotland). Sigrod gives Myr-giol to his wife, and it is Erp’s mother whom Auðr purchases and then vows to free. Notably, Auðr’s pledge to liberate Myr-giol is conditioned upon the latter’s own promise to wait as loyally upon the former’s daughter-in-law as she has the earl’s spouse: “Afterwards Aud bought her at a high price, and promised her her freedom if she would serve Thor-rid, the wife of Thor-stan the Red, as she had served [the spouse of Earl Sigurd]” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 78).  

In any case, Auðr’s status as a slaveowner turned liberator puts her in the company of other “best-born settlers” including Ingolf, Iceland’s first official resident. *Landnámabók* heightens the parallel it creates between him and Auðr through their former slaves in that both figures free Celtic thralls by the name of Vífil. Like Auðr, Geirmund Hell-skin, who in Iceland supports “átta tige frelsingia” (“eighty freedmen”), seems to have acquired his former slaves via conquest: he is a “her-konungr” (“host-king”) who “herjaðe í vestr-víking . . .” (“used to harry west on wicking [sic] cruises” [trans. Vigfusson and Powell 88]). Eirik of

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150 Jochens observes that “A few Celtic slaves are . . . identifiable through their names” and that “[l]ittle doubt can exist about the origins of Drafdittr, Dufan, Dufpákr, Flóki, Kjaran, Kóri and Vífill [my italics]” (“Race and Ethnicity in the Old Norse World” 86).

151 “Síðan keypte Auðr hána dýrt, ok hét henne frelse, ef hon þíonaðe svá Þórríðe kono þórsteins Rauðs sem dróttningo. . . .” (*Hauksbók* II. xiv. iv). The corresponding chapter in *Íslenzk fornrit* I from which this sentence comes is S 96/H 83.
Goddales’ treatment of his slave, Rongud, resembles Auðr’s treatment of Myr-giol in that the two settlers liberate their respective thralls as compensation for service: the *landnámsmaðr* frees Rongud for undertaking a partial survey of Iceland. And through comparison, Cetil-Atle emphasizes Auðr’s performative role as a slaveowner in that *The Book of Settlements* does not merely define the former as someone who has freedmen or who provides the same with land but rather shows him exercising that agency under conditions that are similar to those in which the *landnámskona* acquires Myr-giol:

Cetil went abroad and was with We-thorm, the son of We-mund the Old. Then he bought of We-thorm Erne-heid, daughter of earl Os-beorn Skerry-blesa, whom Holm-fast, We-thorm’s son, had taken captive; what time Grim, We-thorm’s sister’s son, slew earl Osbeorn in the Southreys. (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 176) 152

By contrast, none of the other *landnámskonur* has any freedmen, let alone provides them with land.

**X. “When she was well stricken in years. . .”**

*Landnámabók* provides the following description of the events leading up to Auðr’s death and interment:

Aúd was a worshipful lady. When she was well stricken in years, she bade to her house her kinsmen and sons-in-law, and prepared a costly feast for them. And when three nights of the feast were gone, then she gave gifts to her kinsfolk, and counselled them wise counsels; and she said that the feast should last other [sic] three nights, declaring that this should be her funeral feast or arval. The next night she died, and was buried on the shore, below

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152 “Ketill fór útan ok vas með Veþorme, syne Vémundar ens Gamla: þá keypte hann at Veþorme Arneiðe, dóttor Ásbiarnar iarls Skerja-Blesa, es Holmfastr, son Veþorms, hafðe her-teket, þá es þeir Grimr systor-son Veþorms, draopo Ásbiornar iarl í Suðreyjom” (*Hauksbók* IV. iv. ii). The corresponding section in *Íslenzk fornrit* I containing this sentence is S 278. It differs from *Hauksbók* only in that it omits “í Suðreyjom.”
high-water mark, as she had ordered it herself; for she did not wish to lie in unhallowed ground, seeing that she was a baptized woman. (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 84-85)

I have already spoken at length about the significance of Auðr’s religiosity, generosity and hospitality, although it is worth noting that with respect to her latter two attributes, the “feast” she hosts and the presents she disseminates not only reinforce her status within medieval Icelandic society but also emphasize the way in which she acts as a “host-king”:

During their raids on other countries the Vikings captured considerable quantities of valuables. . . . The property then in the possession of the hereditary and military aristocracy enabled it to maintain its military power and social prestige at the requisite level.

Generosity and hospitality counted as one of the most important positive characteristics of those who aspired to the highest positions in their society. . . . A noble was obliged to organize rich feasts and to bestow presents on his guests. . . . Leaders constantly organized entertainments for their warriors and their retainers. Indeed, the [Norwegian] king’s warriors, when not engaged in a campaign, used to spend their time in his domain feasting and holding discussions at his table. (Gurevich 185-186)

I have also discussed Auðr’s embodiment of wisdom as an allegory of Oðin, and as Hauksbók II. xv. 

xv indicates, the settler evinces this trait via the advice she imparts to others. That The Book of Settlements defines Auðr in terms of the “wise counsels” she offers does in fact emphasize her status as a woman in that the “wise woman” bearing “practical knowledge. . . . is common in old Norse literature” (Jesch 143). And

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153 “Auðr vas vegs-kona mikil. Pá es hon vas elle-móð, bauð hon til sín frændom sínun ok maogom, ok bió dyrliga veizlo. En es þrírar nætr hafðe veizlan staðet, þá valðe hon gifaðar vinom sinom, ok réð þeim heilræðe. Sagðe hon, at þá skyllde standa veizlan enn þrírar nætr; hon kvað þat vesa skyldo erbe sitt. Þá nótt efter andðesk hon, ok vas grafen í floðar-mále, sem hon hafðe fyrer sagt; þvi at hon vilde eige liggja í óvigðre moldo, es hon vas skírd” (Hauksbók II. xv. xv). The corresponding section in Íslenzk fornrit I containing this paragraph is S 110.

154 See note 153 with respect to Auðr’s death and burial.
indeed, it is worth noting that Auðr is not the only landnámskona who is possessed of such acumen. As-gerd advises her brother Thorwolf as to where he claims land, while in Hauksbók, but not in Sturlubók, Thor-gerd’s brother-in-law, Helge, takes land at her suggestion. Yet in Landnámabók, wisdom does not distinguish Auðr from either the other women settlers or from the “best-born settlers.” A settler known as Hrosskel follows the advice of Eirik of Goddales in deciding where to claim land; Thor stan the White is a “vitr maðr ok góðr” (“a wise man and of good counsel” [trans. Vigfusson and Powell 174]). In addition, the abilities of the “wise woman” who appears frequently in medieval Scandinavian works also include the power to “see into the past and future” (Jesch 143). Auðr’s prediction of her own death certainly qualifies her as such an individual. But the other settler who shows signs of extrasensory perception is Hrafnkel, one of her acknowledged peers. One night, Hrafnkel has a dream in which a “maðr” (“man”) orders him to arise and to abandon immediately the spot in the mountains where he has been sleeping. Hrafnkel does so, and when he is not very far from where he was, the entire peak collapses, resulting in the deaths of his “gaoltr” (“boar”) and his “gríðungr” (“bull”).

XI. “Aud was a worshipful lady”

I began this chapter by alluding to Jenny Jochens’ Women in Old Norse Society, in which she assesses Auðr as “an exceptional woman,” echoing Laxdæla saga’s more effusive description of the landnámskona as a “paragon amongst women.” So too, near the end of its account of her, does Landnámabók express this view in unequivocably praising the widow as “a worshipful lady.”

Yet the literal translation of the Norse phrase that Vigfusson and Powell have rendered as “a worshipful lady,” “vegskona mikil,” points to its own equivocality in referring to Auðr as such. “Vegskona mikil” means “great woman of glory,” and “glory” may be defined as “[e]xalted (and, in mod. use, merited) praise, honour, or admiration accorded by common consent to a person or thing; honourable fame,
renown” (“Glory,” 2a). It is on the basis of her accomplishments as depicted in *Landnámabók*---her departure from Caithness; the marriages of her granddaughters; the construction of her ship; her arrival in Iceland; her exploration of its geography and her land-taking; the establishment of her “prayer-place”; her land-giving; and her death—that Auðr has earned such esteem on the part of both medieval and late twentieth-/twenty-first century writers alike. And more often than not, these deeds define her in terms of Norse masculinity as her fellow “best-born settlers” exemplify it through their own exploits in that same text. My analysis of Auðr and her landnám as *Landnámabók* contextualizes both the woman and the event with its paradigmatic structures and its portrayals of the other “best-born settlers’” and landnámskonur’s settlements underscores this ambiguity in elucidating how Auðr embodies and performs the role of a “best-born settler,” thereby identifying her not only with masculinity but with war. How exactly Naomi Mitchison’s portrayal of Auðr in *The Land the Ravens Found* (1955) compares with *The Book of Settlement’s* depiction of this woman remains to be seen in the following chapter.

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155 *Laxdæla saga*’s account of Auðr’s land-taking also relates most of these acts.
CHAPTER TWO:
The Conventional Unconventional:
Aud in Naomi Mitchison’s *The Land the Ravens Found*

In her postscript to *The Land the Ravens Found* (1955), Scottish writer Naomi Mitchison (1897-1999) states that “[t]he skeleton of this story comes from the Landnamabok” and that its “translation, called *Origines Icelandicae*, can be got out of [one’s] City or County Library” (191). This reference, which overtly identifies the narrative source of Mitchison’s own novel and positions her work as an expansion upon an earlier reading, implicitly affirms the author’s status as a writer of historical fiction, one that she acquired with the publication of her first novel, *The Conquered* (1923) and then reinforced through the subsequent publication of other novels and short stories over a span of nearly seventy years. Indeed, Mitchison revolutionized this particular field by depicting a “gritty realism, combining the immediacy of modern language with an ability to evoke the otherness of the past with great vividness” in lieu of perpetuating “the Jeffery Farnol school of costume and gadzookery” (Hall 4), and in the decades between the First and Second World Wars, her fiction attracted positive attention from reviewers and the general public alike (Burgess 237).

Yet the endurance of Mitchison’s reputation as a writer of historical fiction has not matched that of her interest in composing it, a phenomenon that probably reflects the fact that the writer did not confine herself to any one genre (Hall 3; Burgess 237). Mitchison was also a poet, playwright, journalist and memoirist. But her fiction was no less versatile: before the Second World War, she debuted as a writer of contemporary fiction (to which audiences did not respond as favorably as they had to her earlier works of historical prose [Burgess 237]); folklore, history, realism and fantasy each informed her literary output

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156 (John) Jeffery Farnol (1878-1952) was a writer of historical fiction whose own works often take place between 1811-20 (Drabble 349).
during and after (for a good fifteen or so years) the Second World War (Burgess 237); in the early 1960s, Mitchison added herself to the ranks of science fiction writers (Hall 6). Nor did her intended audience comprise adults only: the publishers Jonathan Cape and Harcourt, Brace published *Nix-Nought-Nothing: Four Plays for Children* in 1928 and 1929, respectively, and *The Hostages, and Other Stories for Boys and Girls* in 1930 and 1931, respectively. Other works that she ostensibly aimed towards children would follow, many of which Collins or Faber and Faber released in the thirty-five years following the end of the Second World War.

Given this chronology, it is not surprising that Mitchison, and therefore her writing, should defy precise and simple classification (D’Arcy 154); and such is no less true of *The Land the Ravens Found* which the author composed for children but which Alexander Scott praised as a novel for adults in the Autumn, 1956 edition of the *Saltire Review of Arts, Letters and Life* (D’Arcy 170; 177). Indeed, one of Mitchison’s biographers, Jenni Calder, argues that Mitchison’s writing features “the same approach and style as in her adult fiction” and observes that the book “is closely linked to [the adult work] *The Swan’s Road*, published the previous year, in which [Mitchison traces] Viking journeys not only to England, Scotland and Ireland but to the Mediterranean, Byzantium and eastern Europe and across the Atlantic” (216). At the same time, *The Land the Ravens Found* not only substantiates Mitchison’s identity as a writer of historical fiction but also is one of the works that she wrote during the second of “two very distinct periods”—“1924-37” and “1952-57”—when she based her narratives upon medieval Scandinavian ones (D’Arcy 155).

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Scott’s review does not explicitly refer to *The Land the Ravens Found* as an adult novel. However, some of the journal’s other reviews of Mitchison’s fiction do refer to the respective works that they discuss as children’s books. Scott’s failure to label *The Land the Ravens Found* as such (or as anything in particular) thus defines it in terms of the default as reading for adults. In any case, Scott’s evaluation of Eric Linklater’s 300-page history of the Vikings in Orkney, *The Ultimate Viking*, in the same review substantiates that classification. Like Scott, J.O Prestwich, who refers to *The Land the Ravens Found* as a children’s book in *The New Statesman and Nation*, admires the novel, calling it “a book of real distinction” (840).
Yet if *The Land the Ravens Found* signals a return to Mitchison’s earlier writing with respect to its setting, it simultaneously reflects an evolution in her ideas about the concept of community. Relative to “her Norse fiction from the 1920s and 30s,” the 1955 novel “marks a new optimism in [her] view of the future of racial relations”: if “[i]n the pre-war short stories her Norse characters could not ultimately extend their loyalty beyond tribal or racial limits,” *The Land the Ravens Found* demonstrates that “differences in race, religion and language can be assimilated to form a new sense of identity, unity and pride” (D’Arcy 173), and while the enlightenment of Mitchison’s ideas in *The Land the Ravens Found* relative to those conveyed through her older works is noteworthy in and of itself, its significance in light of that which I will be shortly arguing here has less to do with its intrinsic worth than with its relationship to the period in which Mitchison composed it and more importantly, to the radical politics that inform her writing in all of its various genres and that define her as a twentieth-century writer. Affirming her long-held pacifism, Mitchison became “vice-chair” of the newly formed Authors’ World Peace Appeal (AWPA) which represented the concerns of numerous writers, the majority of whom were British, about “the threat of war posed by the tension between the United States and the Soviet Union” (Benton 140). That organization desired “to create an alternative children’s literature to the comic and books featuring war and violence which US troops had brought into Britain when they were stationed there during the [Second World] [W]ar” (D’Arcy 170).

Mitchison’s response to this ambition was two-fold. First, she wrote “The Writer and the Child” which *The New Statesman and Nation* published in its February 12, 1955 issue. 158 In this essay, Mitchison argues that “a certain amount of violence, both in life and literature, is necessary for the happiness of normal children, but that it can be a violence unrelated either to cruelty or war” (203) and that

> [w]hen writing for children we have no right to over-simplify moral issues. . . .we must not leave out love; and we should not leave out hate. . .If we see the blow, we must also

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158 Calder quotes from and discusses this essay but in linking it to *The Land the Ravens Found* does not mention the AWPA at all, let alone as a catalyst for either work.
feel the pain and see the corpse, and know the result both on killed and killer. The protagonists must not be so dressed up that they cease to be ourselves underneath. It is surely for this seriousness and identification that we read even the unlikeliest Shakespeare. And it is the complete lack of it that some of us deplore most in the Comics, even the relatively good ones which try to have some kind of standard. . . . We have a duty to present alternatives to war which will make peace just as exciting and dangerous and full of generous situations. (203-04)

Second, Mitchison produced *The Land the Ravens Found*.159 This work, which Collins released in the same year that *The New Statesman and Nation* published “The Writer and the Child,” certainly lives up to its author’s claims on behalf of her own treatment of conflict in her own narratives written for children: “What I have tried to do in my own books for children is to make violence and warfare real and to explain what is really happening to people: that is, to show the historical consequences of actions—or, in other words, the moral” (203).

Yet if the novel is an exploration of peace and conflict, it is also a retelling; and what it retells is *Landnámabók*’s account of Auðr in Írúðga’s Icelandic settlement. For obvious reasons, Auðr is central to *The Book of Settlement*’s depiction of her journey to and settlement in Iceland. But she is also central to *The Land the Ravens Found* which has important implications not only for the way in which she serves as a conduit of the themes of peace and conflict in the novel but also for the way in which she embodies the feminism that informed all aspects of Mitchison’s life, including her writing, and that was an integral aspect of her progressive politics. *We Have Been Warned* (1935), the first of Mitchison’s fictional works to feature “a contemporary and overtly political setting” (Calder 116), exemplifies this feminism as a fusion of the writer’s own lived experience and her ideas. To a large extent, the factual basis of *We Have Been Warned* is

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159 I am echoing Benton’s assertion that Mitchison’s participation in the AWPA resulted in the composition of *The Land the Ravens Found* (142).
Mitchison’s first trip to the Soviet Union. In July of 1932, Mitchison departed from England accompanied by members of a Fabian organization including her own cousin, Graeme Haldane. Once in Leningrad, Mitchison, who had become a member of the Labour party in the previous year, “was hoping to find not only fairer political and social structures, but better human relations” (Calder 111); and if her subsequent visits to Moscow and Kharkov solidified her impression that a “public school mentality” (Mitchison qtd. by Calder 112) pervaded the Soviet Union and left the country unconvinced that Communism was the solution to all of the problems faced by contemporary society, she nevertheless “was encouraged by the position of women” and came away with the impression that there was “no conflict between socialism and feminism” (Calder 112):

The way women have reacted to economic equality is the best advertisement for Marxism, and convinces me more than anything else. . . . When women have become great in spite of economic inequality and the social conditions which it has imposed, they have been strained and torn almost beyond endurance, and they have had to use a lot of their working energies in making themselves into personalities: here that is not necessary” (Mitchison qtd. by Calder 112-13)

Indeed, Mitchison and her travelling companions “[e]ach. . . had a particular area of interest to investigate” while in the Soviet Union (Calder 111). In addition to exploring how the Soviets arranged archaeological findings and other museum artifacts, Mitchison chose to explore “birth control practices” and abortion procedures (Calder 111). Her interest in these matters reflected her own hands-on and administrative involvement with the North Kensington Women’s Welfare Centre whose mission was in part “to help working-class women limit the number of their pregnancies” (Calder 93). As a member of the Centre’s Birth Control Research Committee, whose purpose “was to promote the scientific investigation of contraceptive methods, and their side effects, and to make knowledge and information possible” as well as to consider “the ethical implications of the use of contraception” (Calder 93), Mitchison, who willingly
served as the guinea pig of such experiments (Calder 93), maintained that political autonomy for women was inextricable from their autonomy over their physical selves (Benton 41). But Mitchison’s interest in birth control was inextricable from her views on the interrelationship between marriage, sex, family life and women’s economic equality. In her 1930 essay “Comments on Birth Control,” Mitchison asserts that marriage is no more than “domestic prostitution” (qtd. by Calder 94) when wives have no financial independence apart from their spouses and resign themselves to a lifetime of mediocre sex “in exchange for economic security” (Calder 94), claiming that within some contexts, extramarital affairs might enhance the respective relationships between the members of all involved parties (Calder 95). But Mitchison also viewed such relationships as integral to that which she defines as the ideal for women like her:

Intelligent and truly feminist women want two things: they want to live as women, to have masses of children by the men they love and leisure to be tender and aware of both lovers and children; and they want to do their own work, whatever it might be. . . They insist--as I think they should--on having both worlds, not specializing like bees or machines. . .”

(Mitchison qtd. by Calder 95)

By 1930, Mitchison was in the fourteenth year of what overall would be a happy marriage of fifty-four years, ending only with the death of her husband, Dick, in February of 1970. Five years earlier, that union had evolved into an open relationship, the author and her spouse having both taken lovers independently of each other (indeed, as Mitchison characterized it herself, her trip to the Soviet Union served as an opportunity for her to apply her socialist principles when she made it her mission to help one of her fellow travelers move beyond his sexual inhibitions [Calder 116]). By the end of that same year, Mitchison was also the mother of six children (one of whom, Geoff, had contracted meningitis and had died of it in 1927; Mitchison’s last child, a daughter, would die soon after birth in 1940) and the published author of two novels, a volume of poetry, an essay, several collections of short stories and a biography. But as Mitchison admits in the memoir of her life between 1920-40, “[c]learly without domestic help [she] could not have
had a family and been a successful writer” while answering “[c]ertainly not” to the question of whether her desire to experience both motherhood and a career poses “a sufficient excuse for those who consider [her] and [her] friends as bourgeois capitalist exploiters” (You May Well Ask 27).

Given this background, there can be no question that Mitchison was a progressive feminist socialist and that much of her writing as a reflection of these politics was equally radical. It is with this quality that we commonly associate the term “modern,” implying by way of contrast that the medieval is not, and it is this binary that I hope to interrogate successfully through my analysis of Aud in The Land the Ravens Found. Methodologically, my analysis here is based upon my own close reading as well as upon (mostly recent) scholarly research, most, if not all, of which was published after 1955. Nevertheless, this fact does not, I would argue, invalidate my conclusions. I would argue that most of what I specifically discuss with respect to the research I cite does not constitute knowledge that would have been non-existent before 1955 even if its sources did not come into print until long after the publication of The Land the Ravens Found. My references to Jenny Jochens’ Women in Old Norse Society as substantiation of women’s domestic activities are a case in point. Jochens’ text, which constitutes an interdisciplinary history of women’s lives in medieval Scandinavia, has a copyright date of 1995. But because this work relies heavily upon medieval Scandinavian law and the Icelandic sagas, there is no reason to think that Mitchison could not have gleaned from her own research and reading much of that which Jochens presents in a unified, explicit form. 160

Likewise, it is not difficult to imagine that Mitchison was familiar with the significance and details of certain traditions, values and ideas that have persisted in rural Scottish communities over centuries since the Vikings invaded them, knowledge to which scholarly criticism may or may not have referred before 1955.

160 Mitchison’s visits to Oslo and Stockholm in the winter of 1929 yielded lots of informational fodder for her short fiction, The Swan’s Road and The Land the Ravens Found (You May Well Ask 166); visits to her friend Sonja Carstensen Meyer in Denmark after the end of the Second World War resulted in a reacquaintance with—and a greater appreciation for—the Icelandic sagas (D’Arcy 163). The “Bibliography” section of The Swan’s Road indicates that Mitchison read these sagas, as well as other medieval Scandinavian works, in English translation (151).
(and it should be pointed out that just because the sources I cite here may reflect late twentieth- or early twenty-first century scholarship does not mean that they are the first ones to discuss some of the details that I specifically analyze in this chapter). Mitchison’s visits to Meyer after the Second World War also increased her consciousness of the extent to which Viking customs still persisted into twentieth-century Scotland, ones that she herself perpetuated through her experiences with farming and fishing (D’Arcy 163). At Carradale, which became her permanent residence after the summer of 1939 owing to the start of the Second World War, Mitchison attempted to foster a sense of community in her Scottish village based upon her socialist principles (Benton 117), establishing friendships that transcended class boundaries (Benton 119-21). One of the ways in which she did so was to work on her own land alongside the working-class members of her community whom she had hired to perform such labor while another was to go fishing with those whose livelihood it was (Benton 121-123).

In any case, as I discussed in the previous chapter, Landnámabók allegorically and associatively identifies Auðr in dýpúðga (“the deep-minded”) with war through its contextualization of her as one of Iceland’s “best-born [male] settlers.” That is, The Book of Settlements explicitly admires Auðr as a woman who transcends the conventions of gender in relation to war. And it is my argument here that in contrast to her medieval counterpart, Mitchison’s Aud is a comparatively de-radicalized figure whom The Land the Ravens Found generally identifies in terms of traditional gender roles and boundaries even as she serves as the medium through which it conveys its author’s anti-war sentiments.

I. “Thor-stan was king over [Caithness]...” 161

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161 All subheadings consist of text from Gudbrand Vigfusson and F. York Powell’s translation of Haukr Erlendsson’s compilation of Landnámabók (Hauksbók [1306-08]) which they published in Origines Icelandicae: A Collection of the More Important Sagas and Other Native Writings Relating to the Settlement and Early History of Iceland (1905).
The Land the Ravens Found consists of thirteen chapters, the first of which bears the title “Aud’s Hall.” The novel’s first paragraph provides directions to this structure from the sea while its end, which defines Aud as the “mother of Thorstan the Red, conqueror of Caithness and Sutherland” (Mitchison 11), apparently creates a connection between Aud and conflict in framing her as the mother of an invader.

Yet the novel’s opening lines simultaneously undermine this link between its protagonist and war. The first “sentence” 162 of The Land the Ravens Found, which is initially set in Caithness, describes “a wild sea, even in the middle of summer, choppy waves running every way at once, clear sign to seamen of violent currents, treacherous and difficult” (Mitchison 11). Snorri’s Skaldskaparmál defines the sea as the medium through which ships travel from one land mass to another. To the extent that ships were the Vikings’ usual mode of transport, the sea is therefore a war zone.

The work’s next “sentence” geographically moves us closer to land, where, “under the cliffs,” in a notably “calmer sea,” there are “small boats fishing” (Mitchison 11). Given that fish did not become a major facet of northern Scotland’s economy—Caithness is at the easternmost tip of mainland Scotland—until after 1000 A.D. (Barrett et al, “Diet and Ethnicity” 152), the “small boats” signify not only literal progression towards shore, but also greater physical proximity towards civilization in that the activity of those aboard the “small boats” is both individual and domestic. At the same time, the size of the vessels implicitly defines them as civilian crafts in that the adjective “small” defines them as what they are not: exemplars of the enormous lang-skip whose English equivalent, “long ship,” is synonymous with “a kind of large ancient ship of war” (Cleasby, Vigfusson and Craigie 373). Therefore, in distinguishing between the “wild sea” and the “calmer sea,” the second “sentence” of The Land the Ravens Found delineates a boundary between war and society.

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162 With the exception of three participles, there are no verbs in the first paragraph of The Land the Ravens Found.
Then beyond the “small boats,” the third and final “sentence” of the novel’s opening paragraph leads us to “a creek with flat rocks, easy to land on, and a path going inland up the burn, towards the great Hall of Aud the Deep-Minded, mother of Thorstan the Red, conqueror of Caithness and Sutherland” (Mitchison 11). Insofar as it may be partially defined as “an armlet of the sea” (“creek,” def. I. i.a), the “creek” is a diminution of the ocean. But as a body of water that “runs inland in a comparatively narrow channel and offers facilities for harbouring and unloading smaller ships” (“creek,” def. I. i.a), the “creek” is a natural phenomenon whose function defines it in terms of both land and society, as its “flat rocks” that are “easy to land on” reinforce, and it is perhaps no surprise, given the narrative’s progression away from the sea, that the “creek” transforms into a “burn”—a narrower and even more diminished body of water than an inlet—that parallels a geographical feature that is intrinsic only to land (the “path”) in that there are no trails in the ocean. 163 From its beginning, then, *The Land the Ravens Found* contextualizes Aud through its description of the way to her “Hall” from the sea as an individual who is literally outside the domain of war. 164

Indeed, the novel introduces Aud herself in its second paragraph, and this description echoes the beginning of *The Land the Ravens Found* insofar as it initially seems to reinforce its protagonist’s connection to war and then undermines it. Physically, Aud has “dark and deep-set” eyes and a “tough, leatherish look, like someone who has been out in all weathers” (Mitchison 11). Aud’s skin reflects exposure to the elements of nature, as the adjectives “tough” and “leatherish” imply, and it is precisely the natural world, with all of the dangers that it poses to humankind, that the opening paragraph of *The Land the Ravens Found* defines as the realm of war. In addition, Aud “[wears] a great deal of gold” (Mitchison 11) which emphasizes

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163 The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a “path” as “a way or track formed by the continued treading of pedestrians or animals, rather than one deliberately planned and made; a narrow unmade and (usually) unenclosed way that people on foot can use. In later use also: a way specifically made for people on foot, as in a park or alongside a road” (“Path,” def. I. 1a).

164 Norse men did not, of course, spend every moment of their lives at sea. Nevertheless, I would argue that *The Land the Ravens Found* implicitly frames the ocean as a specifically masculine space that serves as a primary locus of conflict.
her status as Thorstan the Red’s mother. The Vikings originally invaded Scotland proper for the purpose of obtaining movable riches (Barrett, “What Caused the Viking Age” 675), a motivation that *The Land the Ravens Found* later makes explicitly clear through its introduction of Thorstan the Red. Aud’s young grandson, Anlaf, his cousin Runolf and his nephew Hauscoll (who as the son of Anlaf’s older sister Thorgerd is nevertheless a contemporary) are fishing when someone gestures to them to come ashore. That communication indicates the return of Anlaf’s father, Thorstan the Red, who has been “away fighting the Scots” (Mitchison 12). This homecoming, as Hauscoll explicitly conveys, is synonymous with the arrival of “all kinds of spoil!” (Mitchison 20) such as the “silver and coral bracelet” and “circlet for the hair in thin, beaten gold with dragons of gold leaf falling from it” (Mitchison 21) that Thorstan brings for his daughters Wigdis and Olof, respectively. Although Aud’s “thick gold bracelets” (Mitchison 11) already encircle her wrists when the novel introduces her and *The Land the Ravens Found* does not reveal their provenance, the fact that they, like Thorstan’s gifts to his children, are adornments of precious metal makes it reasonable to conclude that they, too, are plundered goods and establish their current owner as a recipient of loot, thereby making her indirectly complicit in Norse aggression beyond Scandinavia.

But if Aud’s “thick gold bracelets” implicate her in war, they simultaneously reveal the limitations of that complicity. The necessity of acquiring “bride-wealth,” as James H. Barrett has posited, motivated the Vikings’ raids (“What Caused the Viking Age” 680-81). That anthropologists have discovered a great deal of

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165 The novel’s description of Anlaf and his two playmates fishing affirms the earlier point I have made that undersized boats are associated with personal, non-commercial activity: “...Hauscoll and Runolf were going off fishing; if [Anlaf] ran down to the creek he would be in time. ...”

“There were several boats fishing, not too far out, the small curraghs. He shouted down to their own boat as he ran and jumped down the zigzags of the path. She was still in the creek, rising and falling with the water, and Runolf holding her in but careful that she would not graze herself against the rock. He stepped in carefully and took a paddle. The oars were only for the big boats. Runolf pushed off. ...”(Mitchison 18)

“. . .they were first in at the creek. They threw the fish up on to the rock, then stepped ashore and carefully pulled up the boat. She was so light that the three of them could manage well enough to carry her up on to a sheltered bit of turf. . .” (Mitchison 20).
plunder originating in the U.K. and Ireland in the burial mounds of Norwegian women who lived during the Viking period affirms this supposition (Barrett, “What Caused the Viking Age” 676). Implicit in these arguments is the fact that men—and only men—participated in these attacks and, therefore, literally seized the goods they brought back to their communities as spoil. Thus while Aud’s jewelry as probable loot situates her as an accessory to conflict, the likelihood that she received the bracelets as such simultaneously emphasizes the comparative passivity of her role in acquiring them, thereby paradoxically emphasizing her distance from war.

Indeed, Aud’s “dark and deep-set” eyes further separate her from the realm of conflict. The parallel structure of Auðr’s appellation and her husband’s, both of which consist of a first name and a descriptor, intensifies her connection to war in Landnámabók insofar as her spouse’s nickname, “enn Hvíte” (“the White”), calls attention to the fact that his rule in Ireland is one of conquest in that the Vikings routinely added the epithet “enn Hvíte” to each other’s names after they arrived in Ireland and Scotland for the reason that they apparently viewed themselves as having lighter skin, hair and eyes than those who were indigenous to both regions (Jochens, “Race and Ethnicity in the Old Norse World” 84). Given that blue or green eyes typically accompany fair skin and blond hair, the color of Aud’s eyes distinguishes them in The Land the Ravens Found from the light-colored eyes of those whom the Irish and the Scots would have perceived as invaders.

And if such subtleties are easy to miss, the situational context in which The Land the Ravens Found introduces Aud is not, and this framing, too, initially and superficially associates Aud with violence before subverting that connection. The book first depicts Aud from the perspective of her young grandson, Anlaf Feilan, who, “inside the great Hall,” is “standing in front of his grandmother. . .” (Mitchison 11). Aud is “very angry with him,” an emotion that makes her a “formidable woman,” and she expresses this fury while “[scolding] Anlaf” by “[beating] on the arm of her chair with her clenched right hand,” making her “thick gold bracelets [clink] and [jump]” (Mitchison 11). Aud has curled her hand into a tight fist, a manual
position that typically indicates an intention to punch something or someone, and the verb “to beat,” in conjunction with the effect of this motion on her jewelry, indicates not only the intensity of her rage but also the forcefulness of her movement.

Yet the reason for Aud’s anger weakens any links between her and violence through her conscious disavowal of it. Aud is upset with her grandson because he attended the “Midsummer sacrifice” where he permitted “himself [to] be marked with . . . horse’s blood” (Mitchison 12), and it is clear from Anlaf’s thoughts in response to the upbraiding he receives from his grandmother that she dislikes the practices of the paganism that she abandoned after her husband was slain because they involve bloodshed:

And why shouldn’t he [attend the sacrifice] anyway? A warrior’s son ought to see plenty of blood. . . . Yes, and a warrior’s grandson! King Anlaf the White, his grandfather that he’d been named for, he’d seen plenty of sacrifices. And it wasn’t till his grandfather was killed that his grandmother had taken to the New Faith. It was time somebody said so.

(Mitchison 12)

But what is most important with respect to the passage quoted above is that it builds upon that which Aud’s “dark and deep-set” eyes implies by more openly subverting Landnámabók’s association of Aud with war through the latter’s identification of her with her husband. By emphasizing the difference between Aud’s coloring and her spouse’s, The Land the Ravens Found undermines the link between Anlaf the White and his wife that Landnámabók establishes through the parallel structure of their names. Given the situation in which Anlaf Feilan currently finds himself, the young man’s thoughts about his grandfather’s presence at many sacrifices highlights the distinction between Anlaf the White and Aud with respect to their attitudes towards bloodshed.

Similarly, Aud’s “thick gold bracelets” subtly embody the distinction between her and Thorstan, a difference that The Land the Ravens Found makes explicit through both its own narrator and Anlaf Feilan’s perspective, and this divergence also subverts Landnámabók by undermining Aud’s connection to conflict.
through its identification of her with her son. Hauscoll’s reaction to the news of his grandfather’s return to Caithness—that Thorstan’s arrival also means that of plunder—rather obviously contextualizes the latter as a pillager, and the man’s own attitude towards the spilling of blood is generally consistent with this status.

166 When Aud chastises Anlaf Feilan for having witnessed and participated in the “Midsummer sacrifice,” he thinks of Thorstan and concludes that “[h]is father, as he well knew, would not have scolded him for going with old Haurd to” this ritual (Mitchison 12); months later, during the Yuletide season, when a seer tells Thorstan that he will die neither aged nor in peace, he remarks that he has “‘always wanted to be killed in battle’” (Mitchison 49) and, when the fortune teller confirms this fate, laughs after commenting that he has “‘never known a battle without blood’” (Mitchison 49). And what is most significant about the divergence between Aud’s and Thorstan’s perspectives on war is the way in which *The Land the Ravens Found* grounds this difference of opinion in adherence to traditional gender roles, affirming its earlier, implicit relegation of its female protagonist to the domestic realm at the very beginning of its narrative, and heightens the contrast between these viewpoints through juxtaposition. It is no coincidence that Aud’s own Hall is the setting in which she upbraids Anlaf Feilan whose thoughts run from his acknowledgement that he is “in the wrong, at any rate according to his grandmother” and “[knows] he’d do the same thing again when next he

166 Although, broadly speaking, Thorstan’s stance towards war contrasts with his mother’s, his position on the subject of conflict is hardly simple, as he conveys through the conversation he has with his son some weeks after returning to his mother’s Hall. After refusing to bring Anlaf Feilan with him on his next raid because the latter is under fourteen years of age and thus still lacks the physical fortitude to go overseas, Thorstan counters his son’s response—that “‘King Harold Fairhair started fighting when he was ten years old’” (Mitchison 28)—with the reflection that the monarch “‘might have been a better king if he had done other things than fighting’” (Mitchison 28) and recommends that Anlaf Feilan spend his time “‘learning to read’” (Mitchison 28). When Anlaf Feilan rejects this advice because he views reading as both a priestly and a womanly pursuit, Thorstan says that “‘there have been times in [his] life that [he] wanted to read’” (Mitchison 28) and points out that one of his comrades (who also happens to be the boy’s cousin), Stanmod of Barra, is able to “‘write to his father’” (Mitchison 28), an accomplishment that implicitly indicates the latter’s ability to read. That is, Thorstan perceives mastery of what his son considers to be a feminine skill as not only an admirable achievement on the part of men but also one that, more than military power, might result in improved leadership. This attitude reflects a tolerance for ambiguity with respect to gender roles, but more significantly, it aligns him with Aud who is herself a skilled reader and writer (see Mitchison 75).
[feels] like it” (Mitchison 11) to his certainty that “[h]is father, as he well knew, would not have scolded him” for his defiance. Likewise, the novel directly contrasts Thorstan’s enthusiasm for raiding with his mother (and his wife’s) opposition to it, a resistance that, failing in its attempt to keep Scotland’s conqueror “at home,” reconciles itself to the inevitable through a performance of hospitality, and such provisioning, of course, was typically the responsibility of Norse women:

After a few weeks at home, Thorstan the Red would get bored. He would hear that in one place or another the Scots were getting uppish; then, whatever Thorrild [Thorstan’s wife] and his mother could say or do, off he would go. They gave him the best of food and drink and he enjoyed that, but summer was for fighting. (Mitchison 27)

II. “Aud was in Caithness when she heard the news of the fall of Thorstan”

*Landnámabók* begins its account of Auðr’s Icelandic settlement in Dublin which Anlaf the White invades and conquers before his marriage; after he dies fighting, his widow and son depart for the Southreys, and it is sometime after that, following his own marriage and the births of his children, that Thorstan, in alliance with Earl Sig-rod, captures much of the territory that we call Scotland. *The Land the Ravens Found* deviates from *Landnámabók* in situating Caithness as its initial setting, after Thorstan has already seized it; nevertheless, from this point onward, the twentieth-century work more or less follows (and expands upon) the chronology of events that the narrative of Auðr’s landnám comprises. In both *The Book of Settlements* and *The Land the Ravens Found*, then, Thorstan’s death at the hands of the Scots whom he previously subdued precipitates Aud’s departure from Caithness. Leaving Scotland in a ship whose construction has occurred in secret, Aud sails to the Orkney Islands where one of her granddaughters marries and settles. In *Landnámabók*, the implications of these events further cement Auðr’s ties to conflict: the medieval text posits Auðr as a progenitor of war insofar as it identifies her with Oðin and Thor-stan with Thor, while the situation in which she finds herself after her son dies superficially parallels that of other
men and women who, like her, ultimately settle in Iceland: the slaying of a close relative at the hands of a political enemy— and thus the vulnerability to further violence that it portends to members of the victim’s family— compels each future Icelander to flee the region in which he resides, which is to say that the choice is to emigrate or to die. In addition, *Landnámabók*’s deployment of the word “knaorr” in reference to Auðr’s ship specifically defines it as a vehicle of war, while her role in Gruoch’s marriage emphasizes the extent to which she identifies as a man in that, according to Icelandic law, the only woman with authority to contract a marriage other than her own was the mother of the prospective bride, and even then, this power applied only if the bride-to-be lacked, in the following order, a legitimate son who was neither enslaved nor intellectually incapable and who had attained his majority; a son-in-law; a father; and a brother related through the same father to contract a marriage on her behalf.

In *The Land the Ravens Found*, it is Aud herself who defuses the potentialities of force that emerge with respect to the incidents I have just outlined. After Thorstan’s death, his men bring his body back to the Hall, where some of them wish to

> burn [it] on a great funeral pyre, as the old custom was, with his horses and dogs round him and perhaps, for better measure, some of the thralls with their throats cut. But Aud [will] have none of it. All the same Thorstan’s sword Scot-Biter [is] buried with him. His hands [are] folded crosswise, but the sword [is] placed so as to touch them. At the Last Day, he [will] have its comfort. He [keeps] his dagger and axe too, and his great gold collar and a purse full of money. (Mitchison 66)

As the passage above accurately indicates—and as the details of the earlier “Midsummer sacrifice” anticipate— medieval Scandinavian funereal rites often involved the slaughter of animals and people.  

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167 In the second decade of the tenth century A.D., Ibn Fadlan was present at that which plausibly was a “Scandinavian ship cremation on the banks of the Volga” (Price 131). Neil Price argues that certain remnants pertaining to this spectacle, as Fadlan describes it in the *Risala*, “can be matched in the
Aud’s refusal to perform, or to permit others to perform, these elements of the “old custom” obviously reflects her aversion to violence. And interestingly, the actuality of Thorstan’s interment belies the rhetoric and syntax that seemingly allow him to be put to rest in accordance with both specific pagan and Christian traditions in that the literal burial of Thorstan’s weapons is a symbolic entombment of the latent violence that they suggest.

Aud’s abandonment of Scotland is obviously calculated and deliberate, and The Land the Ravens Found transforms that which in Landnámabók is no more than a pragmatic choice into a principled decision whereby immigrating to Iceland is not simply the only alternative to impending attack and its probable consequence, premature death, but rather one that arguably carries as much honor as engaging in battle, given that, as Aud puts it, “’It is a glorious thing . . . to overcome the long waves of the sea,’” (Mitchison 68-69) which is precisely what Thorstan and his men have done every time they have sailed and later come safely ashore. As a personal stand for individual freedom, sailing to Iceland is also a demonstration of conscious resistance against tyranny, and the significance of this idea lies in the fact that it not only reflects Aud’s own mindset, which is to say that in the 1955 novel, the protagonist herself views going into voluntary exile as an act of conviction that is preferable to engaging in self-defense, but also demonstrates the inextricability of Aud’s anti-war stance from her valuation of kindred ritual, thereby deepening her archaeological record of the Nordic countries” and that such objects “include . . the specific grave-goods of weapons and food. . .animal killings and the death of another person as part of the ritual” (133).

As Price’s observations, quoted in Note 167, imply, the burial of Thorstan’s body with his “sword,” “dagger” and “axe” (and with the “great gold collar” and the “purse full of money” that those implements likely procured) follows pagan practice while the position of “his hands,” as “crosswise” blatantly suggests, reflects Christian influence. The adverbial phrase “[a]ll the same” and the conjunction “but” in the next sentence indicate turns of thought that contradict the immediately precedent ideas.

It is somewhat unclear in Landnámabók as to whether or not Iceland is Auðr’s intended destination when she leaves Scotland since the text states that she “[holds] her course out to the Orkneys” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 77/ “hélt hon út í Orkneyjar” [Hauksbók II. xiv. ii]) from where, at some point after marrying off her granddaughter Gruoch, she “[goes] out to seek Iceland” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 77/ “Efter þat fór at leita Íslannz. . . ” [Hauksbók II. xiv. ii]). However, the perfunctory tone in which Landnámabók relates these events, in conjunction with the text’s failure to explain why Auðr sails from the Orkney Islands to Iceland, may suggest that reaching the latter is her goal all along.
connection to the domestic realm insofar as families arguably form the core of civilization. In pointing out to Anlaf Feilan that the “‘noble reason’” that “‘men first sailed from Norway to Iceland’” (Mitchison 69) was that Harold Fairhair’s authority meant that “‘[e]ither [one] became his man or, if [one] wanted to go on being free, [one] had to leave Norway’” (Mitchison 70), Aud names several individuals who have already left Norway for other regions, including her own husband, Anlaf’s namesake, who “‘sailed for Ireland and got himself lands there’”; 170 Aud’s “‘two brothers’” who “‘sailed for the new country that Floki Vilgerdsson found: [i.e for Iceland’ “; and Aud’s “‘own father’” who “‘left Norway as King Harald’s man, but . . . thought better of it and cut adrift’” with the result that the “‘Fairhair took all his lands and made him a wolf’s head, an outlaw and an exile!’” (Mitchison 70-71). To emulate them, as Aud implies, is to perpetuate that which has become a family tradition.

Furthermore, the circumstances in which Aud raises the possibility of going to Iceland conventionalize her perspective by emphasizing her status as a woman. In describing Auðr’s response to the slaying of her son, Landnámabók positions her as its narrative and grammatical subject, as its repetition of the pronoun “hon” (“she”) indicates. 171 That is, the medieval text situates Auðr as the sole agent, more or less, of her decision to leave Scotland and her consequent plans for the same. By contrast, The Land the Ravens Found diminishes Aud’s authority which it initially does by turning her autonomous solution to the problem

170 There is a certain irony here insofar as Aud’s husband, Anlaf, conquered others and stole their resources in becoming Ireland’s ruler, unlike the woman’s brothers who in Iceland have claimed soil that no human ever previously owned. Nevertheless, within the context of the conversation I have been partially quoting here, Aud frames her late spouse as someone who chose voluntary exile over conflict.

171 “Auðr vas þá á Cata-nese es hon spurðe fall Þórsteins. Hon let gœra knaorr í skóge á laun; en es hon vas buen, hélt hon út í Orkneyjar: þar gifte hon Gró dóttor Þórsteins Rauðs; hon vas móðer Greladar, es Þórfinnr Hausa-kliúfr átte. Efter þat fór Auðr at leita Íslannz; hon hafðe áð skipe með ser tottogo karla frialsa” (Hauksbók II. xiv. ii)/“Aud was in Caithness when she heard the news of the fall of Thor-stan. She had a cog made in a wood in secret; and when she was ready she held her course out to the Orkneys. There she gave in marriage Gruoch, the daughter of Thor-stan the Red. She was the mother of Gre-lad [Gre-liath], whom Thor-fin Scull-cleaver had to wife.

After that Aud went out to seek Iceland. She had on board with her twenty freedmen” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 77).
of impending and retaliatory violence into that which apparently will be a resolution by consensus. After Thorstan dies, his eldest daughter’s (i.e. Thorgerd’s) husband, Coll, “[asks] Anlaf [Feilan] to come with him to Aud and take counsel” (Mitchison 67), and at this meeting, Stanmod of Barra (see Note 166) is also present.

The novel quickly makes it clear, however, that it is Anlaf Feilan who ultimately will determine the fates of his family and followers, and this authority, particularly in light of his arguably ambiguous stature and abilities, calls attention to the asymmetry of male and female power in medieval Scandinavia. Anlaf Feilan’s own conception of himself, once Thorstan is dead, as the “man of the family” (Mitchison 67) mirrors society’s view of him: when asked by his brother-in-law if he intends to maintain his grip on the territory that Thorstan had seized from Scotland’s natives, Anlaf Feilan “[knows] that if he [says] yes, that Coll [will] feel himself bound to stand by the decision” (Mitchison 68). Yet as the novel’s earlier reference to Anlaf Feilan’s age reveals,172 he is not technically an adult because he has yet to reach the Norse age of majority, sixteen, and his own uncertainty as to what his answer should be, particularly in light of Coll’s and Aud’s respective responses to the reply he gives, reflects his youth and his inexperience:

He looked at Stanmod, but his face told nothing. Then he looked at his grandmother; and she stared past him as though at something far away. It was to be entirely on him: the weight, the blame, the honour or dishonour of whatever was said. At last he said: “Before I answer you, Coll, I have to know what else—if there is anything else—can be done with honour.”

Coll said to Stanmod: “That is the right answer, but I did not know he was old enough to give it.” Stanmod nodded.

172 The Land the Ravens Found states that when Anlaf Feilan learns of his father’s death, he “[can] hardly feel it yet” but comprehends that “now his father [will] never be there to take him out raiding when he [is] fourteen years old” (Mitchison 65).
Anlaf looked again at his grandmother. She said: “You will be a man of sense, my Bull. You will not be like the foolish bulls that run at any rag.” (Mitchison 68)

Coll’s remark to Stanmod, which is notable insofar as its speaker directs it towards the only other man involved in the conversation while failing to address Aud simultaneously, embodies that which the exchanges quoted above intimate as a whole: that Anlaf’s status as Thorstan’s son and heir gives him authority that his grandmother, a woman, would otherwise merit by virtue of her insight and worldliness. At the same time, the conversational snippets quoted above foreground the contrast between Anlaf Feilan and his grandmother whose subsequent dialogue, in affirming the former’s lack of awareness and the latter’s wisdom and knowledge, also defines the nature of Aud’s power in this situation. After acknowledging her grandson’s good sense, Aud tells him that

“. . .there is another thing that can be done.”

“What is it?” he said.

“North-west of us is the land the ravens found, Iceland. You have two uncles there, Helgi Beolan and Beorn.”

“You mean, we could go there?”

“If it is unwise to defend your father’s conquests, then that is what can be done.”

“But how—how would we get there?”

“That would be something to be thought on. But I think it could be done.”

“I am sure it could be done,” said Coll.

Anlaf asked, uncertainly: “But would there be—glory—in it? I would not want to let go my father’s share of glory.”

Technically speaking, Coll participates in this conversation as well, but his comments are few and arguably add little substance to Aud’s discussion with Anlaf.
“It is a glorious thing,” his grandmother said, “to overcome the long waves of the sea. And remember, Anlaf, the reason why men first sailed from Norway to Iceland. It was a noble reason.”

“Because of the Fairhair,” said Coll.

“Tell me more about that,” Anlaf said, and Aud said she would tell him after his father was buried, and then he could make up his mind for certain.

So, during the first days of mourning, Anlaf was not certain. It seemed to him that all the men were wondering what was to happen next, but did not like to ask him. He went to his grandmother and said: “Tell me now about the Fairhair and the Iceland folk” . . .

“He is a great fighter, nobody can deny that. . . But even at the beginning, when it first became plain that he meant to be master, there were those men who could not and would not bear it: all over Norway, men who had been free, users of the land, meeting together to govern themselves and to work out their own quarrels their own way”. . .

“Yet Earl Sigurd of the Orkneys who was my father’s friend, he is King Harald’s liege man.”

“And for that reason your father never spoke as ill of the Fairhair as my brothers did. Nor was there talk of your father being under the Earl. But it might be, now, that Earl Sigurd would be less of a friend to you than he was to your father. Do you understand, Anlaf?”

“It looks to me,” said Anlaf, “that I have two wolves running one at each side of me. One of them is a Scottish wolf. But the other has a look of Earl Sigurd.”

“That is so,” said Aud.

“And in fighting one, I might lose my freedom to the other.”
“Yes,” said Aud, “though I do not say so for certain. But freedom is not a thing which should be risked”. . . .

“It seems, then,” said Anlaf, “as though we should be looking towards Iceland.”

“That is what I think too,” said his grandmother, “and I will try to get letters through to my brothers, so that they may have something prepared. Yet I will not hide it from you, Anlaf, that it will be a dangerous voyage if we do go, and we shall be many days on the way. The Gannets’ Path is bonny to look at, but is no safe road.”

“I can see that well enough,” said Anlaf, “but, my grandmother, how shall we go if we do go? In what boat?”

“That is the easiest part of it,” said Aud. “We shall build a boat.” (Mitchison 68-71)

The casual ease with which Aud answers the last of Anlaf’s questions exposes as a sham her earlier uncertainty as to how she, Anlaf Feilan and everyone else at her Hall would journey to Iceland, and the significance of this deception resides in the retrospective attention that it focuses upon Aud’s rhetorical strategy throughout her discussion with Anlaf Feilan. After bringing up the idea of going to Iceland, Aud frames it as an alternative that is contingent upon whether or not it would be a good tactic to try to keep the territories that Thorstan seized; she points out that emigration has its own share of honor and that preserving one’s autonomy underpins the reason for doing so in response to Anlaf Feilan’s concerns about “glory”; and then she mentions some hypothetical but realistic situations and outcomes of defending Thorstan’s lands in relation to the value of the liberty that Anlaf Feilan may lose in choosing to remain in Scotland. In short, Aud prompts her grandson, via shrewd suggestions, to conclude that the most prudent course of action is to sail to Iceland. Her power is that of influence, which ironically defined women’s roles in relation to war even as it emphasized their distance from, and lack of direct agency concerning, the actual waging of conflict: as indicated by the nearly identical ways in which women from various cultures participated in feuds, there was “a social reality behind the motif of the whetting woman in Edda and saga. . .
. .” (Clover, “Hildegunnr’s Lament” 36): “Not affection but duty obliged a man to take action over a kin killing, and it was no less the duty of women to remember and remind” (Clover, “Hildegunnr’s Lament” 17). In other words, The Land the Ravens Found both diminishes and feminizes the agency that Aud has in Landnámabók, which Anlaf Feilan’s later conversation with Haurd, one of her men, underscores. When it becomes clear to Haurd that both he and Anlaf Feilan have concluded that emigrating to Iceland is a good idea, the older man comments to the younger that this migration “‘will be a thought for [his] grandmother too’” although “‘the old one has been on a ship before’” (Mitchison 72). Haurd assumes both that the notion of going to Iceland is Anlaf Feilan’s own and that such a plan has not occurred to Aud.

III. “She had a cog made in a wood in secret. . .”

Landnámabók’s own language (“Hon let gcera knaorr í skóge á laun” [Hauksbók II. xiv. ii]/ “She had a cog made in a wood in secret” [trans. Vigfusson and Powell 77]) with respect to Aud’s ship situates her as the instigator and director of its construction even as it indicates that she does not literally build it herself, thereby associating her with an occupation (i.e. carpentry) that men typically practiced during the Viking period. It is therefore ironic that in giving Aud more of a hands-on role in the creation of her ship, The Land the Ravens Found once again mitigates her control. When Aud goes into the woods for the purpose of selecting trees that will provide the right sort of timber for the components of her ship, she does so in the company of Coll, Anlaf Feilan and another man, Cathal. The narrative’s first sentence concerning this outing positions Aud, Coll and Anlaf Feilan as its grammatical subjects; the deployment of the conjunction “and” between each name in this clause, coupled with the novel’s deployment of the subject pronoun “they” in subsequent sentences, emphasizes not only the collaborative nature of this venture but also the equal status that Aud shares with her grandson-in-law and her grandson. Indeed, the use of the subject pronoun “they” in the sentences following the book’s description of Cathal render him Aud’s, Coll’s and Anlaf
Feilan’s equal in referring to him as well as to them, contradicting the novel’s initial framing of him as their subordinate:

One day Aud and Coll and Anlaf rode out to the forest. They took with them a man called Cathal. He was a dour kind of man, half a Scot, and very skilled about trees and timber. They went round looking at pines for planking and at oak for keel wood and framing. Above all they looked for certain kinds of crooked oak which would be ready curved for the curves in the body of the new boat. They discussed each tree and, if it was what they wanted, they marked it with an axe. It took them a whole day and in the end they had not found and marked all the trees they wanted. Still, there were enough to work on for a good while. (Mitchison 73)

In fact, it is Coll and Cathal who calculate how big Aud’s ship should be and how many oarsmen it should seat, although the matriarch and her daughter-in-law, Thorrid, “[see] to [its] fittings” (Mitchison 86). But the dilution of Aud’s authority over the shipbuilding process on the part of the twentieth-century narrative, like its lessening of her role in deciding to sail to Iceland, both reflects the contemporary status of women relative to that of men in medieval Scandinavia and anticipates the protagonist’s further conformity to gender conventions. In the dialogue between Aud and Anlaf Feilan that I have cited earlier, the matriarch says that she will compose and send letters to her brothers so that they may prepare for her arrival in Iceland. Although writing missives is superficially androgynous insofar as “[n]ot many men, and still fewer women, [can] write” (Mitchison 75), Anlaf Feilan’s earlier assessment of literacy as a feminine or clerical pursuit highlights the fact that Aud drafts these communiqués “in her bower” (Mitchison 75), away from the “bargaining” with the trader that has recently arrived, which subtly associates her with an enclosed domestic space while separating her from activities that, beyond raiding, otherwise typified the experiences

174 See the passage quoted in Note 166.
of medieval Norsemen beyond Scandinavia. Beyond foraying into the woods for timber and dealing with the fittings, Aud’s hands-on involvement with her ship and other preparations for leaving Scotland consists of perusing some old sails that she and her daughter-in-law, Thorrid, “[patch] or [replace] where necessary” (Mitchison 85). As Jenny Jochens notes, Norse women produced the wool (vaðmál) that medieval communities in Norway and Iceland used “for a myriad of purposes” including that of providing sails for ships (Women in Old Norse Society 142). In addition, it is Aud’s responsibility to determine who will accompany her to Iceland and who, by default, will remain in Scotland, a task that connects her to the civilian realm insofar as she is, in a way, creating a community.

And once again, The Land the Ravens Found links Aud’s adherence to traditional gender roles to her anti-war sentiment even as it initially posits her as an agent of, or as an accessory to, conflict. When Aud ventures into the woods with Coll, Anlaf Feilan and Cathal to get timber for her ship, she, like the men, is “not unarmed; her cloak [is] fastened with a great silver pin, a round strip worked with enamelled patterns, which [slips] through the head of the pin. The pin itself [is] steel, a foot long and very sharp. Twice in her life [she] had used this in defence,” and “it was thought that once at least she had killed her enemy” (Mitchison 73). That Aud may have slain someone obviously implicates her in violence, as does her pin which links her to Norse subjugation of Ireland by virtue of its design and composition. Yet the same language that defines her as a perpetrator of bloodshed simultaneously qualifies, feminizes and interrogates

175 “The tendency to consider the Vikings only as pirates has obscured an important facet of their political and economic life. While piracy was an element in their initial impact outside Scandinavia, the really important feature of their foreign relations ultimately concerned emigration and conquest. Once they had settled in a foreign country, they were likely to maintain economic ties with their original homeland as well as develop them with their new neighbours. At this stage they began to shrug off their piratical past and trade became of paramount importance. Once the Vikings had settled in a new land they quickly became acclimated to its political structure and with their adventurous background became competent traders” (Foote and Wilson 196).
176 As late as 899 A.D. and after 1099 A.D., medieval Irish artisans applied enamel to metalwork (Edwards 287); those whose raw materials included gold, silver, copper or lead created “ringed-pins,” among other things (Wallace 833).
her status as such. The quotidian purpose of pins like Aud’s, as the novel itself makes clear, was to secure one’s clothing around oneself (Richardson, “Visual Arts and Society” 694). That Aud’s “weapon” functions as such is therefore incidental to its conventional use which deepens her connection to domesticity insofar as pins like hers not only met a practical need but also served as a social signifier in that “prestige was attached to the wearing of these splendid objects” (Richardson, “Visual Arts and Society” 694). Indeed, the book’s oblique reference to the bows and arrows with which Coll, Anlaf Feilan and Cathal have armed themselves highlight by way of contrast the status of Aud’s pin as a piece of jewelry and thus as an accessory with which archaeologists particularly associate Norse women. These gendered identifications in turn call attention to the circumstances in which Aud has deployed her own pin in battle. Aud’s pin, unlike her grandson’s bows and arrows, is not a weapon by design; and her deployment of it, in response to another’s violence towards her, contrasts sharply with the unprovoked aggression of Anlaf Feilan towards the beaver. Finally, the clause “it was thought” indicates the putative nature of Aud’s dispatchment of one of her adversaries. In short, there is no doubt that the motivation behind Aud’s physical aggression was to survive her enemies’ offensives against her, while the death of one or more of those foes at her hands is a mere assumption on the part of others. And the fact that Aud might not have slain anyone is in keeping with

177 The Land the Ravens Found states that “the men [are] well armed” and that “[o]n the way back [from assessing the trees], Anlaf [shoots] a beaver in the swamp they had to find their way through. . .” (Mitchison 73). Given the historical period in which The Land the Ravens Found takes place and the idiomatic implications of the infinitive “to shoot,” we may infer that Anlaf Feilan, Coll and Cathal have armed themselves with bows and arrows. Although early medieval law in Norway, Sweden and Denmark did not generally compel men to carry these particular weapons on their persons—the regulations concerning them applied to their presence aboard ships (see Foote and Wilson 272)—the point is that these mandates confirm the use of bows and arrows as instruments of aggression and defence on the part of medieval Scandinavians and thus support my identification of Anlaf Feilan’s, Coll’s and Cathal’s arms as such.

178 Michèle Hayeur-Smith observes that the burial mounds of both Norwegian women who lived between the fifth and ninth centuries and Icelandic women who lived during the overlapping but mostly subsequent Viking Age often contained metal ornaments while those of Norwegian men and Icelandic men who lived during the same respective periods typically contained weapons (231). Notably, one of the Icelandic burial mounds contains a “ringed pin” that is stylistically identical to those comprised by “the largest group of ringed pins from the Dublin sites” (Hayeur-Smith 234) and that Aud’s pin seems to resemble.
medieval Icelandic statutes governing the relationship between women and retribution. Grágás, Iceland’s first set of laws, states that “a widow or an unmarried girl of twenty or more is to have charge of her own lawsuits if they are assaulted or wounded with minor wounds. . .” (trans. Dennis et al, Laws of Early Iceland, Vol. I 158), from which we may infer that married women who had suffered from attacks or non-fatal harm did not manage their own cases but instead had grievances filed on their behalf by their spouses. More importantly, this mandate assumes that women who experience bodily hurt at the hands of others will not avenge their attackers directly and physically. Similarly, the only woman whom legislation required “both to pay and to take a wergild ring” (trans. Dennis et al, Laws of Early Iceland, Vol. I 181) was the never married, sole offspring of the victim or the murderer who himself lacked, in the following order, a living father, son, brother, paternal grandfather, grandson by a son, maternal grandfather, grandson by a daughter, paternal uncle, nephew by a brother, maternal uncle, nephew by a sister, or first cousin (also a man) to do so (trans. Dennis et al, Laws of Early Iceland, Vol. I 175). Carol Clover argues that this listing likely indicates “the schedule of feud itself—the order, that is, in which the survivors are obliged to take retaliatory action” (“Maiden Warriors and Other Sons” 47). If so, it is arguable that women never engaged in retributive combat given that the circumstances under which they might have done so rarely existed. 179

In fact, the twentieth-century work anticipates its subversion of Landnámabók’s identification of Auðr with war through her ship in light of its intended design. If The Land the Ravens Found initially contextualizes trading as a masculine activity, it also affirms the binary opposition between raiding and

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179 Grágás, Iceland’s national code until 1271 A.D., did not exist as a written document until early in the twelfth century and indeed encompassed subsequent additions into the thirteenth century (Dennis, Foote and Perkins, Introduction to Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás I 4-5). Clover points out, however, that the legislation concerning the participation of women in the wergild schema resembles passages from an earlier Norwegian code, Gulaþingslög, and thus reflects long-standing Scandinavian cultural norms (“Maiden Warriors and Other Sons” 46). Such is likely true, even though Gulaþingslög itself “according to Snorri [Sturluson]. . . [was] set up by Hákon the Good” (Grønlie 18-19) whose monarchy began some years after the end of the Settlement Period.
trading that P.G. Foote and D.M. Wilson posit and reverses the implications of The Book of Settlements’ allusion to Auðr’s ship as a “knaorr” by emphasizing the denotative meaning of the term. In the twentieth-century narrative, Aud’s ship is “to be beamy, like a merchant ship, with a small deck at the stern—though that might be left out if time [is] pressing—with a good tree for the mast but depending, in the end, on the rowers” (Mitchison 77). Trading was and is a social phenomenon based upon cooperation and trust between individuals and between members of specific groups such as ethnic communities; that how the oarsmen will function is apparently a factor in the ship’s configuration is an acknowledgement of the collaborative nature of Aud’s journey from Scotland.

But as I have said, the structural plan for Aud’s ship foreshadows the novel’s undermining of the connection between Aud and war that her vessel in Landnámabók reinforces, and The Land the Ravens Found disassociates Aud’s ship from conflict while emphasizing her status as a woman by demonstrating her lack of authority relative to that which she wields in The Book of Settlements and partially rooting the protagonist’s opposition to violence in her sense of community. Dismissing the concerns of her men Haurd and Steinarr, as well as those of two other unidentified people, Aud stipulates that no sacrifice to the pagan gods will precede the departure of her ship, Safe Farer, for Iceland:

“No,” said Aud, “I am having no sacrifice.” She knew well enough what they wanted: to have a living man or woman tied on to one of the rollers, so that the keel of the ship, coming fast and heavy, would cut through them and the scream, rising to the heavens, would be cut as by a knife, and the gods would have accepted this life instead of the ship’s.

(Mitchison 86)

Haurd responds to Aud’s prohibition on sacrifice by remarking “to Steinarr that the old woman [is] spoiling the luck” and because of this comment, “whispers [begin] to go round” (Mitchison 86).

Medieval

\footnote{See Note 175.}
Scandinavians conceived of luck as a trait that was intrinsic to the individual who possessed it (Sommer 275). When, therefore, Haurd accuses Aud of “spoiling the luck,” he is not defining her actions so much as he is assessing her moral character, and in some of the Icelandic sagas, being devoid of luck is tantamount to being a níðingr (“a nithing, villain” [(Cleasby, Vigfusson and Craigie 456)] which “is the worst possible condemnation in the Norse language” and “signifies that the person is a monster, devoid of all honor, and unfit for human company” (Sommer 277). The importance of this insult lies in its connection to níð ("a libel" [(Cleasby, Vigfusson and Craigie 455)]) which, having been expressed, deemed its target a níðingr (Sommer 289). The term níðingr is “legally the strongest term of abuse (like Germ, ehrloser), for a traitor, a truce-breaker, one who commits a deed of wanton cruelty, a coward, and the like...” (Cleasby, Vigfusson and Craigie 456); given that the “fusion between the notions of sexual unmanliness [i.e. taking on the role of the passive partner] and unmanliness in a moral sense [i.e. lacking courage] stands at the heart of níð” (Meulengracht Sørensen, The Unmanly Man 20), the term emphasizes the equivalence of níðingr with “coward.” In a society that equated cowardliness with effeminacy (Clover, “Regardless of Sex” 375), Haurd’s criticism reinforces Aud’s status as a woman, not only from a biological perspective but also from a societal one in linking that identity to her refusal to hold a sacrifice prior to embarkation from Scotland.

The import of Haurd’s remarks is implicit; what happens not long after Aud announces that she is “having no sacrifice” more explicitly affirms the connotations of those comments on a narrative level. At dawn of the morning that she is to depart, Aud awakens to find Vivill, a Scottish boy whom Thorstan had captured, standing beside her bed with an urgent message: that “’[t]hey’ ” (Mitchison 89)—that is, Steinarr, Haurd and his son, two other Scandinavians who will making the trip to Iceland and a number of “older men who would be left, but whose sons [are] going” with Aud (Mitchison 90)—“’have taken a child—for the sacrifice!’ ” down to the Safe Farer to which she must run in order to prevent the ritual from happening (Mitchison 89). To begin with, there is the obvious fact that Steinarr, Haurd and the others consciously and deliberately have contradicted Aud’s orders in attempting to hold a sacrifice; the ritual
never occurs only because Vivill learns of the men’s plans and informs Aud about them. Aud herself, however, is only indirectly responsible for preventing Haurd and the other men from carrying out their intentions. After Vivill warns Aud to go down to the Safe Farer, she awakens her granddaughter, Thorgerd, with instructions to come down to the ship with her own husband, Coll. On their way there, the two eventually pass Aud who exhorts Vivill to keep going when she gets out of breath from running and a cramp causes her to stop, “swaying a little” and “clutching on to a rock” (Mitchison 89); and the matriarch arrives at her destination to find that the erstwhile sacrifice is no longer in danger: Thorgerd is already “untying [the] sobbing, miserable, half-naked child from the roller in front of the ship’s prow” (Mitchison 89) which she is no doubt able to do thanks to Coll’s and Vivill’s attacks on Steinarr and Haurd. And even after Aud gets all four men to stop fighting when she “[claps] her hands sharply” (Mitchison 89), threatening to leave them behind when she sails, Haurd and Steinarr maintain an attitude of defiance. Taken all together, the actions of Steinarr, Haurd and their supporters; Vivill’s alarm; and his, Coll and Thorgerd’s success in protecting the child from physical harm indicate the vulnerability of Aud’s authority concerning the launch of the Safe Farer.

And once again, The Land the Ravens Found relates this weakness to Aud’s identity as a woman, as her argument with Haurd and Steinarr reveals. When Aud inquires as to whom the child belongs, Haurd replies indignantly that “ ’[h]er mother is dead and she has never had any father to speak of’ ” and so “ ’[n]obody would have missed her’ ” (Mitchison 90); a few exchanges later, Steinarr tells Aud that it was “ ‘stupid of [her] to interfere’ ” and that “ ‘Thorstan [her] son would never have done it’ ” (Mitchison 90). Implicit in Haurd’s answer to Aud’s question is his justification for choosing this particular child to be sacrificed on behalf of the Safe Farer: that as an orphan, the girl has no value to anyone else. Aud’s response, “ ‘[m]uch you know!’ ” (Mitchison 90), is in part a repudiation of this idea (and one that proves to be quite accurate since the girl goes to live with “a decent old Scots woman who [promises] to take care of her” [Mitchison 91]) that speaks to her own sense of connectedness to others, and to the extent that Aud’s opposition to
ritual sacrifice is inextricable from her conviction that the girl’s lack of parents does not make her expendable, her (Aud’s) opposition to violence is inseparable from her sense of community which extends beyond her family and followers. Yet Aud’s anti-war position and inclusiveness, as the novel frames them, are not simply reflective of her own idiosyncrasies. In contrasting Aud’s actions with those which her late son would have taken, Steinarr posits the matriarch as Thorstan’s antithesis. Given that Thorstan as Scotland’s former conqueror epitomized the Norse conception of masculinity, Steinarr’s critique implicitly defines Aud’s intervention in terms of her femininity.

IV. “...and when she was ready she held her course out to the Orkneys. There she gave in marriage Gruoch, the daughter of Thorstan the Red”

In Landnámabók, Auðr first sails to the Orkney Islands where she marries off her granddaughter Gruoch and then in turn gives away four of her other five granddaughters in marriage. Auðr’s role in her granddaughters’ unions is indicative of her performance as a man in light of the fact that the only woman in medieval Scandinavia who could legally betroth anyone was the mother of the intended bride and that in Iceland, the settler continues to contract unions on behalf of her granddaughters even though there is a male relative who according to law is eligible to do so. The Land the Ravens Found mitigates the extent to which Aud takes on a male role with respect to the marriages of her granddaughters. Having received earlier notification that Groa would “sail over to Orkney during the summer” (Mitchison 99), the bride’s future in-laws have already completed the preparations for her wedding by the time that the Safe Farer sets anchor in the Orkney Islands. These details, like the narrative’s earlier allusion to the packing of the “chests with Groa’s clothes and dowry” (Mitchison 96) aboard the Safe Farer, make clear that the young woman’s nuptials do not result from matchmaking that takes place after Aud reaches the Orkney Islands. In fact, the twentieth-century work implies that Groa’s late father, Thorstan the Red, negotiated her marriage on her behalf:
[Thorstan] had friends and cousins in Ireland, in the Hebrides, in Orkney and Shetland and in the Faroes. Besides that, he had two uncles, brothers of Aud, who had settled in the new country that was called Iceland. One of his friends in the Faroes had asked for a daughter in marriage for one of his sons. That would be Olof. Groa was already promised for the Orkneys. The other three were young enough. (Mitchison 27)

Similarly, even though Olof’s marriage is tentatively set—“when they got [to the Faroe Islands] it would be seen how things would go” (Mitchison 100)--, and it is Aud who, speaking with the father of Thrand the Seal, Olof’s intended husband, settles the terms of the young woman’s dowry after the Safe Farer beaches in the Faroe Islands, the passage quoted above indicates clearly that Thorstan, not Aud, initially agrees to the match on Olof’s behalf. With respect to the nuptials of both Groa and Olof, then, Aud is simply carrying out her son’s arrangements for his daughters rather than making any marital plans for them herself.

Coll and Thorgerd do not marry until after they settle in Iceland according to The Book of Settlements; in The Land the Ravens Found, they are already married before its narrative begins. But in both texts, three of Thorstan’s daughters, Osc, Thorhilda and Wigdis, are as yet unmarried when Aud leaves the Faroe Islands for Iceland, and as his thoughts indicate, Scotland’s former conqueror has not contracted any unions for them. With respect to Osc’s marriage, Aud’s authority is indirect and surreptitious: the first summer following her arrival in Iceland, the old woman brings Osc to the annual meeting of The Thing for the purpose of showing her off to potential suitors; when one of these individuals, Hallstan Godi, comes to Aud’s hall seeking Osc’s hand, the matriarch converses with him about matters of property and portion before mentioning that “[t]here have been other suitors’” (Mitchison 162) to her grandson’s astonishment, as “[h]e hadn’t realized that his grandmother had been discussing all this” (Mitchison 162). Indeed, Anlaf Feilan himself consciously acknowledges his grandmother’s authority; having already concluded that “if his grandmother [does] not make too much of [Hallstan’s paganism], neither [will] he” (Mitchison 162), Thorstan’s son insists that Hallstan speak to Aud about his intentions towards Osc. Yet as Anlaf Feilan’s
thoughts reveal, it is not with Aud but with her grandson that Hallstan first discusses his wish to marry Osc and terms on which he is willing to do so. That Hallstan does so reflects his perception that Anlaf Feilan has the right to betroth his sister. And later, when Aud tells Hallstan that others have also sought to marry Osc, Anlaf Feilan takes it upon himself to inform his sister of the man’s visit; she is willing to marry Hallstan, and the gist of her response is that her brother should relay that information to their grandmother. Aud’s allusion to other suitors suggests that she finds Hallstan lacking as a potential husband for Osc. In this light, Anlaf Feilan’s response to his grandmother’s reference to other potential spouses arguably constitutes an act of defiance. Furthermore, Anlaf Feilan’s initiative in telling Osc about Hallstan’s visit, in conjunction with her perception of him, emphasizes the extent to which The Land the Ravens Found lessens the authority that Aud possesses in Landnámabók in that he apparently has not yet reached the age of majority (sixteen) and so technically does not have the right to contract a marriage for Osc. Anlaf Feilan is thirteen when The Land the Ravens Found begins according to its list of characters, and he is still thirteen when Thorstan dies in Scotland, as his realization that his “father [will] never be there to take him out raiding when he [is] fourteen years old” indicates (Mitchison 65). At that point in time, it is spring: “[t]o the north the sea [is] still ruffled with whitecap waves. To the south [are] the greening grass and the scrubby edges of the forest, with the catkins tasselling on the birch” (Mitchison 64). Aud settles in Iceland the following spring; that summer, Osc and Hallstan first glimpse each other at The Thing; and when “the water way [is] scarcely open. . .in [the subsequent] mid-spring” (Mitchison 161), the latter arrives at the matriarch’s Hall in hopes of making Osc his wife.

Thorhilda’s nuptials take place the year after Osc’s wedding, by which time Anlaf Feilan is legally eligible to arrange a marriage for any of his unmarried sisters. Aud’s influence over Thorhilda’s betrothal is therefore all the more conspicuous by virtue of the fact that Anlaf Feilan has no role in contracting it whatsoever—in the midst of a conversation, the old woman casually informs her grandson that she has “‘[had] it fixed for [someone named] Eystan to marry Thorhilda’” (Mitchison 174)—but later that same
season, when an individual by the name of Campa Grim voices his desire to marry Wigdis, both Aud and her grandson give their consent. In sum, five of Aud’s granddaughters marry within the narrative of The Land the Ravens Found, and in contrast to the influence over her granddaughters’ respective marriages that she has in Landnámabók, Aud in the twentieth-century novel is solely responsible for contracting only one of those unions.

V. “After that she set out to seek Iceland, and came ashore at Pumice-links or Lava-links, and was wrecked there”

Landnámabók does not reveal much about Auðr’s actual journey to Iceland from the Faroe Islands—that is, it provides few details concerning her experience aboard her ship beyond stating that Coll is her co-captain and that she wrecks her ship upon arrival. In The Land the Ravens Found, Aud demonstrates her leadership by determining how long she and her fellow travellers remain in the Orkney Islands which connects her to war in that her unwillingness to tarry long there reflects her concern that Earl Sigurd, her late son’s ally and now his family’s adversary, might learn of her whereabouts and track her down. That she sometimes positions herself near “Coll at the steering oar” (Mitchison 107) also serves to remind us of her stature aboard the Safe Farer, and when, seventy-two hours after leaving the Faroe Islands, someone from another vessel sights the Safe Farer and asks, “‘[w]ho are you?,’ ” Aud shouts back “that she [is] Aud Cetil’s daughter” (Mitchison 106), implicitly identifying herself as her ship’s captain.

Yet taken as a whole, the novel’s depiction of Aud’s migration to and arrival in Iceland, like its version of earlier incidents that I have already discussed, undermines her authority and the extent to which she performs as a man in reinforcing her identity with the domestic realm. Hours after Haurd, Steinarr and their followers attempt to hold a sacrifice for the launching of the Safe Farer, Coll “[asks] Aud to let [the men] have another barrel of ale” in order to “drink friendship and a new start before the day’s work [begins]” (92). That Coll seeks Aud’s permission to access more alcohol is, of course, an acknowledgment
on his part of her authority over him. At the same time, this apparently mundane request reinforces Aud’s identification with social convention in that making ale was “a female task throughout the medieval period” (Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* 127)—implicit in her ownership of the beer is her production of it—and the importance of this association lies in the contrast it evokes between her and Coll whose assignment aboard ship is to “take the steering oar” (92) which is to say that he will direct the *Safe Farer* along its course to Iceland. By referring to Coll’s dominion over the ship in light of Aud’s management of her kegs, *The Land the Ravens Found* affirms its initial framing of its protagonist as an individual whose domain is outside the bounds of war, for despite the *Safe Farer’s* associations with civility as a merchant vessel, it is nevertheless emblematic of traditional male power in that ships in general were synonymous with Viking raids beyond Scandinavian borders.

Indeed, the book’s depiction of the moment at which Aud glimpses Iceland in the distance positions her and Coll as equals even as it (simultaneously) defines her awareness in terms of contemporary notions about gender:

As it happened, it was Aud who sighted Iceland first. . . . Coll’s eyes were on the water immediately ahead of him, for he needed to keep *Safe Farer’s* head on to the waves.

The day was clouded over with darker clouds on the horizon. Aud, looking ahead, suddenly knew that one of these low clouds to starboard was more than cloud, was dark mountain. (Mitchison 108)

In providing the rationale behind Coll’s actions, the narrative of *The Land the Ravens Found* suggests how Aud’s role complements his. Yet its language intimates that Aud’s perception of Iceland beyond the clouds is less physical than clairvoyant, a quality that aligns her with the “wise woman” who appears frequently in medieval Scandinavian texts (Jesch 143). And the logistics of landing, which, as it turns out, entails difficulties that culminate in wreckage, reveal a notable contrast between Aud’s involvement in the same and Coll’s and Anlaf’s. To begin with, it is Coll rather than Aud who determines where the *Safe Farer* goes
ashore: when a chance to land presents itself, it is Anlaf and Coll alone who discuss this possibility, with the latter choosing to pass on the opportunity and later justifying that decision in response to his wife’s comment that, on account of the weather, they “‘should have stayed in the bay’” (Mitchison 113) on the basis that the “‘shelter there was not good enough’” and that they would “‘do better to go on before the food gets too low’” given that “‘[i]t will be two days at best before [they] are level with the settlements’” (Mitchison 113). Aud remarks that they “‘must put in and ask’” (Mitchison 115) not long after the Safe Farer comes within view of a recognizable landmark, and Coll’s nodding response that they “‘will look for a good place’” (Mitchison 115) suggests, in light of the fact that “[t]he look-outs [are] staring ahead like hawks” (Mitchison 115), that he is not only in agreement with her but also that he is taking orders from her. Yet Coll’s answer simultaneously implies that he and the look-outs will be the ones to spot that “good place”—without Aud’s input.

Not long after Aud first sees Iceland, the Safe Farer acquires a leak. It is Anlaf Feilan who “[caulks] it” (Mitchison 110), and his initiative sets a precedent that distinguishes his efforts in the midst of crisis, and those of the other men aboard, from those of most of the women to varying degrees before and after their ship collides with “a long underwater ridge running out from a rocky foreland” (Mitchison 117). Vivill gives the alarm when he realizes that the Safe Farer is heading right for the rocks, to which Coll and Anlaf Feilan respond by bearing all of their strength down on the “steering oar” so as to maneuver the ship “towards the center of the firth…” (Mitchison 116); twelve rowers attempt to create resistance against the gravitational force pulling the vessel onto the rocks, while other men hold on to extra “oars and poles” (Mitchison 116).

The Land the Ravens Found depicts that which Osc and Thorberg (whose spouse is Haurd) are doing in light of these activities which both coincides with and deviates from the men’s actions in a way that identifies the women with conventional gender roles. Like the men who are not rowing, Osc and Thorberg are also clutching poles by the starboard in case the rowers should need them. But while the men are literally standing, Osc and Thorberg are kneeling, and the pole that Aud’s granddaughter grips is “the beam of the
loom” (Mitchison 116). That is, Osc’s pole is a component of an apparatus that was integral to weaving which in Iceland was a woman’s job until sometime after 1750 A.D. (Jochens, Women in Old Norse Society 139-140). Counter to the difference between Osc and Thorberg’s actions and those of the men beside them is the fact that both Hauscoll and Anlaf Feilan’s nurse, Muirgheal, scoop up water in buckets and toss it out of the Safe Farer before “[stopping] to pull out one of the men who [has] been knocked on the head by his oar and [is] beginning to drown inside the ship” (Mitchison 117). The vessel then appears to have gotten itself clear of the rocks; and insofar as the moment of contact between the ship and the crags seems to be over, the most notable aspect of this episode is Aud’s lack of involvement with it: in detailing this event, The Land the Ravens Found says nothing about her whatsoever.

As it turns out, a large wave tosses the Safe Farer in such a way that it falls “with a great jarring bang that [tears] and [splinters] two of the side timbers” (Mitchison 117) with the result that eventually, “the timber [breaks] inward and the water [begins] pouring through” (Mitchison 117). Those aboard ship must manage the crisis, and once again, with the exception of the bailing (to which Haurd, his spouse, Osc, the rowers, Muirgheal, some unidentified others and, eventually and temporarily, Anlaf Feilan, contribute), the attempts of Thorgerd and three men to plug up the breaches in the Safe Farer and the collection of “driftwood” (Mitchison 122) by Thorstan’s daughters and Hauscoll, there is, for the most part, a division between the men’s efforts to contain the damage and the women’s. When the Safe Farer begins to flood, Coll and Anlaf Feilan attempt to control the ship’s steering oar: “‘Hold her, Anlaf!’ cried Coll as the steering oar shivered and kicked, for at all costs she must be kept clear of the same thing happening again” (Mitchison 117). Significantly, The Land the Ravens Found juxtaposes this moment with Aud’s response to the current emergency: “[w]ith one movement the priest stripped off his cloak and Aud stripped hers, the men caught them, jammed and wedged them into the holes” (Mitchison 117). As a product of women’s labor that is imbued with societal meaning, Aud’s cloak embodies domesticity even as its current function is to prevent the Safe Farer from filling with water. In addition, it is worth noting that Aud’s efforts to stem
the consequences of the damage that her ship has sustained are indirect, unlike those of her grandson and Coll: it is the latter two, not the matriarch herself, who cram her cloak into the Safe Farer’s gaps.

Indeed, indirectness and/or sensitivity to community defines Aud’s further involvement with the Safe Farer’s arrival in Iceland. Aud, along with Thorgerd, “[clears] the dinghy so that she would be easy to launch,” under the rationale that “[i]f they put the children in, with a couple of good men, they might have more chance” (Mitchison 118); later, she is “on the ship, holding on to the mast, shouting her orders, refusing to leave, however much she [is] battered about, until everything [is] out” (Mitchison 121); and after Osc brings news of inhabitants “only a mile or so away under the lea of the hill” (Mitchison 122), Aud announces that she and the rest of her entourage “‘shall go there’” but “‘in proper fashion, not as shipwrecked beggars’” (Mitchison 122). With respect to each of these instances (the last of which I shall discuss a bit later in this chapter), Aud’s lack of hands-on authority appears to be tantamount to a lack of effectiveness in general. To begin with, it is not clear from the novel’s language that Aud herself, with or without Thorgerd’s help, will be placing the “dinghy” into the sea, and the idea that the children shall be accompanied by “a couple of good men” in this boat implies that the latter will row the minors to safety. That Yrp, having jumped ship to be “knee-deep” (Mitchison 120) in the sea, gets his mother, Muirgheal, to toss Wigdis, Anlaf Feilan’s youngest sister, overboard into his arms whom he then carries out of the sea and deposits on land before returning to the water to catch a second younger, and that later, “the rest of the children [are] lifted out and put on shore” (Mitchison 120), suggest, however, that Aud’s plan for bringing the children ashore is never implemented. Similarly, by the time that Aud is “shouting her orders,” the second crisis is pretty much over, the Safe Farer having been pushed onto land and most of its goods having been deposited on land, and there is no indication prior to this moment, that Aud has taken charge at any time after collision with the “underwater ridge” results in enormous gashes in the sides of her ship.

The connection to civilian norms that underpins Aud’s activities in relation to the Safe Farer’s Icelandic landing also underscores those of the other women aboard the ship, accentuating the general
contrast between their actions and those of their male counterparts. Although, as I have mentioned, Muirgheal, Osc and Thorgerd do participate in attempts to stem the damage that the Safe Farer sustains while they are still aboard it, what the men do by and large precedes that which the women do, and broadly speaking, the work of the men involves significant physical labor and/or maneuvering of the ship itself: Coll’s announcement of his intentions— that he will go “round the rocks and then run for the shore” (Mitchison 118)— implicitly indicates his continuing control over the Safe Farer while Vivill and Anlaf Feilan’s directives in reply reflect the fact that they are serving as look-outs on his behalf. Later, when Coll is able to steer the ship towards Iceland’s shore, it is Anlaf Feilan’s duty to anchor the Safe Farer before the rowers hoist it up on land, after which Cathal and Vivill hurl some rope onto the sand so the rowers can use them to pull the ship further up the shore; not much later, Steinarr and Coll hoist the sheep overboard (who then paddle themselves to dry land). Other men unpack the ship, and I would argue that moving “the chests, the bedding rolls, the meal sacks, the beds, the bundles of furs and woollens, the timbers of the loom and the Hall pillars” (Mitchison 121) from ship to land symbolically emphasizes the topographical division between the realms of civilization and war that the novel establishes in its opening paragraph.

The women pick up where the men leave off in that they “[drag the aforementioned furniture, food, storage containers and components of tools] up above high tide mark and [pile] them in some kind of order” (Mitchison 121), an action that reinforces the physical boundaries between the zones of war and civilian existence by literally moving these markers of societal life further away from the sea and placing them in an arrangement that is unspecified but that likely would make sense within the broader context of medieval Scandinavian culture. Thorgerd and Muirgheal provide treatment to those with cuts and “a few broken bones” (Mitchison 122); that medical practitioners in pre-Christian Scandinavia were primarily women (Foote and Wilson 93) emphasizes the conventionality of the two characters’ actions, as does the subsequent sentence in which the narrator of The Land the Ravens Found comments that “[t]he next thing would be to get pots on to the fire for a hot meal” (Mitchison 122): cooking, like brewing, was a woman’s
task in medieval Scandinavia (Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* 125). Even Osc’s discovery of an inhabited home (which unlike moving goods further ashore and providing first aid is serendipitous) connects her to traditional norms in that she glimpses the dwelling by chance after she goes “inland a little way to take off her wet things and put on [a] dry dress . . .” (Mitchison 122). That the first aid, Osc’s exploration and arrangement of goods neither require as much physical effort as the tasks of the men nor involve direct engagement with the *Safe Farer* underscores the connotatively gendered division between land and sea whereby the former is a feminine domain.

As part of its depiction of Aud’s shipwreck, *The Land the Ravens Found* relates the reception of the newcomers by some already settled inhabitants (which does not happen in *Landnámabók*), and this scene, too, mitigates her authority while affirming her connection to domestic life. When twelve individuals—armed in case the need for self-defense arises—walk in the direction of the shore, Aud identifies these men as “‘neighbours’” (Mitchison 124) yet it is Anlaf Feilan who receives them, apparently describing how he and his fellow travellers happened to come ashore. Not long after, the men walk to where Aud is, before which they “[sheath] their swords . . .” (Mitchison 125). Narratively speaking, putting away their weapons is the men’s logical response to their ascertainment that Anlaf Feilan and his entourage pose no harm and have come to Iceland in peace. Thematically, however, this action reiterates the idea that violence and women are mutually exclusive. More notably, after a conversation between one of the twelve (Eyolf Ugly) who makes it clear that Aud’s reputation has preceded her and the matriarch herself who invites him to “‘[c]ome and drink friendship’” (Mitchison 126), he invites her and her fellow female travellers “to stay the night at his farm” (Mitchison 126), an offer that she happily accepts while stipulating that the men are to guard the *Safe Farer* and the items it ferried to Iceland: Eyolf’s generosity affirms the conventions of a social order in which it was the duty of men to protect the women in their communities while Aud’s instructions reflect the underlying premise of that obligation, namely that in so doing, men were to be ready to defend themselves, their families and their possessions at all times. Indeed, the men’s attempts to patch up the *Safe
Farer a bit the morning after landing identify them with war to the extent that carpentry, of which shipbuilding was a subset, seems to have been a male profession and Norse ships, as I have mentioned previously, were synonymous with conflict as the vehicles in which Vikings travelled to the regions they conquered. And the final details of that which arguably is the conclusion of the shipwreck episode in the novel re-emphasizes Aud’s antipathy to war in light of her commitment to social bonds. Aud borrows rollers from Eyolf which the men use to pull the Safe Farer onto higher ground. In the process, two of these rollers break, and in recompense for his loss, they give him a cup made of crystal with which he is thrilled as he owns few household items in which he is able to “take a real pride” (Mitchison 127) and which gift will remind him, whenever he uses it, of those from whom he received it. Symbolically speaking, the destruction of the rollers and the friendship that the glass embodies are an inversion of the sacrifice that Steinarr and Haurd wanted to perform insofar as it was onto a roller that the intended sacrifice had been tied, chosen as such for her supposed lack of connection to her community as the daughter of a dead mother and an unknown father.

Yet if Eyolf’s rollers retrospectively bring us back to Steinarr and Haurd’s failed sacrifice, they also focus our attention upon how Anlaf Feilan, apart from helping with the steering oar and the bailing, not only influences the landing of the Safe Farer, but does so in a way that again highlights his grandmother’s lack of complete autonomy over her journey to Iceland. Not long after Aud glimpses Iceland in the distance, Haurd complains to Anlaf Feilan that his sister, Thorgerd, might have provoked the gods by commenting that their ship had “‘done well without the sacrifice’” (Mitchison 110) and says that if Thorstan were still alive, “‘he would have made a sacrifice, in spite of all the women!’” (Mitchison 110); when his response to Anlaf Feilan’s reluctant query as to what sort of offering he should provide (“‘There are some in this crew that wouldn’t be missed,’ said Haurd grimly ‘but I am not saying—No, Anlaf Feilan, perhaps They would

181 P.G. Foote and D.M. Wilson’s description of the Norse carpenter assumes that the figure is a man (see pp. 178-81).
content themselves with a sheep’ ” [Mitchison 110]) meets with concern that Aud would object, the older Norseman reminds the young man that he is “ ‘Thorstan the Red’s son’ ” and need “ ‘only to say the word’ ” (Mitchison 110). The crux of Aud’s objection to pagan sacrifice is its ritualistic bloodshed. But the implications of Haurd’s reference to that which Thorstan would have done echo Aud’s conviction in the beginning of The Land the Ravens Found that Anlaf Feilan attends the “Midsummer sacrifice” not to demonstrate faith “ ‘in the old Gods’ ” (Mitchison 13) but rather to avoid giving others the chance to remark that he is “ ‘ruled by women’ ” (Mitchison 13). Thus later when the Safe Farer is flooding and Haurd faults Anlaf Feilan’s failure to sacrifice as the cause of all of the chaos, the response of the latter, which is to toss “the thick gold bracelet on his left arm, his father’s last present to him” (Mitchison 118) into the ocean after pleading for aid, not only foregrounds his role in bringing his grandmother’s ship to shore but also demonstrates the extent to which his authority as Thorstan’s heir overrides that of the late warrior’s mother: right after Anlaf Feilan hurls his armlet into the ocean, the efforts of those bailing suddenly are having an effect, and the Safe Farer moves towards “a beach that [has] opened up ahead, sheltered by the point, a beach of dark grey sand” (Mitchison 119). Indeed, the novel emphasizes Anlaf Feilan’s agency here through his own ambivalence about the role of the Norse deities in the Safe Farer’s landing: “ ‘And if the old Gods were there in the sea and if they wanted a sacrifice—and I am not saying they did, Vivill—they got it right enough, for I threw them my arm ring, the one my father gave me before he said good-bye the last time’ ” (Mitchison 123).

VI. She went to Keel-ness to Helgi Beolan, her brother. . .She then went west to Broad-frith to her brother Beorn”

As in Landnámabók, Aud in the twentieth-century novel goes first to the home of her brother, Helgi Beolan, before his lack of generosity, as she perceives it, prompts her to travel on to the home of their brother Beorn; and as her reason for going to Beornshaven from Keelness obviously indicates, hospitality is
as important to the matriarch in *The Land the Ravens Found* as it is in *The Book of Settlements*. Yet the later work’s narrative of Aud’s visits to her kin speaks less to this theme (which, not surprisingly given the differing intents and structure of, respectively, the medieval “record” and the historical fiction, is inextricable from other subjects in the latter and therefore will be addressed at a later point in this chapter) than to others including the paradigms and binaries that it has already established. Although, as I have argued earlier, *The Land the Ravens Found* repeatedly mitigates and in some cases undermines Aud’s leadership, the protagonist never loses all clout and in fact retains it beyond death from the perspective of other characters. Thus the novel’s framing of Aud’s visit to Helgi Beolan and its logistics as her choice alone deepens the complexity of her status in it:

The next day Aud decided to go and see her brother Helgi Beolan and make arrangements for the winter. She would take Anlaf and Osc and half the men who were well enough to move, leaving Coll with Thorgerd and the rest to see to things on the beach. The sprains and broken bones could stay behind too. Those who were left would need to build a rock and turf shelter for *Safe Farer*, using the oars as rafters. Osc and Anlaf could take turns to ride Anlaf’s horse. Coll had better keep his in case he needed to get in touch with her quickly. (Mitchison 127)

*The Land the Ravens Found* also distinguishes between the boundaries of war and those of civilization over and over while identifying Aud with the latter, thereby defining her in terms of conventional gender roles, and it is worth noting that one of her own directives inherently accentuates her association with land by undermining her connection to the sea while demonstrating her power. Aud’s instructions for erecting a structure in which to store the *Safe Farer* mandate “using the oars as rafters.” Although deploying nautical equipment—gear that by virtue of its affiliation with ships identifies with the ocean and thus with the military realm—as the foundations of a roof may arguably seem to blur the distinction between earth and water, the functioning of the “oars as rafters” precludes them from serving in their original capacity while
positing them as essential joists for the covering of an edifice that by its very nature as a structure that would collapse without foundational support can exist only on land and that has a specific, socially constructed purpose. Furthermore, because the mobility of Viking ships across water depended mainly upon the prowess of its rowers, making rafters out of the Safe Farer's paddles effectively puts the vessel out of commission and signifies Aud's intention of never crossing the sea again.

Indeed, these themes alternatively inform Aud's respective visits with her two brothers. On her way to Helgi Beolan's, Aud recalls the last time she had seen him, almost a decade earlier: "[s]he remembered he had been very friendly with Thorstan, encouraging him in all his raiding and fighting; he had watched Anlaf on the floor, wrestling with a puppy, and said he was a likely boy; he had taken no notice of the girls" (Mitchison 127). That Aud's recollections of Helgi Beolan involve not only him but his interactions (or lack thereof) with her only son and his offspring obviously is indicative of the interest she takes in her family members and their respective relationships with one another. More broadly, such concern reflects the extent to which the values of Norse society inform Aud's own in that, as my previous chapter makes clear, genealogy, and therefore familial bonds, were of immense importance to medieval Scandinavians. 182 At the same time, the contrast between Helgi Beolan's dismissal of Thorstan's daughters and the keenness of his attention to Thorstan's son accentuates the identification of war with men and not with women in that the juxtaposition of Aud's memories of Helgi Beolan's treatment of her son and his attitude towards her grandson implies that the promise her brother perceives in the latter is of a piece with whatever quality underlies Thorstan's instinct for "raiding and fighting."

182 "Genealogical material appears to have been fundamental to the formulation of the earliest vernacular writing produced in Iceland, and there are clear indications that oral genealogical traditions were the source for much of this material...a number of sources point to the importance of a knowledge of lines of descent in pre- and post-literate Icelandic culture" (Quinn 46).
Aud’s assessment of Helgi Beolan’s estate also identifies her with land, and her observations, like her instructions to implement the Safe Farer’s paddles as rafters, initially appear to meld some binarily opposite distinctions:

His Hall was on the sheltered side of Keelness, a goodish bit of land, Aud thought, looking it over, though maybe overstocked for the time of year. The harvest was all in, but from the size of the stacks it did not look as though there had been much hay. She kept noticing all the time the small differences in farming practice and the way everything had to be even better secured against weather than in Caithness. The stones they used on the haystacks were bigger, and there was never a turf roof that was not fastened down.

They had passed through some scrub and gnarled, wind-twisted birches, but clearly timber would be difficult—that was just what she had heard—and maybe firewood too. There did not seem to be much in the way of game but the seabirds came far inland. Sometimes the ground had looked very barren and there had been a kind of ash about, but once they had passed Helgi’s boundary marks it was not so bad. But different from Scotland, and oh far, far different from Ireland, away back, years ago, in the days when she and King Anlaf the White had ridden together out of Dublin over the fair land. (Mitchison 127-29)

On the one hand, Aud’s perceptions identify her with conventional Norse masculinity in that her perceptions indicate a detailed knowledge of practices and duties for which Norse men were responsible such as “cutting brush and wood” and “bringing back grain and hay, slaughtered animals, fish and eggs. . . .” (Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* 120). On the other hand, Aud’s awareness of how climate and topography affect the performance of these chores reflects the knowledge of many Norse women who in the absence of their spouses when the latter were raiding abroad were responsible for overseeing and/or taking on their husband’s work in addition to their own (Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* 121). And
perhaps more to the point, Aud’s evaluation of Helgi Beolan’s property, which does not critique it in and of itself but rather compares it to Scotland and Ireland, is inextricable from her recollection of being in the company of her husband while roaming the Irish countryside. In short, what begins as an appraisal that aligns her with traditional male roles in Norse society concludes as a personal memory that underscores her connection not only to family but also to the values of the broader Germanic culture to which she belongs.

Indeed, Aud spends much of her brief visit with Helgi Beolan in a conversation with him about their cousin, Aurlyg which further connects her to domesticity insofar as this exchange is indicative of her interest in her extended family. Yet the importance of this exchange lies not so much in its subject but rather in the fact that it adds another layer, so to speak, to the ambiguity of her authority as it manifests itself throughout the novel. Helgi Beolan, as Aud recollects before arriving in Keelness, had taken a particular interest in Anlaf Feilan when he had last seen the boy almost decade ago. When, however, Aud, Anlaf Feilan (and Osc) arrive at Helgi Beolan’s Icelandic estate, the latter notes only that his sister’s grandson “‘has changed’” (Mitchison 129) after confirming the young man’s identity (who himself thinks that “his uncle [is] looking at him as though he [were] something which had been thrown up in a storm” [Mitchison 129]) and focuses his attention upon his own sister (i.e. Aud). Helgi Beolan never converses with his great-nephew, let alone discusses with him the terms upon which he is willing to host Aud and the rest of her entourage: it is Aud who broaches the subject of whether she might stay with Helgi Beolan throughout the coming winter, and it is she alone who, having failed in her attempt to negotiate the conditions of that visit in her favor, makes the decision to spurn the offer he extends and therefore to travel on to Beornshaven, the home of their brother Beorn.

In keeping with Landnámabók, Beorn hosts Aud and everyone who accompanied her to Iceland on the Safe Farer during their first cold season on that island; and this visit starts out like the stay at Helgi Beolan’s in that Aud continues to make decisions on behalf of herself and her fellow travelers, and it is with her, not with Anlaf Feilan, that their host converses: in fact, Anlaf returns to the shore as requested by his
grandmother for the purpose of leading to Beornshaven those who had remained there while Aud went to Helgi Beolan’s; and he, briefly, is the subject of conversation between her and Beorn.

Yet once again, with implications that are identical to those of turning paddles into rafters, in a demonstration of her authority, Aud strengthens her identification with domesticity and thus with land by weakening her ties to the sea: “[d]ecent wood of any kind was scarce, and so Aud sent back to tell Coll to bring along all the rowing benches for extra seats. She promised to give Beorn two or three good planks from the decking and he was pleased” (Mitchison 132). And for the rest of Aud’s stay at Beorn’s, her leadership is, broadly speaking, paradoxically inextricable from its mitigation as implied by the initiative taken by her grandson and by some of her other men. When Anlaf Feilan goes to collect those who are still on the beach—which, as I have said, he does as directed by Aud—he assesses Beorn’s property in much the same way that his grandmother earlier surveys Helgi Beolan’s: with the purposeful scrutiny of an imminent land taker. Likewise, some of Aud’s men, after setting out to achieve “some idea of what land had been settled already” (Mitchison 135) and to survey the quality of that which has yet to be claimed, return to Beorn’s estate with “good advice for Aud and Anlaf” [my italics] (Mitchison 135). Aud’s immediate response to these suggestions, however, is to “[advise] them not to make up their minds till spring” and to assert that “[s]he herself [is] not going to stir till then” (Mitchison 135); and the fact that the novel makes no reference to anyone claiming land before spring, in addition to its comment that Aud’s men “all knew that the first thing would be to get [her] land into order and build her a Hall and steading” (Mitchison 135)—in other words, that their obligations to the matriarch take precedent over their own aspirations—suggests that her “advice” is not actually advice but a temporary moratorium. As such, then, Aud’s “counsel” is evidence of her enduring authority.

And once again, The Land the Ravens Found links the contradictory extent of Aud’s influence to her antipathy towards violence. When Anlaf goes back to the shore, those who never left the beach after arriving in Iceland “[l]oad the pack ponies with the smaller things—Aud had told Anlaf to get the cords off
and pack some of the chests for easier loading, but if he broke any of the glass or filagree work or ivory she would take her stick to him!” 183 (Mitchison 134). As the dash between “things” and “Aud” indicates, it is in accordance with Aud’s orders, as Anlaf Feilan has conveyed them, that the aforementioned newcomers weigh down the animals with lighter items. To the extent that Anlaf Feilan issues commands on his grandmother’s behalf, his authority in this particular context is equal to hers. In light of this status, then, and in light of both others’ perception of him as Thorstan’s successor and the fact that Aud’s chosen punishment for her grandson’s earlier, deliberate transgression of attending the “Midsummer sacrifice” was to make him “‘grind among the thralls and bond-women until [his] pride [was] gone’ ” (Mitchison 14), let alone her rejection of violence in other circumstances, her threat of corporal punishment for that which would obviously be an unintended error comes across both to readers and to Anlaf Feilan himself as an ironic joke to whose humor the exclamation point at its end draws our attention.

And in fact, some of the items themselves that the horses carry to Beorn’s at Aud’s behest reinforce her connection to domesticity while undermining her association with war. A fortnight after Aud and her fellow travellers arrive in Iceland, some of those living in the same part of the island as Beorn arrive at his estate accompanied by livestock and agricultural equipment with the intention of exchanging these animals and implements for some of the items that have accompanied his guests from Scotland, which include metalwork, “linen cloth, fine woollen goods from England, enamel brooches or buckles, spices or fruit. . .finer furs. . .” (Mitchison 136) and some Italian silk scarves. As the novel contextualizes them, the “furs” and “[dried] fruit” are Scottish products, 184 while the “linen,” “spices” and, obviously, the “woollen goods” and “Italian silk scarves” 185 are items that Aud or her family members acquired from tradesmen who arrived

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183 The narrative refers here to the less cumbersome of the objects that have been removed from the Safe Farer and stacked on the sand.
184 See Mitchison pp. 45, 52, 73 and 75.
185 See Mitchison pp. 63, 74 and 97.
in Caithness from overseas, as indeed may be some of the metalwork, “brooches [and] buckles.” 186 Given the prevalent use of enamel by Irish artisans into the ninth century (Edwards 287), however, as well as the novel’s own framing of certain pieces of jewelry as plunder, 187 the trading of works crafted of metal or enamel—which arguably have embodied Anlaf the White’s conquest of Ireland and/or his son’s raiding prowess in Scotland and elsewhere—transforms them into objects of legitimate exchange that is sanctioned not by war but by neighborly goodwill.

VII. “Afterwards in the spring, Aud and her company went into Broad-frith to explore the land”

In The Book of Settlements, Auðr sets out from Beornhaven at winter’s end in search of desirable, unclaimed land. This journey encompasses two, seemingly mundane events from which the locations in which they respectively occur subsequently derive their geographical identities. Both incidents—the partaking of a meal and the loss of Auðr’s comb—further cement the text’s identification of her with war: to begin with, Landnámabók aligns her with some prominent landnásmenn who are explicit or symbolic agents of conflict by virtue of the fact that the naming of places for that which has happened in them is an important feature in their settlement narratives; but also, the implications of Auðr’s lost comb create a parallel between her and warriors who have not yet achieved victory in battle that contextualizes her subsequent land taking as a metaphorical conquest, a framing that the Norse formulaic of “[X] nam [Y]” (“settler X takes land Y”) 188 affirms in that the infinitive of the third person preterit singular of the verb nam, nema, means “to take by force, seize upon” (Cleasby, Vigfusson and Craigie 452). “[Taking] by force”

186 See Mitchison p. 74.
187 See Mitchison pp. 20-22 and 123.
188 The wording that specifically applies to Auðr’s landnám in Hauksbók is “Auðr nam aoll Dala-laond. . .” (Hauksbók II. xiv. viii/ “Aud took in settlement all the Dale-lands. . .” [trans. Vigfusson and Powell 78-79]).
and “[seizing]” are fundamental to war, the skirmishes of which were the sole domain of men during the late eighth- and early ninth centuries in medieval Scandinavia. In The Land the Ravens Found, Aud’s land claim also takes place during the first spring she spends in Iceland, the details of which initially expand upon, but do not subvert, Landnámabók’s first reference to Auðr’s landnám,189 as follows:

The winter came to an end at last and the young grass began to show green in the low-lying land. . . . Aud decided to go and take up her new lands.

She and Coll and Anlaf had their own horses, but she had borrowed others from Beorn for some of the men. . . . They started in the early dawn of a clear morning, riding off through Beorn’s lands and beyond. . . . By mid-morning they were past any land which had been claimed, riding up a narrow marshy glen under birch and alder.

(Mitchison 145-46)

Yet Aud’s landnám as The Land the Ravens Found depicts it ultimately undercuts Landnámabók’s identification of her with conflict. For one thing, the only settlement that The Land the Ravens Found depicts is Aud’s, thereby stripping it of the comparative framing that the other settlement narratives in The Book of Settlements provide. For another, the novel continues to portray its heroine as a figure whose authority is inconsistently unilateral. Although it is Aud herself who, in keeping with her stated intentions, determines the timing of her settlement, the fact that “the men [take] it in turns to go ahead and find the best way” (Mitchison 146) because of the dangers posed by dead, fallen trees, snowdrifts and the absence of any sort of path is indicative of the extent to which she cedes control of the situation to others, and it is worth noting that Gudbrand Vigfusson and F. York Powell’s reference to Auðr’s entourage190 in their translation of Hauksbók, which Mitchison used as the foundation for The Land the Ravens Found, renders explicit that which is implicit

189 “Afterwards in the spring, Aud and her company went into Broadfirth to explore the land” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 78/ “Efter um váret fóro þau Auðr í Breiða-fjørð inn í landaleítan. . . .” [Hauksbók II. xiv. vii]).
190 See Note 189.
in Haukr Erlendsson’s manuscript. That is, Auðr is the only explicit, grammatical subject who “[goes] into Broadfrith” according to Hauksbók, which by default posits her as an autonomous settler.

VIII. “They took their day meal at a place north [so S, but MS. South] of Broad-frith, which is now called Day-meal-ness”

As in Landnámabók, Aud’s search for a suitable land claim in The Land the Ravens Found encompasses a stop within range of Broadfrith, where she and everyone else with her partake of a meal, \(^{191}\) and as with its depiction of Aud’s expedition into Iceland’s terrain, the novel fleshes out the details of this journey:

Higher up, the glen spread out a bit and looked like usable land. Aud decided she would take it as her boundary. There were slopes that could be cleared of boulders; a ditch would take the water out of that swamp. “Here I could have my barley,” she said, “and there we could cut for meadow hay.” They climbed again, out on to the stony plateau, spreading away towards the mountains. There was another glen but too narrow to be any good, then a headland. Aud suddenly felt hungry. “Let us stop here,” she said, “and take our dinner.” For they had brought food with them, smoked meat and oatcakes and cheese. They sat on the rocks, eating and looking round; they were high above a sea-loch that came in from Broad Firth; it would be sheltered from most winds. The water lay below them, bright and rippling in the sun, and beyond them one ness after another that never a man nor woman had set foot on. “This must be Dinner Ness,” said Anlaf, chucking a stone over the cliff. And that was what they went on calling it. (Mitchison 146–47)

\(^{191}\) “They took their meal at a place north [so S, but MS. south] of Broad-frith, which is now called Day-meal-ness” (trans Vigfusson and Powell 78/ “ . . .þau aoto daogorð fyr sunnan Breiða-fiaorð þar sem nú heiter Daogorðar-nes. Síðan fóro þau inn um Eyja-sund. Þau lendo við nes þat es Auðr tapaðe kambe sinom—þat kallaðe hon Kambs-nes” [Hauksbók II. xiv. vii]).
Yet unlike its description of Aud’s early morning departure from Beorn’s, the 1955 work’s expansion upon Hauksbók’s portrayal of her repast deviates from the medieval narrative in subtle ways. One of these changes arguably has no bearing on the argument I am putting forth here. But the others subvert the implications of the Norse narrative by anchoring the instability of Aud’s leadership in its identification of her with the domestic realm. In Landnámabók, the moment of Auðr’s actual land taking occurs in its entirety after she has both eaten within proximity to Broad Firth and missed her comb; in The Land the Ravens Found, Aud, as the passage quoted above indicates, begins to define the perimeters of her landnam before she sits down to food; and the significance of this change lies in the way that it frames her consequent thoughts, which concern her intentions for the land she has chosen to claim thus far, and connects those musings to her meal. As Aud’s initial assessment of the “glen” as “usable land” implies, settlement is the act of claiming land upon which no other human has ever previously lived. That undertaking, as her proposed changes to the landscape suggest, defines the process of landnam as one of domestication, thereby reinforcing the distinction between land, the literal foundation of civilized existence, and sea, the “wild” and untameable realm of war, that The Land the Ravens Found establishes in its first paragraph.

Indeed, Aud’s allotments of certain areas for the production of barley and hay confirm the nature of this transformation while re-emphasizing her identity as a woman and therefore with the domestic realm in that her comments reveal a level of experience with and expertise in agricultural practices that, as I

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192 The term “daogorð” (standardized as “dag-verðr” or “dögurðr”) that Landnámabók uses to denote Auðr’s repast refers to “the chief meal of the old Scandinavians” (Cleasby, Vigfusson and Craigie 95) which chronologically correlated to our “mod. Engl. breakfast” (Cleasby, Vigfusson and Craigie 95). Although the novel’s deployment of the word “dinner” to define this partaking of food may reflect the fact that in content, “daogorð” more closely resembled our notion of that which we might typically find on our plates at “the chief meal of the day, [which was] eaten originally, and still [is] by the majority of people, about the middle of the day (cf. German Mittagessen), but now, by the professional and fashionable classes, [is eaten] usually in the evening. . .” (“Dinner,” def. a), its (the book’s) previous allusion to the “mid-morning” and to Aud’s activities at that time suggests that it turns her “daogorð” into that which we conventionally think of as lunch.
mentioned previously, was typical of many Norse women who supervised all labor relating to the upkeep of their farms, including jobs that men usually performed, while their spouses were raiding overseas (Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* 121). And it is Aud’s assertion of her need for sustenance, in conjunction with the novel’s description of the foods she eats, that reveals the extent to which settlement is a culminating process that posits its agent (i.e. the land taker herself) as the embodiment of culture, nature’s antithesis. If the first step towards settlement, after delineating its borders, is to manipulate the topography of one’s chosen land, the next step is to turn that soil into the foundation of one’s continued (and implicitly sedentary, as opposed to migratory) existence by transforming it into a comparatively consistent source of raw materials 191—in this case, grains and horse fodder—upon which society may establish itself. The physiological nature of Aud’s hunger notwithstanding, her repast metaphorically represents the end of the settlement process insofar as it respectively takes the forms of social ritual (“dinner”) and processed food (“smoked meat and oatcakes and cheese”).

*Landnámabók* mentions only that Auðr and those with her “[take] their meal at a place north [so S, but MS. south] of Broad-frith. . .” (trans Vigfusson and Powell 78). 194 In *The Land the Ravens Found*, however, it is Aud herself who, motivated by her own hunger, proposes taking the time to eat “dinner”; the proximity of her suggestion to the narrative’s description of her and her entourage “[sitting] on the rocks,” chewing their food and gazing at their surroundings, which are separated only by the book’s explanatory

191 The dependency of late ninth- and early tenth century agriculture upon—and its vulnerability to—the instability of local weather patterns and climatic changes meant that crop productivity may not have always met expectations. That said, the institution of agricultural practices in previously uncultivated Iceland likely had the same effect that it had when humans first deployed these methodologies, which according to Olena V. Smyntyna occurred over eleven thousand years ago (“Agriculture, Origins of,” 39): “The origins of plant cultivation and cattle breeding helped to secure the food procurement system and contributed greatly to the creation of a rather settled mode of life. It was grounded on a relatively stable quantity of product, which could be obtained during a long period of time from the same territory using different sources or/and different ways of their exploitation, combining traits of hunter-gatherers with a productive economy” (Smyntyna, “Agricultural Revolution” 34).
194 See Note 191.
reference to the source and content of that meal, implies that her words do not recommend so much as they compel, and the importance of this distinction lies in the fact that, once again, Aud exercises her authority within a context that associates her with domesticity. At the same time, Aud’s imperative takes on deeper significance in light of the other, seemingly minor revision of The Book of Settlements that the novel’s rendering of this scene encompasses. As in Landnámabók, the location of Aud’s “dinner” in The Land the Ravens Found acquires its name from that event. The medieval narrative credits no particular individual with the idea of naming the site of Auðr’s meal after that experience. In the twentieth-century work, however, it is Anlaf Feilan who gives Dinner Ness its name which, given his grandmother’s recent demonstration of authority emphasizes yet again the extent to which that power is not absolute.

IX. “Afterwards they went inland through the island channels, and landed at the ness, where also Aud lost her comb, and this ness she called Comb-ness”

Aud resumes her expedition at the conclusion of her meal which Landnámabók depicts as follows:

“[a]fterwards they went inland through the island channels, and landed at the ness, where also Aud lost her comb, and this ness she called Comb-ness” (trans Vigfusson and Powell 78). I have already discussed the implications of this sentence with respect to the subjects of gender and war in the previous chapter (which I summarized earlier in this present chapter), although it is worth pointing out that Auðr herself gives Comb-ness its name, a detail that remains unchanged in the 1955 book. In any case, The Land the Ravens Found not surprisingly expands upon The Book of Settlements’ portrayal of this episode which tersely describes the topographical features of the area that Auðr explores, explicitly relating her actions and those of her entourage while barely hinting at her mindset:

195 Ibid.
196 “Síðan fóro þau inn um Eyja-sund. Þau lendo við nes þat es Auðr tapaðe kambe sinom—þat kallaðe hon Kambs-nes” (Hauksbók II. xiv. vii).
After dinner they went on and now Aud kept her eyes open for the best place to build her Hall, somewhere flat and fairly sheltered. The inland plateau was flat enough but the winter winds would skin it like a knife. And she must have a hot spring somewhere near for a bathhouse! (Mitchison 147)

The passage above corresponds to Auðr’s movement “inland,” detailing the qualities of the land that she encounters from her perspective, and that view substantiates the novel’s association of her with domesticity in opposition to war. To begin with, Aud specifies that her settlement be the “best place to build her Hall.” Fittingly, given the implications of her “dinner” as I have discussed them, land taking is tantamount to erecting a domestic space according to Aud, and indeed, her conviction that the “best place to build her Hall” in Iceland is “somewhere flat and fairly sheltered,” in conjunction with her rejection of the “inland plateau” as that site because the “winter winds would skin it like a knife,” reinforces her conception of her Hall as a space of non-violence. On the surface, Aud’s specifications obviously reflect pragmatic concerns: in order to endure, her Hall should be in a location that will protect it from the effects of Iceland’s climatic elements. But the novel’s diction also implies that the Hall should be devoid of all connotations of violence, even those that are domestic in nature. Although killing animals for food was the duty of men (Jochens 120; 129), women had responsibility for “processing and converting the results of male work for short-term consumption and long-term preservation” (Jochens 120). And in fact, Aud’s further stipulation that she “have a hot spring somewhere near for a bathhouse” reinforces not only her distance from war but also her connection to specifically female roles within medieval Icelandic society. First, the “bathhouse” was the one place where men disarmed themselves (Jochens 124). But second, women did all of the laundry, a chore they routinely combined with taking a bath during their own trips to the “[h]ot springs” (Jochens 123).

Just as The Land the Ravens Found imparts psychological complexity to its depiction of Aud’s search for land, it also imbues that experience with causal connection. Landnámabók provides no particular reason...
as to how or why Áudr “loses her comb”; the 1955 fiction implies that its loss is owing to the fact that it is “difficult going especially when they [come] to places where there [are] great rocks scattered,” as follows:

It was a beautiful gold and ivory comb that held her hair together at the back; when they halted and got their breath after a scramble it was gone. Aud was really upset and sent back all the men to look for it, but try as they might it was nowhere to be seen. However by the time they had all hunted and finally given it up, she had decided there were more things to worry about than that; they must go on, but this headland where she was sitting waiting for them would be Combness. (Mitchison 147-148)

In both Landnámabók and The Land the Ravens Found, Aud sails from Caithness for Iceland (by way of the Orkney Islands) in the company of her grandchildren, among others, after Scotland’s conqueror—her son, Thor-stan—dies in conflict. Thus although navigating Iceland’s terrain is problematic for Aud as well as for those accompanying her, her comparative lack of youth superficially explains her need to have those in her entourage search for her comb. Yet at the same time, this necessity emphasizes her comparative inability to maneuver through Iceland relative to that of her men, and the importance of this difference lies in its affirmation of the division between the domains of war and civilian life that the opening paragraph of The Land the Ravens Found establishes. As I have pointed out, the beginning of The Land the Ravens Found describes “a wild sea, even in the middle of summer, choppy waves running every way at once, clear sign to seamen of violent currents, treacherous and difficult” (Mitchison 11). The novel’s deployment of the adjective “difficult” to describe both the sea and Aud’s search for land therefore links the latter event to war but then undermines that connection in relating her comparative lack of capacity to deal with Iceland’s terrain, thereby subverting Landnámabók’s identification of her land-taking with conflict.

Indeed, the composition of Aud’s comb, and the trajectory of her response to its loss, affirm her anti-war mentality. Aud’s comb consists of “gold and ivory” which is to say that it is made of ivory and decorated with gold. Before and during the Settlement Period, Vikings perceived Ireland, which unlike
medieval Scandinavia produced combs made of ivory (Edwards 281), as a (plunderable) source of both gold and silver (Wallace 836). Given that both Landnámabók and The Land the Ravens Found contextualize Aud’s husband, Anlaf, as Dublin’s conquerer and ruler (although when the novel begins, he is long since dead), the matriarch’s possession of her comb makes her complicit not only in war but in territorial oppression. On a narrative level, Aud’s reaction to losing one of her cherished personal possessions is perhaps recognizably human: first, she reacts to her loss with sadness. Then, she attempts to recover what she has lost. Finally, coming to terms with its irretrievability, she moves on literally and mentally. Symbolically, however, Aud’s response to the loss of her comb represents her relinquishment of what for lack of a better term I will call “imperial authority.”

It is no coincidence, then, that The Land the Ravens Found concludes its version of this episode by reaffirming Aud’s aversion to conflict through her conformity to conventional gender roles. When Aud’s grandson comments that the loss of her comb may be interpreted as “‘a sacrifice for the new land’” (Mitchison 148), his grandmother “[tells] him to mind his own business” (148) while “twisting her hair which was very long still, for all it was grey, round a stick, and [pulls] the hood of her cloak well over it. . .” (Mitchison 148). While women who had yet to be married did not pin their hair back or up, those who had married customarily wrapped it into a bun with a veil over it (Foote and Wilson 174). Thus, Aud’s insistence upon maintaining this propriety even in the absence of her comb constitutes her commitment to civilizing norms. But Aud’s response to the remarks of her young grandson constitutes a rebuke to his continuing support of the paganism that defines itself through its violence, which is specifically that of aggressive warfare. While expressing his thoughts aloud, Aud’s grandson is “thinking of his arm ring” (Mitchison 148) which he had earlier thrown into the sea as a sacrifice so that his grandmother’s ship might land safely in Iceland at the very moment when it was apparently about to be wrecked. That “arm ring,” which had been “his father’s last present to him” (Mitchison 118), is a “thick gold bracelet” (Mitchison 118). As such, it is an object of plunder and therefore an emblem of viking aggression.
X. “Aud took in settlement all the Dale-lands. . .”

The actual moment of Auðr’s land taking is the next event that The Book of Settlements relates after providing its account of her travels “inland through the island channels” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 78) where her comb goes missing. Hauksbók’s deployment of the third person preterit singular form of the verb nema implicitly and figuratively defines this seemingly prosaic event as a military victory, a metaphor that, I would argue, the medieval manuscript’s depiction of Auðr’s land claim itself emphasizes insofar as it defines that settlement solely in terms of its geographical boundaries and posits her within those limits. That Aud has already defined the valley below the cliff on which she eats as “her boundary” (Mitchison 146) notwithstanding, The Land the Ravens Found, like Landnámabók, relates her landnám as the follow-up to her experience in Combness:

They camped that night and went on the next day along the sides of the great sea loch that was called Hwamm Fjord. Aud made up her mind what land she would take. She did not want more than she could look after, but only part of any holding could be cultivated. . . . In the end she made a biggish claim because she wanted to have plenty of land to give away to her shipmates. It would be better, having regard to the rest of the settlers, if she should be the one to make the claim and uphold it before the Thing, the Parliament, when it met, so that everything should be within the law. (Mitchison 148)

As Zoe Borovsky points out, “Eyrbyggja saga states that women lost their rights as plaintiffs after a legal disaster circa 992 (1935:103-104)” (12). Assuming that this assertion is true, Aud’s intention of establishing the legitimacy of her land claim by declaring it at court has no bearing on her identification with traditional Norse roles of either gender, although it is worth pointing out that Iceland’s first law code, Grágás (“Grey

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197 [Síðan fóro þau] inn um Eyja-sund” (Hauksbók II. xiv. vii).
Goose” [1117-18]), more or less prohibited women from participating in the Þing and doubtless reflects long-standing social and legal conventions that predate its own existence in written form. Nevertheless, as I argued in the previous chapter, Aud’s intention of gifting land to others does in fact identify her with war insofar as the lack of expected reciprocation that is inherent in such beneficence establishes a parallel between her and the Scandinavian monarchs depicted in skaldic poetry whose presents of “gold, weapons and other valuables” (Gurevich 182) inspired enduring loyalty in the form of military service on the part of their recipients.

And yet Aud’s settlement, as The Land the Ravens Found depicts it, substantiates, rather than undermines, her status as a woman overall. For one thing, Aud’s justification for “[making] a biggish claim” indicates that she has both a sense of camaraderie and respect for the rules of the community that she has joined, two qualities that distinguish her as a civilized individual and thus associate her with society. But for another, Aud’s landnám in The Land the Ravens Found is precisely that which it is not in Landnámabók. As I explained in the previous chapter, Hauksbók’s description of the settlement of another landnámskona, Thorgerd, illustrates by way of contrast how Auðr claims land in that text not as a woman but rather as a man:

[. . . .] it was held law, that a woman should not take in settlement more land than a quhae or heifer of two years old could go round on a spring day from sunrise to sunset, a half-

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198 "The most important public event in medieval Iceland was the annual meeting of the Althing. The Althing was the center of the social space where Icelandic law obtained (Hastrup 1985: 144). . . . The performance roles at the Althing—lawspeakers, chieftains, judges, plaintiffs, and witnesses—were filled by males. . . . A woman could attend the Althing as a member of the general public, but she would have had to ‘sit on the outside of the benches’ (Grágás 1980: 189) . . . .

“However, the Icelandic law codes were inconsistent with regard to the kinds of cases women could plead, which suggests a legal loophole. A widow or an unmarried girl of 20 could take charge of her own lawsuit if it was about an assault or a minor wound (Grágás 1980: 158). One version of Grágás, “Konungsbiók,” states that a woman in a similar position (widowed or beyond the age of 20) could prosecute a killing case (Grágás 1980: 157), but another version, “Staðarhólsbók,” contradicts this and stipulates that in no instance could a woman be a plaintiff (Finsen 1974:335)” (Borovsky 12). It should be noted that the exceptions to the rule that Borovsky describes obviously do not apply to Aud as her reason to appear before the Þing has nothing to do with seeking compensation for physical harm.
stalled neat, and well kept. Wherefore Thor-gerd led her heifer under Toft-fell a short way from Fold-River in the south, and into Kid-point, hard by Iockle’s-fell on the west.

3. Then Thor-gerd took in settlement land over all Ing-wolf’s-head-wharf, between Fold-river and Iockle-river, and dwelt at Sand-fell. (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 191)

As Thor-gerd’s actions imply, a woman may legally claim as much land as she can encircle with a two-year-old heifer in tow between daybreak and dusk which in the spring constitutes an approximately twelve-hour span. That measure arguably defines Aud’s landnám in The Land the Ravens Found which, aside from the land that she claims temporarily for the purpose of giving it away, seems to fulfill her initial desire to claim no more land than she can manage. In the 1955 novel, the dimensions of Aud’s landnám coincide with the terms by which a landnámskona may take land.

In any case, what ensues after Aud determines the perimeter of her settlement further cements her connection to the domestic realm while reinforcing her separation from the bounds of war. I have already discussed the way in which the process of settlement is essentially that of domestication whereby the taming of nature, so to speak, distinguishes land from the unruly zone of war (i.e. the sea), and the construction and landscaping that take place once Aud makes her land claim embodies this transformation. Beyond the “clearing, draining and ploughing [of] the ground” (Mitchison 148-49), Aud turns or incorporates natural resources into manmade structures: boulders on her property form the walls of her “new Hall” (Mitchison 148), a couple of which “[stick] right through into the Hall itself so that they [can] be used for sitting on” (Mitchison 149), while “fair-sized trees in the glens” become “beams and rafters, with smaller branches tied across as sarking under the thatch” (Mitchison 149); “[f]our walls” turn a “hot spring about half a mile

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199 “2. En þat vas mælt, at kona skyldde eige viðara nema land an leiða mætte kvígo tvæ-vetra vár-langan dag sól-setra miðle, half stalit naut ok haft vel. Þvi leide Þörgerðr kvígo sína undan Tofta-felle skammt frá Kvi-ao suðr, ok í Kiðjá-leit hiá laokuls-felle fyr vestan.

“3. Þörgerðr nam þar land um allt Ingolf- (haofða)-hverfe, á miðle Kvi-ár ok laokuls-ár; ok bió at Sand-felle” (Hauksbók IV. xv. ii-iii).
inland” into a “bath-house” (Mitchison 149). In addition, the construction of Aud’s Hall demonstrates the mitigation of her complete authority over her settlement while diminishing her association with the sea in that she and Coll “[decide] to use all that [is] left of Safe Farer’s deck planking for panels and furniture” (Mitchison 149). Like Aud’s meal in Dinner Ness, some of the final details pertaining to the disposition of her Hall symbolize its conclusion: “the new Hall hangings” and “shelves for the most precious things” (Mitchison 150) are objects of social, and therefore, cultural, significance that make a home out of that which otherwise would be merely shelter. But “the looms [that are] put together” at which “the girls [start] weaving” (Mitchison 150) define the Hall as a specifically feminine space and inspire in Aud a thought that illustrates her identification with and perpetuation of convention gender roles: “it was time for [her granddaughters] Thorhilda and Wigdis to start becoming housewives” (Mitchison 150).

XI. “She had her prayer-place or oratory at Cross-hillocks. There she had crosses set up, for she was baptized and of the true faith”

After specifying the location of Auðr’s residence, Landnámabók states that “[s]he had her prayer-place or oratory at Cross-hillocks” and that “[t]here she had crosses set up, for she was baptized and of the true faith” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 79). The twentieth-century work follows The Book of Settlements insofar as the labors of “the priest and two of the Scots” (Mitchison 150) in hewing one of the crosses and then rooting it and two other, shorter crosses of wood in “a hillock which could be seen from the fjord below” (Mitchison 150) reflect the implications of the statement that “at Cross-hillocks” Auðr “had crosses set up”—namely, that others plant the crosses atop a knoll at her command.

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200 “She dwelt at Hvam, on the Trout-water-oyce, at a place called Aud’s-tofts” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 78-79/ “Hon bió í Hvamme við Aurriða-ár-ós—þat heita Auðar-tofter” [Hauksbók II. xiv. viii]).
201 “Hon hafiðe bœna-hald sitt á Cross-hólom. Þar lét hon reisa crossa; því at hon vas skírð ok vel trúð” (Hauksbók II. xiv. viii).
Yet *The Land the Ravens Found* inverts the connotations that these crosses possess in *Landnámabók*. Auðr’s Christianity in the medieval text defines her in masculine terms in that she is the only woman within a group of men whom the text identifies as having been baptized, while her religiosity in general and the paradox she embodies as a consciously practicing Christian whose name identifies her with the pagan Oðin and therefore with war affirm her status as one of the “best-born [male] settlers” in Iceland. By contrast, the erection of the crosses in the 1955 novel perpetuates the paradigmatic implications that that work has already established. To begin with, *Landnámabók*’s situation of Auðr as its grammatical and narrative subject in the clauses quoted above contextualizes the decision as to where her crosses should stand as hers alone while the location of the same in *The Land the Ravens Found* is the result of a joint decision that once again undermines her autonomy: “‘And where,’ said Aud to the priest, ‘should we put up our crosses?’ And they looked about for the right place and at last chose a hillock which could be seen from the fjord below with their great cross against the sky-line” (Mitchison 150). But more importantly, the collaboration between Aud and the priest foregrounds the fact of her conversion to Christianity which in turn identifies her with certain other entities. First, Aud’s faith, as she expresses and the novel portrays it, is mostly synonymous with the absence of violence, as the following examples demonstrate. Certainly the novel connects Christianity to anti-violence—at least as perpetrated in mortal life—within its first few pages when Aud, in response to her grandson’s assertion that his “‘grandfather went to the sacrifices’” (Mitchison 13), says that

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202 “Men say that these settlers were baptized:—Helge the Lean, Aurlyg the Old, Helge Beolan, Eor-wend the Christian, Ead the Deep Wealthy, Cetil the Beguiler, and most of them that came hither from the west of the sea” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 236/“Svá segja menn, at þesser hafa skíðer vereð land-námsmenn. Helge Magre; Ærlygr enn Gamle; Helge Beolan; Íorundr enn Cristne; Auðr en Diúp-auðga; Ketill enn Fíllske; ok flester þeir es kömo vestan um haf” [Hauksbók V. xvii. v]).

203 “. . . þesser land-náms-menn hafa gaðgaster vereð” (Hauksbók V. xvii. ii).

204 In a conversation with Vivill, whom Thorstan the Red captures after killing the boy’s father, Muirgheal, Anlaf Feilan’s nurse, points out that comprehending why both of them ended up as slaves would be to “‘know more than all the priests in the world’” but recalls having once been “‘proud, a King’s daughter, an Earl’s wife,’ ” and surmises that God might “‘always [want] to pull down the proud and powerful from the imaginations of their hearts which take them away from Him’” (Mitchison 50). Ideas of divine punishment aside, this passage posits Christianity as justification for oppression.
her late husband “‘is most likely being punished for it now’” and asks the boy if he does “‘not think it is better to take punishment here and now than to suffer many years of burning in hell’” (Mitchison 13): the irony of Anlaf the White’s presumed fate aside, the penalty that the former King of Ireland supposedly incurs for his involvement with the “sacrifices” signals the Christian deity’s disapproval of murder. Similarly, when Anlaf Feilan thinks of the itinerant clerics who have stayed with the resident priest in Caithness, he notes that they travel “weaponless, alone, on foot or in coracles . . .” (Mitchison 30). And when Haurd comments that the “‘the gods would have liked [the child he would have sacrificed to the Safe Farer]’” (Mitchison 90), Aud retorts that there is “‘[m]uch [he knows]’” given that her “‘God who walks on the faces of all [the old man’s] gods, He says the child is to live!’” (Mitchison 90).

But second, having more or less linked Christianity with peace, *The Land the Ravens Found* also identifies these entities with femininity. As I mentioned briefly in Note 166 with respect to Thorstan’s attitude towards war, Anlaf Feilan’s response to the suggestion that he “‘[learn] to read’” is that he is “‘not a priest or a woman!’” (Mitchison 28), a remark that places the Church’s official representatives and women in the same category while emphasizing the distance of both the clerics and the women from war insofar as Thorstan the Red proposes the idea of acquiring literacy as an alternative to that which the boy would prefer to do were he permitted to do so, which is to accompany his father on his next raid. And the novel reinforces the connection it poses between Christianity and femininity—in opposition to conventional Norse masculinity—throughout its narrative, as the following examples illustrate. One night in Caithness, “the priest [goes] round [Aud’s] Hall, blessing the doors, sprinkling door jambs and thresholds with holy water” after whom “[goes] Aud, on foot, and the rest of the women, and some of the men” (Mitchison 56-57). The presence of the latter notwithstanding, both the literal and situational context of this activity defines it in terms of the domestic realm. For one thing, the physical bounds of the priest’s work is Aud’s Hall which, as *The Land the Ravens Found* depicts it, is the main living space for the matriarch, her family, those who work for them and their farm animals. But for another, that all of the women who
dwell in the Hall but only “some” [my italics] of their male counterparts follow the priest calls attention to
the broader circumstances in which he carries out his duties. At this time, Thorstan the Red, accompanied
by a majority of his men, is “going the rounds of the lands he [has] conquered,” having “[left] the Hall
guarded more by fear and repute than by swords” (Mitchison 53). Insofar as to bless is to “consecrate (a
thing) by a religious rite, the utterance of a formula or charm; in later times by a prayer committing it to
God for his patronage, defence, and prospering care, as in to bless food, to ask God's blessing on it”
(“Bless,” def. I. 1.a.), the priest’s ritual establishes a contrast between his actions and those of Aud’s son and
his followers: the cleric serves as an intercessor for divine protection; through his own military efforts,
Thorstan the Red, along with his men, has set out to defend the territory he has taken.

And in fact, The Land the Ravens Found more explicitly emphasizes the distinction between clerics as
the representatives of Christianity and some whose actions demonstrate the extent to which they exemplify
traditional notions of Norse masculinity. En route to Iceland, Aud spins the tale of Iceland’s discovery for
“the younger children” (Mitchison 104), according to which narrative the first person to “set out on a
definite voyage of exploration” (Mitchison 104) towards the island was a certain Floki Vilgerdsson.
Muirgheal, however, challenges this version of events by pointing out that her Irish countrymen had settled
Iceland before Floki landed there. When Aud demands that the woman provide evidence to support her
assertion, Muirgheal says that she “‘[thinks] Floki and his friends tried to make it difficult to prove’” that
the explorer and his company “‘were not above killing the ones they found in the new land’” and that
“‘a priest does not fight back’” (Mitchison 104-5). The implication is clear: according to Muirgheal, the
first individuals to settle in Iceland were Irish clerics who, in keeping with their status, perish at the hands
of, rather than defend themselves against, the later immigrants whose belief in “‘the Old Faith’” (Mitchison
105) meant that “‘it was no matter to them, the slaying of a priest or so’” (Mitchison 105). And as Aud’s
narrative implies, this adherence to the “‘Old Faith’” is synonymous with the veneration of war: when
Floki departed for Iceland, “he had taken three ravens with him, which were hallowed to Odin” (Mitchison 104).

More subtly, however, *The Land the Ravens Found* associates Christianity with femininity in opposition to masculinity by creating a parallel between Aud and the priest in light of the activities of those around them. I mentioned earlier that Aud’s cloak is an emblem of domesticity as a socially meaningful object that results from women’s work and that the novel situates her shedding of this article—with which Coll and Anlaf Feilan plug up the holes in the *Safe Farer* after the sea floods the ship—relative to the more direct and active role that they, Aud’s grandson-in-law and grandson, respectively, play in trying to stem the damage from the shipwreck by attempting to gain control of the vessel’s steering oar. In this context, it is not only Aud who takes off her cloak: the priest removes his also, and it is not he but Anlaf Feilan and Coll who shove it into the *Safe Farer’s* crevices.

XII. “Aud gave land to her shipmates and freemen”

According to *The Book of Settlements*, Auðr, having rooted her *crucifixes* atop Cross-hillocks, disseminates “land to her shipmates and freedmen” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 79) which distances her from the other women settlers and affirms her status as one of the “best-born settlers” in that she, like other *landnámsmenn* but unlike any *landnámskonur*, both takes land that no one else has ever claimed and parcels some of it out to others. Auðr’s *magnanimity* renders her complicit in war in two ways: first, because her gifts, by virtue of the fact that they cannot be reciprocated, establish a relationship between their donor and those to whom she respectively gives them that parallels that between rulers and those who demonstrate their *fealty* through military service; and second, because some of her beneficiaries, like those of some of the other “best-born settlers,” are *leysingjom* (“freedmen”) to whom she has granted liberty.

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205 “AUÐR gaf land skipverjóm sinom ok leysingjóm” (*Hauksbók* II. xv. i).
which is to say that Auðr’s former ownership of those she has freed implicates her in unprovoked conflict and subjugation insofar as the names of these individuals suggest that they became enslaved as a result of either Anlaf the White’s conquest of Ireland or Thor-stan the Red’s invasion and oppression of Scotland.

In any case, the “shipmates” to whom Auðr gifts land are Cetil and Haurd; and as Landnámabók’s wording indicates, the matriarch herself is the sole agent of these bequests: “2. CETIL [Cathal] 206 was the name of a man to whom [Auðr] gave land from Scram-leap-water to Haurd-dale-water. . . . 3. HAURD was the name of a shipmate of Aud. To him she gave Haurd-dale” (Vigfusson and Powell 79). 207 No character named Cetil exists in The Land the Ravens Found; Haurd is a somewhat significant figure in this work, however, and his role in relation to Aud’s generosity subverts the implications of Landnámabók’s narrative of the same. Haurd is present when Aud claims land which somewhat undercuts The Book of Settlement’s contextualization of her in this moment as an autonomous settler. 208 And as one might have expected given his earlier defiance of Aud’s orders prohibiting pagan sacrifice on behalf of the Safe Farer, Haurd has his opinion concerning his superior’s land claim: having “[taken] a great fancy to one particular bit of land,” he “[asks] for it as his share” (Mitchison 148). Aud’s reply, which is to assent to Haurd’s request along with the comment that his “share” will be known as “‘Haurd-dale,’ ” (Mitchison 148), reflects the ambiguity of her own position. That Haurd’s status as a landowner is dependent upon Aud’s magnanimity towards him emphasizes her authority, as does her naming of the land that she gives to him. Yet if it is the landnámskona who determines whether or not Haurd becomes a landowner at all, his influence alone

206 Vigfusson and Powell are responsible for this emendation.
207 “2. Cetill hét maðr es hon gaf land frá Skraumohlaups-ao til Haorðadals-ár. . . . 3. Haodr hét skipvere Auðar; hónom gaf hon Haorða-dal” (Hauksbók II. xv. ii/iii).
208 “Aud took in settlement all the Dale-lands [here falls in the second blank in H; see Introduction], at the inward of the friths, from Day-meal-ness to Scram-leap-water” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 78–79/ “Auðr nam aoll Dala-laond i innan-verðam firðenom frá Daogðar-ao til Skraumo-hlaups-år” [Hauksbók II. xiv.viii]).
determines which land he specifically acquires which is to say that, once again, Aud in *The Land the Ravens Found* lacks the autonomy that she has in *Landnámabók*.

Yet Aud’s dissemination of land, unlike the other themes that define her settlement narrative, does not unilaterally diminish her agency. *Landnámabók* states that Coll, Aud’s co-captain aboard the *Safe Farer* and the husband of her granddaughter Thorgerd, claims “all Lax-water-dale all up to Hawk-dale-water” (Vigfusson and Powell 81). As this wording suggests, Coll makes his own autonomous land claim in the medieval text. In *The Land the Ravens Found*, however, it is Aud who both gives Coll his land and defines the boundaries of that gift: “And in her mind she had more or less decided what other land was to be given and to whom. Coll, above all, must have a good homestead and enough land for him, in his turn, to be able to give some away or to divide it up among his children when the time came” (Mitchison 148).

Such contradiction also informs Aud’s endowments of her former slaves in *The Land the Ravens Found*. Just as the novel’s earlier evocations of Christianity inform its later description of the planting of her crosses, so do its earlier depictions of slavery inform its later references to its protagonist’s dissemination of land. But unlike Christianity, which associatively—and more or less unambiguously—aligns Aud with non-violence and domesticity in *The Land the Ravens Found*, slavery in this work emphasizes her paradoxical relationship to conquest while nevertheless feminizing, and therefore, conventionalizing, that connection. Sent by his grandmother to “‘grind among the thralls and bond-women until [his] pride is gone’ ” (Mitchison 14) as punishment for attending “the sacrifices” (Mitchison 13), Anlaf Feilan goes to “the end [of the Hall] where the thralls [live] and [work]” (Mitchison 14). There, “[t]wo of the bonds-women”—one of whom is “a Scots prisoner, taken on one of the raids by Thorstan the Red and never ransomed”—are “grinding” for the purpose of producing enough food “to feed all those who [eat] in Aud’s Hall” (Mitchison 15). That these women labor “in Aud’s Hall” clearly implicates the matriarch in their oppression, while the

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fact that her son enslaved one of them after invading and subjugating her native land links that tyranny to war and therefore renders the old woman complicit in the same. At the same time, this first, explicit reference to slaves in the novel makes clear that they have a distinct place in Aud’s Scottish household—literally, as the novel’s allusion to the “end [of the Hall] where the thralls [live] and [work]” implies—and figuratively in that they, the other bondwomen and the bondmen perform specific tasks that contribute to the running of Aud’s farm and residence: the latter break up sandstones while their female counterparts, in addition to pounding barley and oats, weave willow fences and “baskets” (Mitchison 16), preserve fish, milk cows and clean wool. The lowness of their status notwithstanding, Aud’s slaves occupy a particular social niche within the household to which they belong, one that, in the case of the bondwomen, reasserts the identity of women with domesticity. Slave women in Norse culture were, as The Land the Ravens Found accurately reflects, responsible for “grinding corn in the handmill, milking, dairying, cooking, washing” (Foote and Wilson 76). But with the possible exception of transforming raw materials into meal which in Norse poetry is “performed by lower-class women” (Jochens, Women in Old Norse Society 127), women in general, not just slave women, bore responsibility for any duties having to do with preparing and preserving food, maintaining a dairy, doing laundry and creating vadmál (“homespun”). 210

Indeed, Aud’s incorporation of slaves into her household in Caithness goes beyond giving them a role in the running of her residence and farm. Between approximately 800 and 1000 A.D., the Vikings invaded, conquered and governed Ireland as well as the “northern and western isles (Orkney, Shetland, the Hebrides and the Isle of Man) and parts of the mainland of Scotland such as Caithness” (Dyer 43). As The Land the Ravens Found accurately indicates and depicts, the Vikings enslaved both war captives and civilian natives of the regions they occupied. Some of these slaves, as Jochens’ observations concerning their names

210 See Jochens, Women in Old Norse Society 120-24; 126-31; 134-36.
were of much higher social status before the Vikings enslaved them; in other cases, owing to the difficulty they had in articulating Irish and Scottish names, the raiders gave their slaves Norse names or transformed adjectives like *svart* (“swart, black”) into names for the latter that defined them in terms of Scandinavian discernment of skin color (86-87). By divesting their prisoners of their respective social ranks and/or their personal names—i.e., their respective social identities—the Vikings arguably decivilized their Celtic captives. By contrast, the “justice” that Aud’s slaves “[know]” that “[their mistress]” (Mitchison 30) would dispense in response to any mistreatment of them on the part of Haurd and Steinarr implies that she acculturates them. Among other things, justice may be defined as the “exercise of authority and power in maintenance of right. . . .” (“Justice,” def. II. 4) where “right” may be defined as the “standard of permitted and forbidden action within a certain sphere; law; a rule or canon” (“Right,” def. I. 1). Insofar as “[standards],” “[laws],” “[rules]” and “[canons]” are cultural constructions, the anticipation of successful appeal to “their mistress” on the part of Aud’s slaves indicates that there is a socially sanctioned limit to the abuse that they must endure. But more importantly, the slaves’ expectation of redress inherently reveals the extent to which Aud acknowledges them as members of her household and therefore as individuals for whom the broader context of Norse society accounts. In short, if Anlaf the White and, later, his son Thorstan the Red decivilized their respective captives, Aud has civilized these individuals.

Aud’s treatment of the slaves at her Hall goes beyond incorporating them into Norse culture and giving them a role in the running of her farm, doing so in a way that emphasizes her association with domesticity. Aud (along with Thorrid) nurses the captives with whom Thorstan the Red returns after raiding with “ointments and salves” (Mitchison 26) that she and her daughter-in-law have concocted from “herbs” (Mitchison 26) that they have collected, the significance of which is that in pre-Christian medieval

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211 Jochens states that Icelanders with Scandinavian roots may have permitted their Irish and Scottish slaves with aristocratic or royal pedigrees to maintain their patronyms (“Race and Ethnicity in the Old Norse World” 86).
Scandinavia, women ministered to the sick and hurt (Foote and Wilson 93). Later on, after the harvest, “Aud [has] a feast made for everyone, free or thrall, and a long night to sleep in” (Mitchison 35); as mentioned earlier, both in this chapter and in the previous one, Norse women were responsible for the production and serving of food (Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* 120; 125-26; 129).

To the extent that bondsmen and free individuals alike may partake of it, Aud’s banquet elides the distinction between slaves and non-slaves, anticipating her liberation of the Scottish captives (which I shall discuss shortly) whom Thorstan the Red brought to her Hall. This fête is not, however, the only event that foreshadows this emancipation: the celebration of Yule at Aud’s Hall also undermines the social division between slaves and non-slaves as a “feast time for all” to which she has invited “even the lowest of the thralls” (Mitchison 41), although, as Vivill bitterly remembers, his share of the food is “not the roast meat, spiced and juicy, but stringy boiled ends of neck and a pudding of flour and suet boiled in the same water: slave’s food” (Mitchison 46). But the most significant aspect concerning Aud’s celebration of Yule is that in a somewhat paradoxical manner, it also affirms her distance from war. For one thing, the holiday coincides with “the birthday of the New Faith” (Mitchison 41), thereby linking Aud to Christianity which is aligned with non-violence in *The Land the Ravens Found*. But for another, the occasion is one of gift-giving, and Aud’s presents to Sunkwolf, Dog and Vivill—who correspond, respectively, to the slaves “Sokkolf” “Hundi” and “Vifil” whom she frees and to whom she gives land in *Landnámabók*—simultaneously embody the potentiality of violence and defuse it. Aud presents Sunkwolf with an axe of his own; she presents Dog with an axe as well and provides Vivill with “a little knife” (Mitchison 42). In light of the novel’s earlier reference to the fact that “Sunkwolf and Dog were good woodmen, but Haurd never trusted them alone in the forest, and when they were finished with their wood axes, these had to be given back” (Mitchison 30) and Vivill’s own recognition that “Aud had given him a knife, a knife sharp enough to kill with” (Mitchison 42), the danger to others that these instruments might pose is obvious. That the axes and knife are gifts that the recipients are unable to reciprocate also, as I have earlier discussed, links them to conflict. At the same time, the context
in which Aud disseminates these tools, as well as that which they are meant to convey to their respective recipients, defines them in terms of the domestic realm. The tools that Aud presents, respectively, to Sunkwolf, Dog and Vivill are each paired with another gift. Aud “[gives] Vivill . . . a bone comb for his hair” (Mitchison 42), the social implications of which still apply in the twenty-first century, while providing Sunkwolf with “an iron plough soc” and Dog with “an ox yolk” (Mitchison 42), both of which are implements for the cultivation of land: men use the “iron plough soc” to till the soil, while the “ox yolk” restrains the animals who pull the plough. More important, however, is the symbolic import of these items: what Aud presents to all three slaves are “free men’s gifts” (Mitchison 42) indicating her intention to emancipate them (Vivill’s failure to decode the significance of his gifts notwithstanding), and the gifts that Aud presents to Sunkwolf and Dog specifically convey her pledge to give them land as emblems signifying “the beginning of a homestead of one’s own” (Mitchison 42).

It is perhaps fitting, then, that Aud’s liberation of her slaves undermines the stature of the Norse ship as a metonym for raiding by associating it with a cultural norm that will more fully integrate the bondsmen into society instead of destroying their ties to civilization. Having gathered all whom she wishes to accompany her to Iceland, Aud informs her slaves that in keeping with the traditions of her culture, a “‘man who rows in one of our boats is ever afterwards a free man, whatever he may have been’” and that they “‘will all be rowers’” but that because her “‘boat should be built by free men too,’” all “‘who have been thralls are now free’” (Mitchison 82). And what is more, this moment, like Yule, at once emphasizes and diminishes the potentiality of war. To her former slaves, Aud dispenses the very sort of jewelry that her countrymen seized as booty during their raids while commenting that they “‘shall have swords’” (Mitchison 83)—the very instruments of conflict—before departing for Iceland. As already mentioned, the recipients’ lack of reciprocity indebts them to Aud in a way that connects them to war by creating a parallel between their relationship with her and that between a military leader and his retainers, and the matriarch’s own language suggests that she herself is cognizant of the effect that her gifts will have upon their recipients:
“‘Come then, my friends,’ she said, ‘you shall have gold from me now and I shall have much help from you’” (Mitchison 83). Yet Coll’s later comment to Yrp, when he is reluctant to accept a dagger for the song that he has just sung among other things from Anlaf Feilan, that “‘a free man takes gifts from another free man’” (Mitchison 96) retrospectively suggests that the aid that Aud expects has less to do with that which is owed to her than with the fact that going to Iceland would be “hard, even dangerous” yet “they would all be together in one adventure” (Mitchison 82). In any case, the overall context of the situation not only diminishes the difference between Aud’s status and that of her former slaves but also disassociates the “bracelets and brooches” (Mitchison 83) she gifts and the “swords” she promises from war insofar as they are given and pledged in friendship. And in fact, the novel further destabilizes the connection between Norse ships and war when, aboard the Safe Farer and safely at sea beyond the gaze of those left behind in Scotland, Aud returns to each former bondsman the sword with which he had been armed when Anlaf the White or Thorstan the Red had captured him, instructing each man to “use [his] sword well when need might come in the new land, but meanwhile. . .to put his away in his bundle under the rowing bench” (Mitchison 98).

XIII. “SUNK-WOLF was the name of a freedman of Aud’s”

The apparent progression of Aud’s treatment of her slaves encompasses and informs her interactions with those particular bondsmen in The Land the Ravens Found whom she frees and in some cases to whom she also gifts land in Landnámabók. The Book of Settlements’ narrative concerning Auðr’s dissemination of land to Hound, Sunk-wolf and Erp is matter of fact, revealing little more than the names of their respective settlements and their status in relation to their patron which is to say that the medieval text identifies each of these individuals as one of her former slaves. That is, Landnámabók reveals only the

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212 5. HOUND [Cu] was the name of a freedman of Aud’s, a Scottish man. To him she gave Hound-dale, and there he dwelt a long while.

“6. SUNK-WOLF was the name of a freedman of Aud’s. To him she gave Sunk-wolf-dale. He dwelt at Broad-bowster, and many a man is come from him.
formal, public relationship between Auðr and Hound, Sunk-wolf and Erp, respectively. By contrast, Aud has a personal relationship with each of these individuals in *The Land the Ravens Found*, one that demonstrates her regard for them as human beings, and it is this regard that arguably epitomizes, or is supposed to epitomize, that which stands in binary opposition to war. Aud makes her intention to free Sunkwolf and give him his own land early on in the novel, before the harvest, and she does so within the context of complimenting and encouraging his efforts:

> It was almost harvest time, indeed one early field had been cut. The men worked with sickles and the girls bound the corn and stooked it where it would get the wind. Sunkwolf was in charge here; Aud called him out and praised him. She asked him if he thought he could now do all the work about a farm and he said yes. “So that if you had gear of your own--” said Aud, half to herself. Sunkwolf looked at her very keenly; there seemed to be a kind of half promise. “How long is it since you have been here?” Aud asked him.

> “Four years,” said Sunkwolf, “and soon enough five, lady.”

> “Good work will get guerdon,” said Aud, “though you were a bad wolf for a while.”

> Sunkwolf stood with the sickle in his hand. It was blunted with cutting but still a weapon of a kind. He said: “Haurd has never said I work well.”

> “But I do,” said Aud, and nodded at him. (Mitchison 33)

“7. To ERP [Welsh Yrp], the son of earl Mel-dun [Mael-duin], who was spoken of above, Aud gave his freedom and Sheeps-fells-land. From him the ERP-LINGS are come. . . .” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 80/ “5. Hunde hét leysinge Auðar, Skotzkri; hónum gaf hon Hunda-dal. Þar bió hanne lenge.


“7. Erpe syne Mellduns iarls, es yar vas geteð, gaf Auðr frelse, ok Sauðafellz-laond.—Frá hónum ero Erplingar komner. . .” [Hauksbók II. xv. v-vii]).
XIV. “HOUND [Cu] was the name of a freedman of Aud’s. . .”

Sunkwolf’s response to Aud’s remarks is to “[work] hard at the harvest” because he is aware that she is “watching him” and says as much to Dog who also has received “words of praise from the mistress” (Mitchison 34) and whom Aud thinks of as “‘[her] Hound’” (Mitchison 81). More interesting, however, is the novel’s description of his Icelandic settlement which saliently links it to Aud’s emancipation of him as well as to her objection to war. At this point in its narrative, The Land the Ravens Found refers to Dog as Cu-na Gleinne. “Cu-na Gleinne,” as the 1955 work informs us five pages after it begins, means “Hound of the Glens” in his native Irish (Mitchison 16). That the book now refers to Dog as such therefore implies that Aud’s liberation of him has resulted in his reclamation of his own native heritage; and it is, perhaps, not a coincidence that unlike Landnámabók, which unambiguously asserts that Auðr gives him his land and does not clarify who names it “Hound-dale,” the novel’s own language gives the impression that the former slave acquires his own land and states that he names it himself: “Cu-na Gleinne had got his holding fixed—he called it Hound-dale—. . .” (Mitchison 151). More significant, however, is the fact that Cu-na Gleinne leaves Aud’s new Hall to live on his own plot after she “[blames] him for beating” a slave (Mitchison 151) and on account of which action she remains “angry with him for a year. . .” (Mitchison 152).

XV. To ERP [Welsh Yrp], the son of earl Mel-dun [Mael-duin]. . .Aud gave his freedom and Sheep-fells-land”

If Aud acknowledges and commends Sunkwolf and Dog for the efforts they contribute to the running of her farm—necessary labor that they as slaves have no choice but to perform--she also notices and encourages the abilities of her slaves that arguably have no direct impact upon the survival of those who live in her Hall and that, more pertinently, seem to reflect the bondsmen’s own apparent interests and inclinations rather than any proficiency they may demonstrate in any assigned role. In light of the fact that “Vivill found it difficult to take to thrall’s work” (Mitchison 26), the novel’s later remark in the same
paragraph that Yrp, who according to its narrative has been a slave since infancy, “just does the same as the others” (Mitchison 26) implies that he performs the same labor that other slaves do: there is no indication in The Land the Ravens Found that he is training, at Aud’s or anyone else’s bequest, to do anything other than contribute to the running of her farm, much less play the harp. That the matriarch has a “chief harper” (Mitchison 47) underscores this point: not only is there someone in residence whose official role is to produce music, but also the book’s reference to the fact that “the chief of the harpers...[was] a good warrior as well as a good musician” (Mitchison 57) indicates that the official duty of at least two individuals living at Aud’s Hall is to play the harp. Yet it is Yrp’s melodies that Aud wishes to hear one night after her head musician leaves her Hall to accompany Thorstan on his “rounds of the lands he had conquered” (Mitchison 53). And perhaps more to the point, as Anlaf Feilan earlier observes, his grandmother “would ask Yrp to play to her just as though he were a grown man” (Mitchison 47). Such treatment, given the eagerness with which Yrp’s generational peers look forward to taking on adult roles, 213 thus affords him privilege rather than privation. Furthermore, Aud respects Yrp’s talent apart from any benefit it may give her: almost immediately after freeing her slaves, Aud presents Yrp with “a narrow gold bracelet and a gold ring with a carved seal stone in it” that she says “‘will look well between the harp strings’” (Mitchison 84). That is, Aud acknowledges the fact that Yrp will continue to play the instrument even though, as an ex-slave, he is no longer bound to comply with her demands that he do so for her. A conversation that Aud has

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213 According to the list of main characters for The Land the Ravens Found, Yrp is fourteen years old, one year older than Anlaf Feilan (and therefore still a minor), when the book’s narrative begins. Several examples abound with respect to the desire of young men and women to take on the roles of adulthood. When fifteen-year-old Runolf learns that he will be going on his first raid, the novel observes that he had been wanting to start his life as a man...” (Mitchison 27), an existence that it positions in opposition to that of a woman in continuing on to say that for Runolf, “it had been more and more irksome to be left with the women” (Mitchison 27) which is what happens to thirteen-year-old Anlaf Feilan who is “furiously jealous” (Mitchison 28) when he discovers that Runolf won’t be staying behind when Thorstan departs for his “next exhibition” (Mitchison 27). Similarly, Anlaf Feilan’s fifteen-year-old sister Olof contemplates her upcoming nuptials while aboard the Safe Farer, considering herself “well able to undertake the running of a household” (Mitchison 100).
with Anlaf Feilan nearly three years later confirms this change: when Aud queries her grandson as to whether it would “‘have been a wicked thing to have kept a man like Yrp as a thrall,’ ” Anlaf Feilan replies in the affirmative but points out that Yrp “‘would have been able to go on playing the harp [for her]’ ” and that she has “‘never liked [his] playing as well as [Yrp’s]!’ ” (Mitchison 174). In any case, although *The Land the Ravens Found* depicts Yrp as a creator of music and Aud as its audience, what the two obviously have in common is a love for the sound of stringed instruments, which is to say that their relationship with each other is arguably mediated less by war than by culture.

XVI. “Muir-gheal was bondmaid to [Earl Sigrod’s] wife. . .”

In *Landnámabók*, a narrative gap exists between its introduction of Yrp and its description of his landtaking; and although it initially defines Yrp not only as a “freedman of Aud’s” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 77/ “leysinge Auðar” [Haukshók II. xiv. iv]) but also as the “son of earl Meldun [Mael-duine] of Scotland” and “Myr-giol [Muir-gheal], daughter of Glio-mal [Gleo-mael], king of the Irish” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 77/ “hann vas son Melduns iarls af Skotlande. . . . Móðer Erps vas Myrgiol, dotter Gliomals Íra-konungs” [Haukshók II. xiv. iv]) 214 and links his fate to his mother’s in noting first that Sigrod captured and then enslaved them and second, that both individuals later accompany Auðr to Iceland, the medieval text does portray Yrp as the sole recipient of the land that the former queen of Dublin gifts to him. In *The Land the Ravens Found*, however, the land that Aud intends for Yrp is also for his mother, Muirgheal, and the implications of this seemingly slight revision extend the novel’s established paradigm of identifying Aud with the domestic realm. That Yrp’s land is also Muirgheal’s obviously feminizes his claim in that Aud cedes ownership of it not only to him but to another woman, while the fact that it belongs jointly to him and to

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214 It should be noted that Vigfusson and Powell’s translation here is incorrect: “He was the son of earl Meldun [Mael-duine] of Scotland, who fell before earl Sigrod the Mighty, the mother of Myrgiol [Muir-gheal]. . .” should read as “He was the son of earl Meldun [Mael-duine] of Scotland, who fell before earl Sigrod the Mighty. Yrp’s mother was Myrgiol. . .”
his mother necessarily establishes another point of connection between the two of them that is both public, in the sense that land claims are communally acknowledged, and therefore socially sanctioned. Indeed, this transaction influences Aud’s own reputation in the eyes of her fellow Icelanders: having “given [Yrp and Muirgheal] what they needed, and given generously,” Aud finds that such magnanimity is “to her honour, for now nobody could say that she had treated the son of Earl Maelduine badly” (Mitchison 164).

But to a certain extent, like the jewelry she presents to Yrp, Aud’s gift of land is, I would argue, a reflection of her personal relationship with those upon whom she bestows it. In particular, that largesse is a measure of her relationship with Muirgheal which to an extent subverts Landnámabók’s rendering of it. As I mentioned earlier, Earl Sigrod turns Myrgiól and Erp into slaves after killing the former’s husband—in which capacity, according to Landnámabók, the widow loyaly waits upon her captor’s wife. At some point thereafter, Auðr purchases Myrgiól for a large sum, pledging to liberate her if she will be as constant to Thorstan the Red’s spouse as she has been to Sigrod’s; the medieval narrative then states that Myrgiól and Erp accompany Aud on her journey to Iceland. Auðr’s interactions with Myrgiól in Landnámabók, as I discussed in the previous chapter, reveal the former’s agency as both subjugator and liberator. If The Book of Settlements initially identifies Auðr as Myrgiól’s emancipator, the conditions upon which that freedom is premised simultaneously position the former as the latter’s captor.

The novel’s account of Muirgheal’s experience following the slaying of her husband coincides, to a limited extent, with this chain of events in Landnámabók: Muirgheal herself relates how Sigurd seized her as spoil, while Aud confirms that she bought Muirgheal for a great deal of money. Muirgheal, however, says nothing of any devotion she might have shown to Sigurd’s spouse but rather alludes to how “‘his lady was good to [her],’” (Mitchison 79) as well as to Yrp, who was then an infant, and “‘protected [her]’” (Mitchison 80) when one of the earl’s followers desired to wed her and attempted to persuade him that she was his enemy. Taken together, Sigurd’s spouse’s treatment of Muirgheal and the latter’s appreciation of it suggest that, regardless of the former’s official status as Muirgheal’s owner--The Land the Ravens Found
unlike *The Book of Settlements*, specifically indicates that it is from Sigurd’s wife that Aud purchases Muirgheal—the personal relationship between Muirgheal and the “‘Earl’s lady’” (Mitchison 80) was one of mutual affection that, I would argue, anticipates the relationship that Gelomael’s daughter has with Aud. Technically speaking, Muirgheal is Aud’s slave, a status that her duties as nurse to Thorstan’s children and waiting woman to Aud confirm. These responsibilities notwithstanding, Muirgheal otherwise transcends her official status. Superficially, as Anlaf Feilan observes, “her clothes [are] almost as rich as his grandmother’s and her feet [are] in soft doe-skin brogues, tied across the ankles” (Mitchison 17). More significantly, “she [is] not the kind of person that anyone would treat as a common thrall, least of all Aud” (Mitchison 17). Indeed, Muirgheal herself perceives Aud as someone, like Sigurd’s spouse, upon whom she, and as she informs him, Vivill, can rely: “‘And, as far as things of the earth go, I have one I can trust in. Aud the Deep-Minded is such a woman and it is well for you that you are in her hands’” (Mitchison 50). But in *The Land the Ravens Found*, Aud buys Muirgheal not because she intends to provide her daughter-in-law with someone to wait on her loyally but because, she tells her grandson, “‘we both thought she would be better here’” (Mitchison 80). In context, the “we” might refer to Aud and Sigurd’s wife, in which case the former’s motive for purchasing Muirgheal reflects no more than her own concern for the slave’s well-being. But “we” might equally refer to Aud and Muirgheal, and if so, it also hints at the comradery that characterizes their interactions both before and after the matriarch emancipates the bondswoman. When Sigurd sends some of his followers to visit Aud after Thorstan’s death “‘to see what they could see’” (Mitchison 78), as Yrp puts it, she and Muirgheal meet with them together, revealing “several things. . .which might not have been the whole truth” (Mitchison 80). After Sigurd’s followers leave Aud’s Hall, they encounter Anlaf Feilan returning from the woods, but not before Yrp warns him to remain silent about the ship that Aud is secretly having built or any other plans in the making—schemes that he supposedly knows nothing about but of which he is very much aware because, as he explains after Sigurd’s men take their leave and are out of earshot, Aud informed his mother, Muirgheal, all about them. And when, back on
his grandmother’s farm, Anlaf Feilan points out to her that she had never mentioned her intention to tell Muirgheal about the construction of the ship, implicit in Aud’s response is the idea that the slave is her confidante in all matters:

Anlaf looked at the ground. “You never said to me, Grandmother—“ he began, and stopped.

“What?” said Aud.

“That you were going to tell Muirgheal. About the ship.”

“But of course!” said Aud. “When have I hidden anything from Muirgheal?”

(Mitchison 80)

But if trust and friendship underlie Aud’s personal relationship with Muirgheal, so too does a mutuality that belies the distance between the two women with respect to their official relationship to one another, thereby undermining war as the basis of that connection. After Anlaf Feilan leaves the presence of his grandmother and his nurse, their discussion turns to the topic of Iceland, and as Muirgheal’s wisdom and Aud’s agreement with the slave’s unsolicited suggestions reveal—not to mention the fact that Muirgheal addresses Aud as “Aud” and not as “lady” which is what, notably, Sunkwolf calls her—the princess-turned-bondswoman is more or less on an equal footing with her owner throughout their dialogue:

Anlaf walked away, over to the Hall. His grandmother shook her head.

“Sometimes he has sense,” she said, “and sometimes no sense at all.”

“He will grow up,” said Muirgheal, “and once we are in the new land all this between him and Yrp will stop having any meaning. It is hard for them both now.”

“It might be better,” said Aud, “if, when we take over our land, in the new country, yours was a little way off from ours. But if it is, you will need to promise to come and see me—often, often!”

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“Oh, I shall come, my dear,” said Muirgheal, “you’ll not get rid of me so easily!

But I think, Aud, you will do well to speak to some of the others soon. For they are all beginning to guess.”

“I think it is clear enough who should come.”

“Vivill, for one.”

“Of course. And Sunkwolf.”

“And Cu-na-Gleinne.”

“Yes, yes, I’m taking my Hound! But I shall only have those I am sure of. And those who can stand it.”

“I know,” said Muirgheal, “but it will be a hard parting for some.” (Mitchison 80-81)

It is worth noting that how Muirgheal and Aud respectively refer to Dog in the conversation quoted above slightly undermines their parity as participants in the same: while Muirgheal alludes to her peer by his original given name in his own native Irish, Aud calls him by its abbreviated equivalent in her own language, thereby interjecting her position as conqueror into their exchange. The significance of this difference, however, has less to do with the fact that it subtly introduces a moment of inequality into their dialogue in and of itself than with the fact that it frames the women’s discussion here as a step towards narrative and linguistic equality that anticipates Aud’s storytelling aboard the Safe Farer. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, Aud’s narrative identifies a man by the name of Floki Vilgerdsson as the first individual to discover Iceland, the implication of which is clear: a Norse man was the first person to discern the island and set foot on it. Muirgheal, however, disputes this apparent fact, asserting that clerics from her own native Ireland had landed and settled in Iceland before Floki ever reached it. Aud insists that Muirgheal verify the truth of her statements, and the importance of the latter’s response lies as much in the particularity of its details as it does in the fact that Aud never resumes her narrative: it is Muirgheal’s version of events that The Land the
Ravens Found establishes, and according to her, the pagan Floki and his companions murdered the Irish priests who were already living in Iceland when they got there and who in keeping with their vocation “‘[did] not fight back’ ” (Mitchison 105). On the one hand, then, Muirgheal’s story reinforces the novel’s identification of paganism with violence while once again associating Christianity with its absence. But on the other, Muirgheal clearly depicts the Norse as that which we, for lack of a more precise term, might call imperialists, in opposition to her countrymen, and the fact that Muirgheal’s story undermines and supersedes Aud’s affirms the implications of her own thread, namely that the power of Celtic narrative—from the mouths of Norse slaves, no less—is greater than the literal military strength of their enslavers. Muirgheal states that Floki and his company murdered the Irish clerics in an attempt to destroy any evidence of their existence in Iceland but that “‘some of [those with Floki] had thralls out of Ireland or Scotland and so the story came back’ ” (Mitchison 105). In short, Aud’s relationship with Muirgheal in The Land the Ravens Found distances the former from conflict and ensconces her more firmly in the domestic realm as a connection that, personally if not officially, is characterized by mutual friendship, loyalty, trust and equality, the last of which partially manifests itself in a form (i.e. narrative) that allows the oppressed to triumph over their oppressors in a figurative way without resorting to literal violence and that itself is synonymous with the cultural record of humankind.

XVII. “WIVIL or WEEVIL was the name of a freedman of Aud’s”

Landnámabók ostensibly documents the settlement of Iceland between approximately 870-930 A.D.; and as a supposed record of land claims, it not surprisingly reveals very little concerning the personalities of the settlers whom it mentions. For this reason, its narrative pertaining to the settlement of Vivill, who is apparently the last of the former slaves to whom Auðr gifts land,215 is distinctive insofar as it

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215 Although the Norse original of “others” is “aoðrom maonnom” (“other men”) rather than “aoðrom leysingjom” (“other freedmen”) and although “other men” does not necessarily mean “all others,” the
provides some insight into both the respective characters of the former slave and his former owner and the quality of their relationship with one another:

4. WIVIL or WEEVIL was the name of a freedman of Aud’s. He asked her why she did not give him a homestead as she had to others. But she said that it did not matter, because he would always be held a gentleman wherever he was. She gave him Weevil’s-dale. There he dwelt, and had a feud with Haurd. (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 79-80) 216

Wivil’s query indicates his concern that Auðr has not been as generous with him as she has been with her other former slaves. Her verbal response, which implies that to be a “gentleman” in the eyes of one’s countrymen is to own land, suggests that she interprets his question as an expression of anxiety over his social status. At the same time, Auðr’s own assessment of Wivil is implicit in this reply, while the desire to provide tangible reassurance of his worth arguably motivates her subsequent gift to him.

The Land the Ravens Found reconstructs and expands upon the conversation recounted above—indeed, it is the last dialogue between Aud and Vivill that the novel depicts. But while the original passage from The Book of Settlements is a discrete section unto itself as far as Auðr’s relationship with Wivil is concerned, such is not the case in The Land the Ravens Found. Aud’s interactions with Vivill earlier in the book inform and contextualize this final exchange; and it is not through Aud’s relationship with Muirgheal but rather through her relationship with Vivill that The Land the Ravens Found most saliently identifies its protagonist with domesticity in relation to the issues of land giving and slavery. Early on in the novel, Thorstan the Red kills a number of Scottish rebels, taking as captives those who have not died in the

implication here seems to be that the only one of her former bondsmen to whom Auðr has yet to give any land is Wivil. In this light, it is somewhat odd that Landnámabók describes Wivil’s land claim before depicting those of Auðr’s other leysingjar.

uprising. Vivill is one of those prisoners, at sixteen old enough to go to war but young enough to be a peer of Anlaf Feilan's, and he catches Aud's attention when presented to her by her son:

Anlaf and Hauscoll were jumping round, trying to see. One of the prisoners was not much older than themselves, but he had been fighting, for he was wearing a torn mail-shirt and a sword belt but no sword in it.

Aud was looking at this one too. “Who is it?” she asked her son.

Vivill, son of Niagli,” said Thorstan. “It was his father who was leading the Scots.”

“What happened?” said Aud.

“I killed him,” said Thorstan easily, “cut his head off.” He made a quick movement with his wrists and laughed.

“Be quiet,” said Aud, “the lad is listening to you. Is he likely to be ransomed?”

“No,” said Thorstan and laughed again. (Mitchison 22)

The novel juxtaposes Thorstan’s cavalier attitude towards his victim and his lack of sensitivity to the feelings of Niagli’s surviving heir with Aud’s empathy for the young man, a contrast that the matriarch’s imperative to her own son accentuates. In calling Thorstan’s attention to his audience as the reason that he should stop talking about his decapitation of Niagli, Aud implicitly chastises her offspring for his brutishness, and the circumstances are such that the Viking’s graphic boasting of his own deed comes across as an expression of unprovoked, psychological and emotional aggression: bound and chained, Vivill seems to be less of a contained threat than a victim himself. From this perspective, Aud posits herself in opposition to the unwarranted cruelties of war. Yet in aligning herself with “the enemy,” so to speak, but without turning against her own flesh-and-blood—she doesn’t incite Vivill to seek revenge for the murder of his father or conspire with him against Thorstan, after all, even if she does, however gently, admonish the latter for his insensitivity—Aud also undermines the essential structure of conflict which inherently comprises at least two opposing sides.
If Aud objects to the infliction of war in verbal terms, she also objects to its imposition in literal, physical ones, and her demand that Vivill be loosed from his bonds anticipates her emancipation of her slaves later in the text. More interesting is the way in which the novel links Aud’s directive to her use of language which both defines Vivill as a victim by describing him in terms of vulnerability and emphasizes her alliance with him. Thorstan objects to untying Vivill on the basis that the young man “‘scratches’” (Mitchison 23), a description that Aud dismisses as “‘[n]onsense,’” the captive being “‘only hurt and frightened’” (Mitchison 23). Then, she addresses Vivill directly, communicating with him in a way that acknowledges not only his humanity but also his cultural identity: not only does she address him by name, but she pronounces his name as it is pronounced in his native language and speaks to him in that idiom.

And what Aud says is as important as the language in which she speaks. After stating that he “‘will be set loose,’” Aud warns that he “‘must be sensible,’” that he “‘cannot escape here’” and then asks if he shall “‘be sensible?’” (Mitchison 23). From one perspective, by attempting to engage Vivill in this conversation, Aud is trying to make him complicit in his own imprisonment: for Vivill to “‘be sensible’” in this context is to make no effort to escape his captors once they have removed the bodily restraints into which they have put him. But from another, she is appealing to his own logic in order to persuade him to act in a manner that, in a literal and immediate sense, will result in his freedom; that she does so, like her decision to communicate with him in Irish, reflects her recognition of him as a human being.

Vivill’s response initially is to “[gulp] and [shiver] and [seem] to go paler in the unbruised part of his face” (Mitchison 23); Aud in turn

leant down towards him and made the sign of the cross. Then he looked at her and nodded quickly and whispered yes. Thorstan spoke to Steinarr who cut the thongs at the boy’s wrists and ankles, and pulled him to his feet. He moved his arms and hands gingerly, stretching his fingers which were long and not perhaps much used to work. “Come here,” said Aud. (Mitchison 23)
Aud’s gesture indicates that she ascribes to him a religious and thus cultural identity; that her signage elicits a direct answer to her question emphasizes the accuracy of her assumption as well as the fact that she herself is communicating with him in the “language” of that faith. The juxtaposition of Aud’s motion with Vivill’s affirmation and that of the latter with his liberation from bonds links her hatred of violence to Christianity in a paradoxical way which further exchanges between the two affirm: 217

He took a step nearer and stumbled. Then he fell on his knees in front of the high seat, but looking at Aud. “I am here, lady,” he said low. She reached for the wine cup that Thorstan had been drinking from and held it out to the boy, who drank a little, uncertainly, and then put one hand up to his bruised face, screwing his eyes with pain.

“Now, said Aud briskly, “you are among decent people and there is nothing to be afraid of. Thorstan has won the battle and you are his prisoner. Other men have been in bonds before you. I think you are a Christian.” He nodded. “Very well, then. You will find mercy here. You must be sensible and everything will go well in God’s own time. Will you tell this to the rest of the men?”

He said nothing for a moment. He seemed to be thinking about it. Then he said, “Yes, lady, I will tell them.” He went over to the others and spoke to them. After a while he said, “They understand.”

“You can loose them all, Steinarr,” said Thorstan and then to his mother: “You were right about that one. He has been plenty of trouble all the way. Once or twice I thought I would need to kill him. But you are the clever one, Mother.”

“Not at all,” said Aud, “but it would be queer if I could not tell something about a man, after all these years, and this boy Vivill is a gentleman. Also he belongs to my faith.

217 Julian D’Arcy observes that “Aud is Christian and thus exceptionally considerate to her slaves” (170-71).
And to-morrow, Thorstan, we will give thanks that you are home safe, and you will come to the chapel. And you will kneel when you should.” (Mitchison 23-24)

Like her first remarks to Vivill, Aud’s subsequent ones to him persuade him to be complicit in his own enslavement; and insofar as she induces him to convince his fellow captives to acquiesce in their captivity based upon the same reasoning that underlies his own submission to his captors, Christianity, as she deploys it, is an agent of slavery. 218

Yet it is through her invocation of Christianity that Aud simultaneously demonstrates respect for Vivill as a human being in appealing to his sense of reason and also for the other captives in assuming that they, too, can and would respond to their circumstances in a logical manner when asked to consider them. And just as Vivill’s affirmation that he will “‘be sensible’” after Aud “[makes] the sign of the cross” associates Christianity with his subsequent emancipation from physical restraints, so too is there a causal connection between the other prisoners’ assent to “‘be sensible’” in the faith that “‘everything will go well in God’s own time’” and their ensuing liberation from actual fetters. But more pertinently, it is through Christianity that Aud—somewhat contradictorily—subverts Vivill’s new status as a slave and captured enemy. That Aud offers Vivill the vessel of wine from which Thorstan has sipped alludes to the moment in Matthew 26.27-29 219 when Jesus passes his cup to his disciples. In the Biblical narrative, Jesus offers his cup to his followers as a collective whole, making no distinction between any one of them, and it is this parallel that the novel evokes insofar as Vivill drinks from the same cup as Thorstan: there is no difference between the slave and his captor who happens also to be Scotland’s conqueror.

What Aud subsequently says to Vivill seemingly reestablishes hierarchical differences between him and her son and confirms their oppositional status in relation to one another as political and territorial

218 As D’Arcy notes, Aud’s conduct towards her slaves has a practical advantage: her kindness inspires their devotion to her and motivates them to work carefully and productively (171).
enemies: “‘Thorstan has won the battle and you are his prisoner’” (Mitchison 23). But her ensuing comments undermine her apparently straight-forward identification of the young man in social terms. After verifying that he practices Christianity, Aud informs Vivill that he “‘will find mercy here,’” advises that he “‘must be sensible and everything will go well in God’s own time’” (Mitchison 24) and asks him to convey this message to the other captives. Implicit in Aud’s references to “mercy” and “‘God’s own time’” is that she, like Vivill, is a Christian and as such, they are religious allies to one another, a circumstance that Thorstan’s contrasting lack of belief in the “New Faith” accentuates, as his mother’s later demand (which is met with protests of having been a “‘good son’” [Mitchison 24]) that he accompany her to Mass the next day and follow its rituals illustrates. But what Aud wishes to communicate to the other captives via Vivill is as much political as it is spiritual, and in appealing to the young man to speak to the other prisoners on her behalf, she effectively posits him as her political ally which, given that she is Thorstan’s mother, undercuts the division between the two men. In addition, The Land the Ravens Found recontextualizes Auðr’s comment to Wivil in Landnámabók that “he would always be held a gentleman wherever he was” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 79). 220 That Aud tells Thorstan rather than Vivill himself—who presumably is in earshot, nevertheless—that the latter “‘is a gentleman’” is not particularly significant. That Aud immediately follows this statement with the remark that Vivill “‘belongs to [her] faith’” once again suggests that she defines him in terms of their shared religion, however, and in light of Aud’s earlier exchanges with Vivill in which she categorizes him as a “prisoner” and a slave, her assessment of him as a “gentleman” obviously subverts his legal and public status.

With respect to Aud’s first encounter with Vivill, there is one final point to be made—namely, that in destabilizing the binary construct of conflict through Christianity, she also links that subversion to domesticity. In picking up her son’s wine cup and passing it to Vivill, Aud performs that which was

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220 “. . .kvað hann þar gaofgan mundo þickja sem hann være” (Hauksbók II. xv. iv).
conventionally the duty of women in medieval Scandinavia and Germany: pouring and offering alcohol (Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* 107).

In any case, Aud’s subsequent interactions with Vivill further cement her identification with culture, war’s antithesis, insofar as her treatment of him destabilizes his status as a slave. During Christmas Mass, Aud invites Vivill into her chapel where he “[kneels] beside her” (Mitchison 43). Given that those of her slaves who attend services “kneel at the open door where they [can] hear and see” (Mitchison 30) because there is not enough space for them to fit inside the edifice, Aud’s welcoming of Vivill inside her church distinguishes him from his peers. More substantially, when Anlaf Feilan brings it to his grandmother’s attention that the other bondsmen force him to take the “worst place” (Mitchison 32) when laboring with a group of peers, she goes to witness the truth of this situation for herself; following a discussion that Aud has with Haurd who supervises the slaves, Vivill no longer suffers as much in doing his share of work. But the other, more important outcome of Aud’s talk with Haurd is that Anlaf Feilan receives permission to “take Vivill off to practise fighting or to go on hunts with him, or in the boat” (Mitchison 34) which on the surface may appear to tie his grandmother to war rather than distance her from it given the adolescents’ activities but that in a wider context complexly encourages not enmity but friendship and allows him to exercise the privileges of a free man. Earlier in the novel, Anlaf Feilan demands that Vivill “come and practice [fighting] with him, using shields and long sticks” (Mitchison 31). Notably, Vivill is ambivalent about the experience: he is “afraid of being punished, and yet he half-[enjoys] it” because battling is better than doing “his thrall’s work of carrying and hurrying and being shouted at” (Mitchison 31), and his feelings reflect that which Haurd confirms when he asserts that he is not only aware of Vivill’s ability as a warrior but that the slave “‘is not to be reminded of it’ ” because “‘[h]e is a thrall, a thrall, and that’s all there is to it’ ” (Mitchison 32) after having interrupted the young men’s session and assaulted his underling. That is, to be a slave is tantamount to being denied the opportunity to engage in battle, and Haurd’s insistence upon Vivill’s status as such calls attention to the fact that he is connected to
Aud by virtue of war. But through his “fighting” with Vivill, Anlaf Feilan comes to perceive his sparring partner as an actual human being with a talent, and this change in perspective is what leads him to observe that the slave “always [has] the worst place” when working with a group of other bondsmen and then to inform his grandmother about the unjustness of this situation.

If Aud’s invitation to Vivill at Christmas Mass and her intervention in his work situation serve as proof of both her generosity and her sense of justice, they also reflect her autonomy in that it is the matriarch alone who, uninfluenced by anyone else, in both instances extends privileges to her slave that normally are reserved for those above his legal station. It is therefore notable that Aud tacitly affirms Vivill’s own spontaneous expression of self-assertion that belies his status later on that same winter, after the Christmas homily. One evening, at Aud’s request, Yrp plays the harp for an audience that includes Anlaf Feilan, Vivill, Osc, Groa and little Wigdis; after the performance, the two older girls compliment and show affection towards Yrp and persuade him “to play tricks with his golden balls. . .” (Mitchison 59). Jealous of the attention that his sisters have bestowed upon Yrp, Anlaf Feilan “[puts] out his foot and [trips] him” (Mitchison 59). Vivill’s reaction, which is to call Anlaf Feilan a “’fool’ ” (Mitchison 59), recalls his position to himself: he “had been watching Yrp with such pleasure that he had somehow forgotten who he was, forgotten he was only a thrall. The moment after he had spoken he remembered” (Mitchison 59-60). But rather than back her grandson, who “[looks] at [Vivill] in a way that [sends] the fear coursing down through his blood to his heart” (Mitchison 60), Aud remarks that Vivill is “‘quite right’ ” (Mitchison 60). But the full significance of Aud’s comment lies in how it connects this moment of tension to that which ensues. Aud then turns to Yrp, asking him to play the harp once more; although he refuses, she successfully convinces Vivill to do so who at first hesitates because he feels out of practice and then feels embarrassed because “[h]is hands [are] rough with work” (Mitchison 60). Vivill begins by accompanying his own voice, singing “a song that his mother used to sing to him” (Mitchison 60). But thinking that “he should not . . . be singing in Scots here among the Norse” because “it [is] not courteous, and, when one is asked to play on the harp in the Hall
of another, one’s song should be for their pleasure” (Mitchison 60), Vivill stops playing and singing. And when he begins anew, he sings “neither in Scots nor in Norse, but in Latin,” and what he sings is a praise of Saint Columba, coming over in his boat from Ireland, turning his face away from all he loved, landing at last but finding that from a hill above his chapel he could still see Ireland, and so again, sadly and bravely, he must go, setting out on the wild waters, carrying his cross and his books. (Mitchison 61)

Vivill’s song of course foreshadows Aud’s journey to Iceland. But with respect to Anlaf Feilan’s tripping of Yrp and its aftermath, Aud’s calm affirmation of Vivill’s assessment of her grandson in that moment, followed by her request to Yrp, defuses the potential for conflict—when, after calling him a “fool,” Vivill perceives how angry Anlaf Feilan is, he himself “[clenches] his fists, waiting for the blow that was bound to come” (Mitchison 60)—and reestablishes the tone of the evening, which is one of community and harmony that binds both slaves and non-slaves together through their mutual enjoyment of a particular art, an atmosphere that Vivill himself deliberately endeavors to maintain when he switches from singing an old Scots lyric to one that is linguistically and narratively neutral. And because the subject of Vivill’s song is Saint Columba, this episode in its entirety links Aud’s approval of Vivill’s own transcendence of his status not only to her prevention of struggle in favor of re-creating a space for unity through culture but also to Christianity. Moreover, it is worth noting that Aud subsequently and implicitly demonstrates her approval of Vivill’s conduct on this occasion by having him play the harp for her in her private chambers, a privilege that distinguishes him from the other slaves, as their reaction to it reveals: “After that there were other evenings when Yrp took Vivill through with him to Aud’s bower. The rest of the men teased Vivill about it, but it was worth it all the same” (Mitchison 61). But perhaps Aud’s most important vindication of Vivill’s spontaneous critique of Anlaf Feilan occurs when she later defends him against Haurd who, not surprisingly, is irate when Aud, having been alerted to the fact by the young Scot, prevents him from sacrificing a child to the Safe Farer: “‘If that little snake had not told—’ said Haurd. But Aud said: ‘He did right and it shall not be
Aud’s utterance of the clause “‘[h]e did right’ ” nearly echoes that which she says when Vivill tells Anlaf Feilan that he is a “‘fool.’ ” And the change in Vivill’s status between the night of the harp performance and the early morning in the woods highlights this similarity: at this point in *The Land the Ravens Found*, Vivill is no longer a slave.

If, however, as I posited earlier, intimacy stands in opposition to conflict as an exemplum of social cohesion, then the novel’s expansion upon the personal relationship between Wivil and Auðr in *The Book of Settlements* epitomizes war’s antithesis. Like her relationship with Muirgheal, Aud’s relationship with Vivill in the 1955 work is one of emotional closeness. After freeing her slaves, Aud disseminates valuable jewelry to them: “And so to each man she gave something, and with whatever was given, a good word” (Mitchison 84). Yet when she offers Vivill his share of goods, she demonstrates that affection by physically arraying him with the “thick bracelet of soft gold” (Mitchison 84) that she has chosen for him: “She pulled it open a little, put it on his arm and then pressed it together” (Mitchison 84). And it is in the book’s passages that directly derive from and expand upon *Landnámabók* that Aud’s feelings about Vivill are most evident. The medieval narrative provides no reason as to why Auðr has apparently given land to each of her shipmates and former slaves except for Wivil until he personally seeks it. But *The Land the Ravens Found* does, and that motive is none other than her unwillingness to be separated from someone she loves:

Aud liked to see [Signy] and Vivill together. But they would be wanting to get married too, once she had set Vivill up on his land. She felt a kind of reluctance to do that; she had become very fond of Vivill, he was like a kind of extra grandson. Once he had fallen over a low cliff, climbing for gannets’ eggs, and had been knocked unconscious. She had looked after him as though he had been her child or grandchild; naturally he had got well with no trouble—Aud prided herself on her gift of taking care of the sick—but once you have nursed someone to health they are in a way your own. She did not want him to go yet.

(Mitchison 163)
Given the significance of genealogy in *Landnámabók*, which reflects the importance of ancestry in both Old Icelandic literature and in medieval Icelandic society more generally, Aud’s affection for Vivill further anchors her to civilization, thereby distancing her from war, while her ministrations to him, like her care for her other slaves, reinforces her connection to domesticity in that healing, as I pointed out earlier in this chapter, was typically a female profession (Foote and Wilson 93). And the novel’s adaptation of *Landnámabók*’s depiction of Wivil underscores Aud’s identification with the social realm through her relationship with Vivill. If Aud perceives Vivill as a son or as a grandson, she implicitly identifies herself as his mother or grandmother, and his own reaction to her response when, “moody and silent, not like himself,” he inquires as to why she has “‘given everyone else land. . .and none for me’” (Mitchison 165) suggests that how they define themselves in relation to one another is mutual. What is more, Vivill’s kneeling echoes the moment when he joins her inside the church in Caithness, once again associating Aud’s generosity with Christianity:

> “Your land?” said Aud, “yes, yes. You shall have it. But there is nothing to upset yourself about. Whether you have land or not, anyone can see you are a gentleman.” She looked long and gently at Vivill who had been her thrall and suddenly he burst into tears and knelt beside her, hiding his face in her skirt. (Mitchison 165)

Yet more so than any other themes in *The Land the Ravens Found*, land giving and slavery tie Aud to war by undermining the consistency of her progression towards liberation and its implicit acknowledgement of her slaves as human beings. When a trading ship arrives in Caithness, Aud rejects Coll’s advice to “sell some of her own prisoners” in part because, she says, “‘to be sold out of one’s country is a hard thing,’” but dismisses the humanity of the African slaves aboard the vessel: “But of course blue men from Africa who did not speak any real tongue that one knew and huddled up like chilly sheep even on a summer day, they were different. Not people at all” (Mitchison 76-77). More significantly, Aud becomes directly complicit in perpetuating the slave trade. If in Scotland Aud supervises the captives whom her late husband or her son
bring to her Hall, in Iceland, she actually purchases slaves, which she justifies on the basis that “there [is] plenty of work for them to do” (Mitchison 150), and there is a certain irony to this action insofar as The Land the Ravens Found mentions this event right after it describes the grounding of her crosses, thereby linking Christianity to slavery. Indeed, this irony deepens when Aud later decides to purchase “one or two more women to wait on her and the girls. . .” (Mitchison 156). Aud herself loosens the bonds around the hands of the young woman she buys, a “‘lassie’” who according to her seller “‘is as obstinate as pig and. . .not for want of beating’” (Mitchison 156) and for whom Aud does not “let the [merchant] off without a hard bargain” (Mitchison 157), and it is upon discerning that Muirgheal is the young woman’s aunt and namesake that Aud tells her that she is “‘in God’s hand’” (Mitchison 157) which she will discover when she arrives at Aud’s Hall. Divine intervention, it seems, is responsible for uniting Muirgheal with her niece. But since Aud is the means of that union, her direct participation in the slave market and her implicit valuation of slaves as property in wanting a good deal on those whom she buys must also be the work of God. And although Aud tells her former bondswoman that she bought the young woman “‘with the thought that she would take a little bit of [Muirgheal’s] place’” and because the adolescent “‘reminded [her] of [her friend]’” (Mitchison 158), the fact is that she purchased the young woman in order to provide free labor: had the young woman not turned out to be Muirgheal’s niece, Aud would not have offered to release her immediately. As Muirgheal stipulates, twenty-four months must elapse before her niece leaves Aud’s household as a “‘free woman’” (Mitchison 158); another slave, one who has no connection to anyone with a personal connection to Aud, would likely serve her for a much longer time span before attaining freedom if Sunkwolf is any precedent (he is Aud’s slave for approximately half a decade before she emancipates him).

XVIII. “Aud brought up ANLAF-FEILAN, the son of Thor-stan the Red”

The Book of Settlements states that Auðr raises Anlaf-Feilan and that he later marries “Al-dis, the Barrey woman [Barra in the Hebrides], the daughter of Conal, the son of Stan-mod, the son of Aulwe Bairn-
carle” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 83). The medieval narrative then proceeds to identify Anlaf-Feilan’s descendants, as follows: his son Thord-Gelle and daughter Thora by his wife Al-dis; a few generations of Thord-Gelle’s descendants (which information appears to be incomplete); Thora’s son Thor-grim, his son Snorre-gode and her two other sons, Borc the Fat and Mar; Anlaf-Feilan’s presumably illegitimate daughter Wig-dis (whose own familial details also seem to be incomplete); his presumably illegitimate daughter Helga and her daughter; and his presumably illegitimate daughter Thor-rid and her daughter. That is, The Book of Settlements lists each of Anlaf-Feilan’s children along with his or her direct descendants in turn, the only exception to which is its introduction of both Thord-Gelle and Thora before naming the former’s sons and grandsons. That the text provides this information reflects the importance of genealogy and heritage. But the order in which Landnámabók lists these individuals also correlates to the inheritance schema of Grágás, Iceland’s first legal code, which expresses the patriarchal attitude of medieval Iceland. The first heir of a given man or woman is his or her legitimate son if he was not born into slavery (trans. Dennis, Foote and Perkins, Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás II 3); in the absence of such an individual, the first heir’s female counterpart assumes his spot in the line of inheritance (trans. Dennis, Foote and Perkins, Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás II 3). Grágás identifies seven other ranks of heirs before acknowledging the rights of illegitimate daughters to inherit from their parents.

In sum, then, Landnámabók’s reference to Anlaf-Feilan explicitly reveals two biographical details about him—namely, that his grandmother is responsible for his upbringing and that he marries Al-dis—while upholding patriarchy through the indirect means of conveying the importance of genealogy and inheritance law. The Land the Ravens Found elaborates upon Anlaf Feilan’s transition into adulthood under his

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221 “Hann feck Aldísar, ennar Barreysko, dóttor Conals, Steinmóðs sonar, Olves sonar Barna-karls” (Hauksbók II. xv. xiv).

222 I have omitted the mention of certain others, such as spouses and the children of spouses. In addition, Vigfusson and Powell’s translation states that Anlaf-Feilan has two illegitimate sons by the names of Grim and Ingioeld, but the Old Icelandic text that these scholars provide as the basis of their translations does not mention these individuals (see Hauksbók II. xv. xiv/Vigfusson and Powell 84).
grandmother’s supervision, turning his eventual union with Aldis (which I will discuss in Sections XIX and XX of this chapter) into a sort of culmination of that process and using that metamorphosis as a vehicle of subversion with respect to the themes of ancestry and heirdom. In so doing, the twentieth-century novel transforms that which in The Book of Settlements is arguably rote: Hauksbók’s focus upon Anlaf Feilan immediately follows three subsections that allude to his grandmother’s arrangement of the marriages of his sisters Thor-hild, Osc and Wig-dis, respectively, and to the additions to the family tree that ensue from these respective unions, giving the impression that it (the text) is perfunctorily identifying Auðr’s descendants according to the chronological order in which Thor-hild, Osc and Wig-dis not only marry but perhaps also were born in that its explicit statement that “Aud brought up ANLAF-FEILAN” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 83) suggests that he is the youngest of her grandchildren and as such is the last of them to be married (although in keeping with the superior status of men relative to women in Norse society, the work’s enumeration of his descendants is much more detailed than its descriptions of his sisters’ respective lines).

221 Technically speaking, in keeping with the respective inheritance schedules set by Norway’s Gaiapínt and Frostapínt, both of which came into existence as written code during the reign of Hakon the Good (935-61 A.D.) according to Snorri Sturlason (Larson 7) and which in the case of the former almost certainly reflects earlier tradition (Larson 7), Anlaf Feilan becomes Aud’s sole heir upon the death of his father since “[t]he first inheritance is that which a son takes from his father or a father from a son, if death removes the one or the other” and “[t]he second is that which is taken by a daughter and a son’s son, each [taking] one-half” (trans. Larson 108). By contrast, according to Iceland’s first legal code, Grágás (which presumably reflected the legal precedents in effect before it came into existence as a written statute in 1117-18), Aud’s primary heirs should be her brothers Beorn and Helgi Beolan since those who would have superceded them as her claimants (Thorstan, her son; a daughter; her father, Ketil, in that order) are either dead (in the case of Thorstan and Ketil) or never existed (a daughter). It is not clear when those regulations that distinguish Grágás as it was first drafted from the Norwegian codes. It is therefore entirely plausible that Iceland during the Settlement Period (870-930 A.D.) follows Norwegian inheritance law. In any case, the novel’s (mostly implicit) framing of Anlaf Feilan as Aud’s heir makes sense not only from a thematic perspective but from a twentieth-century point of view when it would be customary, given the deaths of one’s own children, to name one’s grandchildren as one’s heirs rather than one’s siblings.

224 “Auðr fœdde Óleif Feilan. . .” (Hauksbók II. xv. xiv).
By contrast, in The Land the Ravens Found, Anlaf Feilan is the first named character under the heading “Chief people in the book, and their ages at the beginning of the book” (Mitchison 9), a positioning that hints at his centrality to the narrative in which he features and that is perhaps not unexpected: as I mentioned towards the beginning of this chapter, Mitchison wrote The Land the Ravens Found for a younger audience; and this conception of her prospective readership accounts for the fact that from the perspective of genre, the novel is a Bildungsroman, among other things. Indeed, what is surprising (and therefore worth noting) is Aud’s positioning in this list of characters. After naming Anlaf Feilan, who, it tells us, is “nicknamed The Bull” (Mitchison 9), The Land the Ravens Found introduces “[h]is father: Thorstan the Red (Mitchison 9), followed by “[h]is mother: Thorrid: whose father was Eywind the Eastman and whose mother was Princess Rafurta of Ireland” (Mitchison 9). It is only then that the book introduces “[h]is grandmother, Thorstan’s Mother: Aud, nicknamed the Deep-Minded, widow of King Anlaf the White and daughter of Cetil Flatnose” (Mitchison 9). Given Aud’s own centrality to The Land the Ravens Found, which becomes readily apparent by the end of its first chapter, it seems odd in retrospect that the book should list her after Thorstan and especially Thorrid. It is true that Thorstan is situationally integral to the plot of the narrative insofar as his rule and his subsequent dispatchment serve as the catalyst for Aud’s emigration from Scotland to Iceland and that he thematically problematizes the glorification of war as someone who both perpetuates it and acknowledges its limitations; by contrast, his wife’s presence as an actual character in the book is arguably inessential to the unfolding of its narrative events or its theme. But neither Thorstan nor Thorrid appears as an actual character beyond approximately the first third and the first half of The Land the Ravens Found, respectively, and more to the point, neither Thorstan nor Thorrid rivals Aud with respect to her significance to the work as a whole.

Yet from another perspective, this ordering makes sense: it is conventional, when introducing an individual in the context of his familial relations, to identify members of his immediate clan before identifying extended family, and Anlaf Feilan’s parents are obviously more closely related to him than Aud,
although the text then contradicts this logic by listing her before naming any of Anlaf Feilan’s sisters (three of whom, unlike in Landnámabók, are explicitly younger than he is: he is thirteen when the book begins, Osc is twelve, Thorhilda is eleven, and Wigdis is nine). More significantly, the listing of “Chief people in the book, and their ages at the beginning of the book” defines almost every individual it includes in terms of her connection to Anlaf Feilan which in turn highlights the extent to which it subtly introduces the themes of genealogy and patriarchy in relation to him and, I would argue, sets up expectations of conventionality with respect to the text’s treatment of these themes that the book ultimately transgresses while affirming Áud’s own conformity to gender roles. Although The Land the Ravens Found begins by describing the way to Áud’s Hall in Caithness (and identifies it as such), the first character it actually introduces is Anlaf Feilan who is being disciplined by his grandmother for having accompanied “old Haurd to the Midsummer sacrifice and for letting himself be marked with the horse’s blood” (Mitchison 12). Anlaf Feilan’s attitude towards his grandmother’s chastisement not surprisingly typifies the ambivalence that many adolescents feel towards those in authority which is to say that even as he internally acknowledges the correctness of his grandmother’s stance, he then outwardly (by his facial expressions) and inwardly (by noting the subjective nature of her position, his parents’ contrary attitudes and the history of Áud’s outlook towards pagan violence) interrogates it:

Anlaf scowled and his under lip stuck out a little, but he didn’t say a word. He knew he was in the wrong, at any rate according to his grandmother, and equally he knew he’d do the same thing again when next he felt like it. . .

. . . . .His father, as he well knew, would not have scolded him for going with old Haurd to the Midsummer sacrifice and for letting himself he marked with the horse’s blood.

Nor would his mother have bothered to scold him, even if she had minded, and he wasn’t sure if she would have. She had joined the New Faith, certainly. But she never
seemed very sure about the edges between it and the Old Faith. Better be safe and have all the Gods on your side, for you never knew when you weren’t going to need them.

. . . And it wasn’t till his grandfather was killed that his grandmother had taken to the New Faith. It was time somebody said so. (Mitchison 11-12)

More importantly, Anlaf Feilan’s response to his upbraiding reveals the extent to which he identifies with the culture of violence that informs Norse ideals of masculinity. Beyond his clothes, the thirteen-year-old wears “on his belt. . .a quite practical sword, not very much lighter than a grown man’s. His father had given it to him, his father Thorstan the Red, who was away fighting the Scots” (Mitchison 12). But just as significantly, Anlaf Feilan’s indignation at being censured for having attended the “Midsummer sacrifice” and involved himself in its rites arises from his conviction, which Thorstan’s gift to his son affirms, that to witness such violence is to perpetuate a family tradition that is no less than his birthright:

He suspected that it was [his older sister Thorgerda] who had told his grandmother what he had been doing. And why shouldn’t he, anyway? A warrior’s son ought to see plenty of blood—Haurd had said that. Yes, and a warrior’s grandson! King Anlaf the White, his grandfather that he’d been named for, he’d seen plenty of sacrifices. (Mitchison 12)

Yet wanting to follow the precedent of his father and grandfather, however, is not Anlaf Feilan’s sole motivation for attending the “Midsummer sacrifice”: according to Aud herself, her grandson’s presence at the “Midsummer sacrifice” has as much to do with wanting to be disassociated from women in the eyes of others: “ ‘Anlaf, I think you went to the sacrifices, not out of belief in the old Gods, but out of pride. So that it would not be said you were ruled by women. No, listen, to me! So that some of the men, who are perhaps brave but certainly fools, should praise you’ ” (Mitchison 13).

Aud punishes Anlaf Feilan for his transgression by demanding that he “ ‘go and grind among the thralls and bond-women until [his] pride is gone’ ” (Mitchison 14), which assignment in itself, in addition to the young man’s reaction to it, emphasizes his current mindset. Althought Aud’s imperative indicates that
grinding is a chore performed by both men and women, the work is fundamentally a female task in that, as I have already discussed, in Norse society, slave women performed the labor of grinding (Foote and Wilson 76). Aud’s punishment therefore relegates Anlaf Feilan, if temporarily, to the status of those with whom he least wishes to be identified; that he “[shoves] one of the woman [sic] away and [takes] her place” (Mitchison 15) is an act of physical assault that both reflects his contempt for those whose company he must presently keep and affirms the culture of war embraced by his forebears in that capturing and enslaving people typically involves actual force, and he himself is intent upon defining his adulthood through the perpetuation of that tradition: “When would he be old enough to go fighting with his father? Next summer, or at least the summer after that. Then he would be a man and nobody could stop him doing what he chose, not even his grandmother” (Mitchison 15). Yet if the penalty that Aud imposes upon Anlaf Feilan forces him to perform physical labor, it does not subject him to corporal punishment, and if it does not necessarily accomplish that which it ought—namely, that her grandson excise his “pride” through physical exertion—it does force him to acknowledge, through first-hand experience, that the very labours performed by the slave women in his grandmother’s Hall on a daily basis challenge his strength:

Now his shoulders were beginning to ache. But he wouldn’t stop, wouldn’t give in. This was what the bond-woman [sic] had to do every day. One of them went over and took some milk from the cow, milking her into a wooden pail bound with withies and speaking to her gently in Scots speech; then she asked Anlaf if he wanted to feed the calf. He shook his head; he wasn’t going to be pitied or let off! (Mitchison 16)

And he finds, once released from his penance, that he wishes for maternal comfort even as he resists its ministrations, thinking himself “too old” to avail himself of it:

And then Muirgheal his nurse came through the curtains; she spoke his name once and gestured with her head. He got up and found that his hands and arms were shaking. He
went over to her and suddenly he wanted to take her hand. Only he was too old; he
mustn’t show that now. (Mitchison 17)

Aud’s upbringing of her grandson is not always so explicit and hands-on: her influence over him is
often subtle and indirect, particularly when it dismantles (and redefines) that which he inherits, as the
novel’s deployment of imagery suggests. After the initial excitement of his return has dissipated, Thorstan,
along with Coll, goes into his mother’s Hall, and he and his family settle themselves as follows:

Now [Aud] and her son and her son-in-law [sic] were all sitting together on the high seat
that was deep and roomy, cushioned with soft furs. Thorrid was sitting on a cushion at
Thorstan’s feet, her cheek against his hand. Thorgerd was leaning over, pulling Coll by the
ears and he was reaching up to kiss her. The younger girls were standing round. (Mitchison
21)

Aud, Thorstan and Coll are situated on “the high seat” which “was the rightful seat (ondvegi) of the owner of
the house, conventionally but misleadingly called the ‘high seat,’ in English. . . .” (Foote and Wilson 160)

and it is from this vantage point that she, after upbraiding her own son for his insensitivity to the young
captive she has just met, elicits the latter’s word that he will not attempt to flee by appealing to his logic and
to his own self-interest through her acknowledgement of his humanity as a Scot and as a Christian. That is,
Aud, in treating Vivill humanely, demonstrates that she does in fact perceive her son’s captives as people,
not only as an individual but as the head of her Hall, and this conception of slaves as human beings is not lost
on Anlaf Feilan: it is no coincidence that he attributes his discernment of the abuse that Vivill endures at the
hands of the other captives to the fact that the Scot “had suddenly become a person to him” (Mitchison 32)

225 Margaret Clunies Ross’ discussion of Icelandic land-taking as a masculine ritual, which I summarized in
Chapter One, implicitly indicates that the owners of high seats were typically male, as her references to the
high-seat pillars that settlers heave into the ocean upon glimpsing Iceland may suggest.
through their experience as sparring partners, having been present during his grandmother’s first exchange with Vivill.

Anlaf Feilan’s development, like that of most individuals, is by no means linear; despite his experience grinding corn with the female slaves in his grandmother’s household, he rejects his father’s suggestion that he “‘could be learning to read’” (Mitchison 28) on the basis that he is “‘not a priest or a woman!’” (Mitchison 28), and the fact that Thorstan recommends becoming literate as an alternative to the raiding that Anlaf Feilan would prefer to do but is not yet old enough to experience emphasizes his refusal to acquire a skill that he perceives as feminine. Given this context, it is not surprising that when Runolf, who has just returned to Aud’s Hall after going on his first raid, brags about having slain someone, Anlaf Feilan thinks that “[i]t would be wonderful to have an enemy one could hate enough to kill, even if it were only a hate that went on for the time of the fighting” (Mitchison 36). Furthermore, in questioning the relationship he has established with Vivill, Anlaf Feilan also interrogates the correctness of Aud’s perception of the slave as a generically female perspective:

He had become friendly enough with Vivill during these last two months. Now he was not so sure. Vivill had been an enemy, had been fought and partly killed. For wasn’t being a thrall the same as being only partly a man? So he could think of Vivill as an enemy still. It was only his grandmother who didn’t. And what if she was wrong? If that was only a woman’s way of looking at things?

. . . . It was all the fault of the Scots. Being there at all. In this land that might have had no enemies in it. The Scots and the Irish! Pretending to be kings, them! Not like his grandfather, Anlaf the White, King of Dublin, King by conquest. Only that wouldn’t work either, for his mother had been a King’s granddaughter. But it was the other kind of king. Her mother was Princess Rafurta, daughter of the Irish King Ceaval. Sometimes Anlaf had been proud of that too. But not now. Now he hated the whole thing. (Mitchison 36)
Indeed, Anlaf Feilan himself posits these ideas as the impetus for “[doing] something that he never intended doing” (Mitchison 36)—namely, taking Muirgheal’s cross and hanging it from the “Hall rafters” (Mitchison 37)—an act for which, in his estimation, the resident cleric bears some responsibility by “asking him to come to the chapel. As though it were a favour! . . . pulling at him, speaking of love” (Mitchison 36). That Anlaf Feilan should attempt to put literal distance between himself and a palpable symbol of Christianity by putting it out of easy reach is not surprising in light of Aud’s sense of connectedness to Vivill through their shared Christianity and the association that he himself makes between his frustrated confusion about his relationship with the slave and the priest’s words. But Anlaf Feilan’s thoughts about his relationship with Vivill also concern his ambivalence towards his maternal heritage, and the equivocal nature of his feelings towards his ancestry on his mother’s side relates to his antagonism towards Christianity insofar as he links it to femininity in opposition to that which he thus far considers to be the Norse masculine ideal. As the clause “[o]n feast days Aud took Anlaf with her to the chapel” (Mitchison 30) indicates, Anlaf Feilan involuntarily attends mass with his grandmother where his eleven-year-old cousin, Hauscoll (who attends mass at the behest of his own mother, Anlaf Feilan’s sister Thorgerd) is the only other free Scandinavian male present:

“[B]ut Haurd and the rest of the Norsemen did not go [to mass]” (Mitchison 30). Significant too is the identity of the cross’ owner: Anlaf Feilan’s nurse Muirgheal, the very woman whose comfort he had wanted after the exhaustions of grinding, and on whose lap “[w]hen [he] was quite a little boy he used to sit . . . and

226 Yrp also attends mass on these occasions, and he is technically a slave, although the novel’s language at times implies that his status is less clear-cut. For example, The Land the Ravens Found states that “Muirgheal and Yrp went [to church], and all the girls . . .” (Mitchison 30) while pointing out in its next sentence that “[s]ome of the thralls went, even if there was no room for them inside the chapel” (Mitchison 30). The novel’s specific reference to Muirgheal’s and Yrp’s attendance at mass apart from its allusion to that of the other slaves suggests that the former two individuals occupy a nebulous social space between slave and non-slaves, one that in this particular context situates them as de facto members of Aud’s family: in identifying who goes to mass, The Land the Ravens Found first names Aud and Anlaf Feilan; then his sister Thorgerd, her son Hauscoll and “her two little daughters” (Mitchison 30); then Muirgheal, Yrp and Anlaf Feilan’s other sisters. It is only after mentioning these people as distinct individuals that the book refers collectively to the presence of the “thralls” (Mitchison 30) at church.

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stare at this cross and sometimes dab at it softly with his finger” (Mitchison 18). It is therefore predictable that Anlaf Feilan is thrilled to be accompanying Coll on the post-Yule deer hunt, so much that he is “too pleased to keep still” because “[h]unting [is] half-way to war” (Mitchison 45).

Yet it is Aud and Vivill whom Anlaf Feilan emulates after Thorstan dies at the hands of rebellious Scots. Just as Aud gave up paganism and its inherent fetishization of violence after the death of her husband, so does her grandson seek existing alternatives to war when asked by Coll if he “ ‘[means] to hold the land that [his] father took from the Scots?’ ” (Mitchison 68). In the conversation that ensues from this query (which dialogue I have earlier discussed with respect to Aud’s rhetorical mode) and that concludes with Anlaf Feilan deciding to emigrate from Scotland to Iceland instead of attempting to maintain the control over Soctland that his father had established, Thorstan’s son, as his grandmother has already acknowledged (“ ‘You will be a man of sense, my Bull!’ ” [Mitchison 68]) takes Vivill’s lead in considering the circumstances in which he finds himself and deciding to act with prudence in accordance with them. But just as importantly, Anlaf Feilan’s dialogue concerning his future—and those of his followers—also begins to redefine the way in which he perpetuates family tradition. When Anlaf Feilan first meets in counsel with Aud and Coll to discuss that which he should do in the aftermath of Thorstan’s slaying and the matriarch suggests immigrating to Iceland, her grandson queries as to whether “ ‘there [would] be glory—in it’ ” as he does “ ‘not want to let go [his] father’s share of glory’ ” (Mitchison 68). That is, Anlaf Feilan still wishes to perpetuate the spirit of Thorstan’s legacy, if not his actual reign, and implicit in his question is the idea that “glory” derives from battle and conquest. Aud’s answer, that “ ‘[i]t is a glorious thing . . . to overcome the long waves of the sea’ ” and that he must keep in mind “ ‘the reason why men first sailed from Noway to Iceland’ ” (Mitchison 68-69) prompts her grandson to seek further knowledge about Harald Fairhair, to which she responds by saying that “ ‘she would tell him after his father was buried’ ” (Mitchison 69), the significance of which is not the break in conversation itself but the circumstances under which it resumes. First, the exchange continues between Anlaf Feilan and his grandmother alone. Second, when
Anlaf Feilan wishes to continue talking about Harald Fairhair, he finds his grandmother “tallying up skeins of wool, putting anotched tally stick in with each bundle, so as to know just what she had” (Mitchison 69). That Aud is counting “skeins of wool” emphasizes the personal traits that she nominally and actually embodies while reinforcing her connection to domesticity. Icelandic landnámskonur from Norway—from which both sides of Anlaf Feilan’s family originate—“brought to Iceland the age-old skills of spinning and weaving. . .” (Jochens, Women in Old Norse Society 135) where their production of wool (vaðmal) “replaced silver as the standard commodity against which other products were evaluated within Iceland” (Jochens, Women in Old Norse Society 134). Somewhat anachronistically, given that it did not become Iceland’s currency until the conclusion of the eleventh century, the vaðmal calls attention to Aud’s nickname, which The Land the Ravens Found renders as “the Deep-Minded” but has also been translated as “the Deep-Wealthy.” Symbolically speaking, the “skeins of wool” are arguably a palpable symbol of the wealth she possesses that The Land the Ravens Found itself equates with her “deep-mindedness.” This moment, however, is adjunct to that in which Aud resumes her conversation with Anlaf Feilan which, significantly, takes place on “the high seat” (Mitchison 69) where both individuals sit side by side. Aud tells Anlaf Feilan that her own husband and her “two brothers” (Mitchison 70) departed from Norway in order to maintain their liberty after Harald Fairhair came to power; his reply reveals some skepticism as to whether, in light of his late father’s alliance with Earl Sigurd, Harald Fairhair poses such a threat. It is only when, having established that Sigurd may not extend his alliance with Thorstan to his son, and having been told of Aud’s “own father[’s]” (Mitchison 70) departure for Norway—“as King Harald’s man” (Mitchison 70) no less—and his decision to “cut adrift” (Mitchison 70) at the cost of becoming “‘a wolf’s head, an outlaw and an exile’” (Mitchison 71) in order to preserve his liberty that Anlaf Feilan elects to immigrate to Iceland. That is, The Land the Ravens Found contextualizes Anlaf Feilan’s decision to leave for Iceland instead of defending his late father’s Scottish domains as a considered choice that reflects his status not only as Aud’s equal, as their location on “the high seat” indicates, thereby mitigating her authority, but more significantly, as “the high seat” also underscores,
as her heir insofar as he both expresses signs of the characteristic that defines her and chooses to carry on the traditions of her family. Indeed, Anlaf Feilan’s later exchange with Haurd underscores the extent to which the former is his grandmother’s heir in that he asserts that there perhaps is a “wiser” (Mitchison 72) option than fighting the Scots, and the older Norseman points to the ways in which the younger man has not followed tradition: “‘This comes of the New Faith!’ Haurd said. ‘If we had got you for Thor, the way we should have, then you would have had other thoughts. But you were stopped from learning the signs and taking the oaths and now you are not like a Viking’s son!’” (Mitchison 72).

As I have already discussed in some detail, Anlaf Feilan, Aud, Coll and Cathal, the half-Scottish expert in the knowledge of “trees and timber” (Mitchison 73) go into the woods in order to assess which trunks and branches will provide the best wood for the ship in which the first three will sail to Iceland; and it need only be pointed out here that this expedition represents Anlaf Feilan’s first actual step towards perpetuating the traditions of his grandmother’s branch of the family. Similarly, it is worth pointing out that while Aud writes to her brothers to inform them of her eventual arrival in the country where they have settled, Anlaf Feilan “[stands] watching her,” wondering if “he too ought too learn” (Mitchison 75)—that is, he reconsiders his earlier stance that to be literate is to be like “‘a priest or a woman’” (Mitchison 28).

Nevertheless, maturity does not happen all at once; the inconsistency with which Anlaf Feilan demonstrates this quality occurs when he discovers, to his surprise, that Yrp knows all about the building of the Safe Farer when the latter warns him to say nothing of it to the “three armed riders” (Mitchison 77) who have visited Aud on behalf of Earl Sigurd and who, having left her Hall, are coming towards him:

Anlaf was coming out of the forest when Yrp ran up to him and said: “Make sure you say nothing about the ship, Anlaf! Nor anything else!” There was no time to ask any questions, for one of the riders had trotted up and greeted Anlaf, saying that the Earl Sigurd was grieved to hear of the death of his old friend, but glad that all was going well with his son. Could he be of any help? Vengeance was doubtless in preparation?
Anlaf did some quick thinking. Yrp must have meant something. And it was not even as if he had ever spoken of his project with Yrp! Doubtless these men were trying to find out his purpose.

He answered with all courtesy that he was indeed glad of the Earl’s friendship, but he did not need to call on it so far. Perhaps a time would come—yes, he had his plans. Nothing would be kept from Earl Sigurd. While he was speaking Anlaf sat as straight as he could. He was glad that he had lately changed his small sword of a year ago for a man’s sword. It was a sword that had belonged to his grandfather; it had been put away for a time, but now its edge was newly set to a killing sharpness. It had been heavy at first, but every week it seemed to come easier to him.

The riders thanked him for his fair words. Yes, they had eaten, must be on their way. Soon they were riding off. (Mitchison 77-78)

To the extent that Anlaf Feilan’s response to the rider is the result of his “quick thinking,” he answers as his grandmother’s grandson. Anlaf Feilan, however, is thankful during this encounter that he is armed with Anlaf the White’s recently sharpened sword, and it is not coincidental that the former’s identification with his namesake, which metonymically is to identify with the culture of war that the dead man represented as Ireland’s conqueror, should, when he asks Yrp how he knows about the ship, lead first to feelings that posit Aud, Muirgheal and Yrp in opposition to himself—the first two as the feminine other; the latter as the subjugated enemy—and second, to an act of violence against a living creature of the very same species as that which served as the “Midsummer sacrifice”:

Yrp stood by the horse’s head. It was a small horse with a thick coat and round body, more of a pony but right for this rough country. He was looking down, speaking with difficulty. “Why did you never tell me yourself, Anlaf? he said. “You might have trusted me!”
“But you know!”

“Of course. Your grandmother told my mother.”

“I see,” said Anlaf. He was angry. His grandmother might have said to him that she
was telling Muirgheal! These women! And now Yrp seemed to be blaming him.

“You could have told me,” said Yrp again.

“I have told none of the thralls!” said Anlaf and kicked his horse and went on to the
Hall, the anger still in him, not once looking back to see how Yrp was taking this.

(Mitchison 78)

And just as Haurd’s comments to Anlaf Feilan concerning the latter’s decision not to defend his father’s
Scottish territory earlier reveals the extent to which he has distanced himself from the pagan rites of his
grandfather, so now do his exchanges with Aud, and her reaction to them, reflect the extent to which, in
this moment, he little resembles her in his own thoughts:

Anlaf looked at the ground. “You never said to me, Grandmother--” he began, and stopped.

“What?” said Aud.

“That you were going to tell Muirgheal. About the ship.”

“But of course!” said Aud. “When have I hidden anything from Muirgheal?”

“And she told Yrp!”

“You are not in any danger there, Anlaf Feilan!” said Muirgheal rather sharply.

Anlaf walked away, over to the Hall. His grandmother shook her head. “Sometimes he has
sense,” she said, “and sometimes no sense at all”

“He will grow up,” said Muirgheal, “and once we are in the new land all this
between him and Yrp will stop having any meaning. It is hard for them both now.”

(Mitchison 80)
Yet the next time that Aud “[sits] among cushions on the high seat” (Mitchison 82), Anlaf Feilan is next to it, a positioning that hints at his later conduct. It is on this occasion that Aud announces her intent to sail to Iceland, frees her slaves and doles out to them gold and gems. After Aud gives Yrp “a narrow gold bracelet and a gold ring with a carved seal stone in it” (Mitchison 84), he “[shoves] his clenched hand with the ring on it in front of Anlaf’s face” and remarks, “‘Ah, my foster brother, I do not think I shall let you make me afraid now!’” (Mitchison 84); and in his response, the latter resembles his grandmother: “Anlaf chucked up his head proudly; there was a kind of half threat here. Perhaps it should be answered in kind. And yet he knew it was justice. He had no right now to be angry with Yrp. No right with a free man” (Mitchison 84).

For one thing, Anlaf Feilan makes the choice to turn away from the potential for violence. But for another, in understanding Yrp’s words as “justice,” he comprehends that which his grandmother dispensed as an owner of slaves: “. . .the thralls knew that, at least, they would get justice from Aud their mistress” (Mitchison 30).

Indeed, Anlaf Feilan’s conduct at the launching of the Safe Farer is both a reversal of previous deportment on his part and a follow-up of Aud’s intentions that paradoxically precedes her own actions. Earlier in the novel (as I have discussed with respect to Vivill), Anlaf Feilan, jealous of his sisters’ attention to Yrp, trips him while he is juggling at their request. But after Yrp provides “a song-hallowing” (Mitchison 95) for the Safe Farer, Anlaf Feilan wishes to convey his appreciation for the music. Beaten to the punch by Coll who tells the performer that his “‘was a fine song. . .a free man’s song!’” (Mitchison 95), Anlaf Feilan pulls his “dirk out of his belt and [shoves] it, wordlessly, hilt first, at Yrp” (Mitchison 96). Given Aud’s announcement to her newly liberated slaves that she will disseminate swords to them before departing for Iceland, Anlaf Feilan takes her lead; yet in actually offering such a gift, he simultaneously anticipates Aud’s own disbursement of similar weapons.

And yet, Anlaf Feilan’s gift to Yrp has more import than that which I have already conveyed. For one thing, Aud, in many cases, returns to her former slaves the swords that had been taken from them
when they became captives, so the weapons she hands out collectively amount to a restoration of confiscated property, while the sword that Anlaf Feilan gives to Yrp is a bona fide gift. But for another, in light of the book’s earlier reference to the sword that Anlaf Feilan now carries, it may be argued that the “dirk” that Anlaf Feilan gives to Yrp is the very one that once belonged to Anlaf the White; if so, then what is a metonym for conquest that inherently posits the victor and the defeated in opposition to each other becomes instead an emblem of alliances between equals. And in fact, the stowing of the Safe Farer signals the discontinuation of Anlaf the White’s legacy in an ironic way. On the face of it, the removal of “the carved boards” from over “the high seat” pragmatically allows them to be stored as cargo aboard the Safe Farer; that they are “the luck of the house” makes them akin to the high seat pillars that many Norwegian natives hurled into the sea so as to discern where they should settle, “a practice which indicates in some measure the symbolic importance of such objects. . . .” (Foote and Wilson 160). Yet the verb “dismantle” as it applies to the “carved boards” fittingly describes that which is happening to the familial traditions represented by Anlaf the White: the “carved boards” depict the former king of Ireland in his encapsulating moment of militaristic glory when he epitomizes the Norse masculine ideal, so the actual “dismantling” of his image from “the high seat” is tantamount to a metaphorical “dismantling” of the traditions that he once perpetuated. And what is more, the circumstances in which this “dismantling” occurs heightens the import of this moment: on the last day of preparations for the Safe Farer’s departure from Scotland which is synonymous with Anlaf Feilan’s exodus into self-exile. Indeed, Anlaf Feilan’s final moments on Scottish soil emphasize this change. Anlaf Feilan stops by “his father’s grave, to promise his father that he would be a worthy son. But his heart was not there but already away on the ship” (Mitchison 98). Anlaf Feilan’s passion is no longer for war; rather, he now desires escape from its possibility which Iceland represents.

To the extent that war, as The Land the Ravens Found depicts it, posits the Norse and the Scots in opposition to each other, Anlaf Feilan still evinces thought along these lines: when Muirgheal tells her version of how Iceland was settled—the details of which she reveals as answers to his questions and which
frames the Norse individual who according to Aud was the first Icelandic settler as an aggressor who
supplants the non-violent Irish priests who came to the island before him—Anlaf Feilan disdainfully and
scornfully, with anger, dismisses her account as the culmination of “‘[t]hralls’ stories!’”:

She lifted her head and said: “Aye, but there were folk in Iceland long before your Floki
and his mates came. My own folk were there.”

“That’s what you say, Muirgheal!” said Aud, “but prove it!”

“I think Floki and his friends tried to make it difficult to prove. They were not
above killing the ones they found in the new land. And a priest does not fight back.”

“Do you think there were really priests, Muirgheal?” asked Anlaf. “How could they
have come?”

“They came in their little light curraghs, blown by the breath of God,” said
Muirgheal. “And a curragh will stand what will whelm a ship because she dances over the
waves where a ship will fight them. They went there, but few of them came back. And
when they did, they did not speak of it much. They were not thinking of land—and
butter.” 227

“But surely our folk did not kill them?” said Anlaf.

“Floki and Faxe and Thorwolf Butter and all of them, they were in the Old Faith,
yes and Ingwolf and Heorleif too, and it was no matter to them, the slaying of a priest or
so. But some of them had thralls out of Ireland or Scotland and so the story came back.”

“Thralls’ stories!” said Anlaf angrily, but Muirgheal looked at him and smiled.

(Mitchison 104-105)

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227 “. . .one of [Floki’s] crew, trying to persuade the girl he wanted to marry to come out with him, had said
that every grass blade [in Iceland] dripped with butter” (Mitchison 104).
In fact, it is perhaps in dealing with the tribulations of the *Safe Farer* that Anlaf Feilan most saliently demonstrates the extent to which he still embodies paradox with respect to his position as his paternal grandparents’ heir. Sometime after Aud glimpses Iceland, Haurd complains to Anlaf that Thorgerd “‘[f]ool of a Christian that she is, . . . said *Safe Farer* had done well without the sacrifice’” and that “‘she may have waked—anything—saying that!’” (Mitchison 110). That Anlaf Feilan turns down the corners of his mouth, thinking that his sister’s remark “seemed to him too an unlucky thing to say” (Mitchison 110), and then “[touches] lightly with one finger on the cold iron of his knife” (Mitchison 110) shows that he has yet to eschew fully the warrior culture that Anlaf the White embodied even as his response aloud to Haurd is meant not only to raise doubt as to the effect of his sister’s words but implicitly to quell any quarrel that might now arise between Haurd and Thorgerd, knowing, as he does, the tempestuous nature of their relationship with each other: “‘Maybe it was not heard’” (Mitchison 110). Haurd, however, insists that he “‘saw a great seal listening’” who “‘may have told—Those Ones under the water’” (Mitchison 110). More significantly, he asserts that “‘[i]f [Thorstan] had been here he would have made a sacrifice, in spite of all the women!’” (Mitchison 110), thereby positing the feminine in opposition to male leadership, and Anlaf Feilan’s response both reflects his hesitancy to perpetuate pagan ritual and his simultaneous desire to define himself in terms of his father: “‘But—but what kind of sacrifice?’ Anlaf asked, glancing round in case someone might have heard” (Mitchison 110).

Indeed, Anlaf Feilan’s concern with that which others might have gleaned from his exchanges deepens when, after he alludes to his grandmother as reason for objecting to the insinuation behind Haurd’s statement that “‘[t]here are some in this crew that wouldn’t be missed’” but that “‘perhaps They would content themselves with a sheep’”(Mitchison 110), the latter cuts hims off with a reminder that he is “‘Thorstan Red’s son’” and “‘[has] only to say the word’” (Mitchison 110):

Then Anlaf saw that he was being watched. The stroke oar on the Scots side was Vivill, and he had heard—something perhaps. You could see in his look. And if he had--? There were
two ways of thinking about all this. Vivill was in the New Faith, had made no sacrifices; and what had come of that? He had been beaten in battle and made into a thrall! Supposing that had been the punishment Thor put on him for withholding the sacrifice? Vivill at least has no right to judge me, thought Anlaf, and said to Haurd: “There may be something in this. But we have only five sheep and a ram left.” (Mitchison 110-11)

Anlaf Feilan’s thoughts prove that he is yet his father’s son, if somewhat ironically: he still cares about others’ opinions of him, which motivated his presence at the “Midsummer sacrifice” according to his grandmother, yet in this case, the individual whose assessment matters to him is Vivill who as a Christian and as a favorite of Aud’s stands in for the matriarch herself. In addition, Anlaf Feilan’s supposition that Vivill’s fate may result from godly punishment—that of the deity known for his violence as I discussed in the previous chapter—indicates that he has not discarded his pagan beliefs. Yet Anlaf Feilan’s thoughts exemplify logical analysis based upon empirical observations that are similar to those he earlier evinced in response to Aud’s careful prompts. It is therefore fitting that his reply to Haurd as to whether he will or will not make a sacrifice is noncommittal (“ ‘We’ll see’ ” [Mitchison 111]), and over a day later, when the Safe Farer is fortunate to avoid serious problems after it comes into contact with an underwater boulder, Anlaf Feilan’s indecision still reflects preoccupation with others’ judgment as well as the sort of skepticism that emerges from empirical thinking:

Anlaf kept on wondering about the sacrifice. If one had any notion of the ways of the gods! He knew what his grandmother would say and what the priest would say. But was it certain they knew? Haurd and Steinarr kept on watching him. And so, he thought, did Vivill. If only it could have been done without any of the ones knowing who would not want it! But perhaps after all there would be no need, perhaps it had been an ordinary seal and no messenger, perhaps in a few days they would be safe and snug on dry land and the whole thing forgotten. (Mitchison 114)
As I have described earlier, the Safe Farer ultimately incurs such damage that those aboard must, as Coll commands, “‘bail for [their] lives!’” (Mitchison 118), and it is in the midst of this crisis that Anlaf Feilan appeals to the pagan gods for their support:

Haurd was one of the bailers, scooping furiously at the threatening water. Through the noise Anlaf heard him shout, “I promise a sacrifice!” Then, through all the splashing and yelling he shouted up to Anlaf: “Your fault! Not sacrificing when I said! Anlaf, make a promise!”

Anlaf, still with all his weight on the steering oar, fumbled with his right hand at the thick gold bracelet on his left arm, his father’s last present to him, and wrenched it off, grazing the skin. “Help!” he cried, “help us!” and threw it into the sea. (Mitchison 118)

On the one hand, Anlaf Feilan’s sacrifice reinforces his identification with his grandfather’s warrior heritage in that it is a capitulation to Haurd, and its object is itself a symbol of war as an object of plunder. On the other hand, Anlaf Feilan also prevents Haurd from drowning Vivill as a sacrifice to the Norse deities, and in the aftermath of the wreck, he explicitly disavows any interest in sacrificing a human life to the pagan gods and qualifies his own belief in them through his deployment of the subjunctive in defining his own actions: “‘...[i]f the old Gods were there in the sea and if they wanted a sacrifice—and I am not saying they did, Vivill—they got it right enough, for I threw them my arm ring, the one my father gave me before he said good-bye the last time’” (Mitchison 122-23). But more importantly, Anlaf Feilan attempts to transform his actions into a legacy of non-violence. When Vivill expresses his appreciation to Anlaf Feilan for “‘saving his] life,’” the latter says that if the former “‘really [wants] to thank [him],’” he should “‘not be having too much of a feud with Haurd’” (Mitchison 122). In addition, he subverts the import of his sacrifice as an emblem of conquest by redefining it as a shared contribution from himself and Vivill that marks an end to the division between them based upon their respective fathers’ history of conflict with each other:
“Your arm ring,” said Vivill and stood silent a moment. Then he said: “Anlaf Thorstan’s son, I must tell you a thing about your arm ring. It was a ring that your father took from my father after he killed him. And whenever I saw that arm ring on you I hated you for it. And now it is gone.”

“Into deep sea,” said Anlaf, “maybe—from us both. So you have no more need to hate me, Vivill.”

“No,” said Vivill, “no more need. We have started fresh.” (Mitchison 123)

Indeed, such paradox manifes itself in the contrast between that which Anlaf Feilan does next and his physical form. The Safe Farer arrives in Iceland during the day; that evening, Aud notices “a dozen men coming along the beach towards them, with swords drawn” whom she takes to be her new “‘neighbours’” (Mitchison 124) and that Anlaf Feilan has already taken the initiative to walk in their direction and introduce himself on behalf of his fellow travelers, an action that is intended not only to allay their fears of having been invaded, as their readiness to defend themselves indicates, but also gestures towards alliance rather than towards enmity. In other words, Anlaf Feilan’s first spontaneous and independent demonstration of leadership is synonymous with an offering of friendship which by its nature associates him with the rites of civilization and therefore with the domestic realm. Yet the figure that he cuts, as perceived by his grandmother, is that of “a young warrior,” even though, she thinks to herself, “it need not be the warrior pattern of life for him” (Mitchison 125).

In fact, despite both his earlier conversation with Vivill and his exchanges with the new “‘neighbours,’” Anlaf Feilan not only physically resembles a raider but cannot help continuing to think like one. As has been mentioned, Aud accepts her brother Beorn’s invitation to live with him during her first winter in Iceland; it is there that Vivill meets the orphaned Signy, a distant relative of the host whom his spouse Geflach has raised. Upon learning that Vivill and Signy intend to marry—a union of which Aud and Beorn very much approve—Anlaf Feilan is “a little surprised and even annoyed” because “Vivill had taken
another step towards wiping out the whole fact of being a Scot and a prisoner and a conquered thrall” (Mitchison 144). Aud’s affections for Vivill notwithstanding, his eventual marriage to Signy means that his connection to her extended family will have legal and therefore social standing which in turn will provide him with stature within Icelandic society. And Anlaf Feilan conveys his feelings by conducting himself in a way that is not only juvenile but that also violates Signy’s autonomy, thereby creating a parallel between him and his father in that his seizure of Vivill’s betrothed is not unlike his father’s seizure of those whom he captured: “He had not paid much attention to girls, but now, in order to tease Vivill he began to make silly jokes about Signy and grab and kiss her in the dark” (Mitchison 144). Notably, Anlaf Feilan’s behavior engenders a response from Vivill that reinstates their adversarial stance toward each other: as the feeling of his blade “[burning] his hand, ready to jump out of its sheath” implies (Mitchison 144), the former slave wants to attack Thorstan’s son but refrains in part because “it [depends] very much on Aud what land he [is] to get” (Mitchison 144), and he clearly does not wish to risk losing her favor by assaulting her grandson.

By the following summer, when he and Aud attend the annual Thing, the paradox that Anlaf Feilan yet embodies literally matures and deepens. Physically, he has attained the height of an adult male while his facial hair, according to his grandmother, likens him to his father (Mitchison 154). But intellectually, he resembles his grandmother in terms of both his abilities and his inclinations which distance him from war while more closely identifying him with society. First, Anlaf Feilan replies to “his elders. . .in few and sensible words, sometimes wittily. . .” (Mitchison 154). These traits, ironically enough, earn him the respect that he has consciously attempted to gain earlier in the novel; that they do so underscores the fact that he is his grandmother’s grandson not only because his prudence and sense of intelligent humor prove that he, like her, is “Deep-Minded” but because her mental acuity also gains her the admiration of others at the Thing: “Deep-minded indeed they found her” (Mitchison 154).

Second, Anlaf Feilan also pays attention “to talk about law cases and [asks] questions, so that he [will] soon pick up the sense of the Icelandic laws” (Mitchison 154-155). Because the focus of the Thing is its
legal proceedings, it is natural that Anlaf Feilan should take an interest in them. Yet because rules underpin the civility and stability of any given community, his desire to become acquainted with Iceland’s statutes aligns him with domesticity while the phrase “pick up the sense,” which indicates his determination to comprehend the reasoning behind these regulations, links that motivation to the empirical thinking he did earlier on in the book’s narrative. But Anlaf Feilan’s motivation to understand Icelandic code is arguably reflective of his respect for it, and as such, it demonstrates the way in which he resembles Aud in yet another way: one of the reasons that she is present at the Thing is to make public her land claim, both on her own behalf and on behalf of those to whom she has dispensed land, “so that everything should be within the law” (Mitchison 148).

Third, Anlaf Feilan “also [listens] to those who were making up verses, and in a year or two he would doubtless be trying that too” (Mitchison 155). Norse poetry is akin to, if not synonymous with, song. Moreover, the composition of verse or song lyrics is the other side of the coin, so to speak, with respect to performing one or the other in that both are acts of metrical production. That Anlaf Feilan’s intention is to be able to produce verse is therefore significant in that doing so would be an emulation of Yrp which in turn would further eradicate any distinction between the two young men based upon the former status of Muirgheal’s son as a slave since it was as such that he sang and played his harp, at Aud’s request, in her Hall. In blurring his identity with Yrp’s, then, Anlaf Feilan emulates Aud who in her own treatment of Vivill and Muirgheal while they are still her “property” destabilizes their identities as slaves. And given Aud’s affinity for music, Anlaf Feilan’s goal of creating poetry means that he shares with her an interest in the arts that as manifestations of culture connect him to community.

Fourth, Anlaf Feilan’s final activity at the Thing is to purchase “a red leather bridle” because he feels that “his horse [deserves] a present after all it [has] been through” (Mitchison 155). Anlaf Feilan’s treatment of his horse emphasizes the extent to which everything else he pursues at the Thing aligns him with Aud in
the way that it contrasts with earlier depictions in the novel of how he has behaved towards his own horse (kicking it) and how others have dealt with other horses (sacrificing them).

Indeed, Anlaf Feilan resembles Aud even as he makes choices that outwardly appear to de-emphasize her own values. While watching his grandmother compose messages to his sisters, Olof and Groa, he regrets never having learned how to write and attempts to do so before abandoning his practice because “his hands [seem] too big now” (Mitchison 159). Yet the contextual reasons for deciding not to bother with gaining literacy are grounded in sound logic that privileges the benefit of his development of other skills that, as we have seen, Aud cherishes:

There was so much else to do and after all there would always be a priest or someone who would do any writing for him that he needed. He would rather learn to play the harp well; when Yrp was away there would be no one who did it better than he did and it would be worth really trying. (Mitchison 159)

But beyond Aud’s influence over his thinking abilities and standards, Anlaf Feilan shows himself to be her successor insofar as he gradually picks up her responsibilities. The autumn after the Thing, Aud starts to “[feel] oddly tired. . .and [begins] to lie long in bed in the mornings, a thing she never used to do” and “[t]hat [means] that Anlaf [has] to take control more and more, especially now that Coll [is] spending most of his time in his own Hall, which was just finished” (Mitchison 159); approximately twenty-one months later, the moment has come for him to “to ride round all Aud’s lands, including the lands which had been given to the others” (Mitchison 167). Significantly, Anlaf Feilan’s authority pertains, in its entirety, to the civilian realm. Geographically speaking, his domain is not sea but earth, and because it consists wholly of previously unowned land that, in part, embodies his grandmother’s generosity to former household members, it binds him to others instead of turning him into anyone’s nemesis.

And what ensues from Anlaf Feilan’s rounds confirms this implication, paradoxically revealing in a moment of regression how little he, who at sixteen has attained his majority, resembles the thirteen-year-
old enthralled by the “Midsummer sacrifice” that he once was while simultaneously and also in a paradoxical manner subverting Anlaf the White’s legacy to him. When he visits Thorgerd and Coll, he takes the opportunity to gaze at himself in his sister’s mirror, seeing the reflection of “his young beard” (Mitchison 167)—which likens him to Thorstan according to Aud. It is not surprising, then, that the sight of his own face should remind Anlaf Feilan of that which he has lost: “‘It is a pity,’ he said to Coll, ‘that I shall never have the chance to be a true king like my grandfather.’ He spoke lightly but he was hoping that Coll would tell him he would look well with a gold circlet on his brow” (Mitchison 167). Coll, however, does not provide the reassurance that Anlaf Feilan desires—the former reminds Aud’s grandson that if he were king, others, maybe including himself, would have to be subordinate to him; and when Anlaf Feilan protests that Coll wouldn’t have to submit to his authority, only those who perhaps believe themselves to be “‘as good as anyone’” (Mitchison 167), the latter says that “‘[w]e are all as good as what we do’” with “a tone of warning in it” (Mitchison 167)—and it is in the frustrations of imagining that which he might have inherited that he arrives at Yrp’s:

Anlaf rode up out of Laxdale and across the high ground between there and Sheep Fells where Yrp had his lands. He kept turning over in his mind the thought of being a king. What had it been like for his grandfather that he had been named for? He had been crowned in Dublin, acclaimed as leader by his own folk with clash of swords on shields and led to the kingly high seat and honoured with gold by the Irish. Whatever his fellows and shipmates from Norway had thought, the Irish had accepted him as High King. Thinking that, Anlaf rode into Yrp’s land and the new barley was in front of him, springing green. There were two or three men and girls weeding it: Yrp had prospered! Yrp, who ought to be his subject. And he rode straight across the barley. (Mitchison 167-68)

Violence and subjugation of the defeated, as the “clash of swords” indicates, are intrinsic to Anlaf Feilan’s fantasies of his grandfather’s accession to the Irish throne. More notably, Anlaf Feilan’s conviction that he
should have dominion over Yrp leads to his literal trampling of a crop whose cultivation is synonymous with the rise of civilization.

To perpetuate the militaristic traditions of Anlaf the White, then, is to destroy the foundations of society, an idea that The Land the Ravens Found underscores in depicting that which occurs after Anlaf Feilan flattens Yrp’s grain:

There was shouting. There was Yrp shouting at him to keep off his barley. There was Yrp running up, seizing on the bridle of his horse. And suddenly he and Yrp were on the ground fighting. It had all started while he was deep in these other thoughts, but now—he and Yrp were hitting out at one another and then had closed, were struggling in harsh anger body to body. Even while it was happening he thought two things: neither of them had drawn sword or knife—whatever happened they couldn’t do that on one another. And, queerest of all, the mere knowledge that after all these years Yrp was at last standing up to him! (Mitchison 168)

Simply put, Yrp engages in a physical fight with Anlaf Feilan after noticing the latter flattening his barley. But what happens in the passage quoted above unfolds from Anlaf Feilan’s perspective, thereby emphasizing the way in which the current situation deviates from his fantasies of military glory and conquest. Having galloped over Yrp’s grain, Anlaf Feilan hears a raised human voice. Next, he recognizes the voice as that of the man over whom he would otherwise rule, and what Yrp communicates is an order “to keep off his barley.” That is, Anlaf Feilan himself, in first hearing Yrp’s voice and then recognizing it as his, imparts first humanity and second, individual identity, to his intended inferior, while the latter’s command calls attention to his prior claim to the land—and thus to its fruits, both literal and metaphorical—that Anlaf the White’s grandson would otherwise seize. In short, Anlaf Feilan’s own auditory perceptions undermine the connotations of glory, valor and wealth that he associates with kingship by redefining such authority in
terms of the dehumanizing consequences that irrefutably characterize it: to be a king is not only to seize territory that has already been claimed but also to enslave those to whom that land properly belongs.

Indeed, the novel’s description of the two young men in conflict with each other further distances war from those qualities that Anlaf Feilan associates with it. *The Land the Ravens Found* states that Yrp tugs “on the bridle of [Anlaf Feilan’s] horse”; thereafter, both of them are “on the ground fighting” (Mitchison 168). It is possible, given this account, that Anlaf Feilan autonomously dismounts from his horse in order to engage in combat with Yrp. It is more likely, given that Yrp initiates physical contact by pulling on the reins of Anlaf Feilan’s horse, that the former slave’s action causes Anlaf the White’s grandson to fall off his steed, which is significant insofar as it ironically puts the latter in a situation that is diametrically opposed to that in which he imagines himself when he thinks of perpetuating his grandfather’s legacy: implicit in Anlaf Feilan’s reveries is that he is both aggressor and victor within the context of war, and the possibility that Yrp may be the reason that he is “on the ground” instead of on his horse means that, having started off as the aggressive party in invading Yrp’s field, Anlaf Feilan is now, contrary to his expectations, in the position of having to defend himself. Furthermore, his own register of their fight as it occurs demonstrates the extent to which it in no way resembles the battles for which he formerly prepared himself. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, Anlaf Feilan used to practice his military skills by engaging in “sham fights” (Mitchison 31) with Vivill. These “conflicts,” as the book’s references to the boys’ deployment of “shields and long sticks” (Mitchison 31) imply, were akin to fencing bouts. To win in fencing requires agility, strategy, focus, quickness and elegance, qualities that typically characterize the movements of fencers in elite matches. Anlaf Feilan’s “battles” with Vivill, then, contrast with the authentic struggle he has waged with Yrp: involving neither “sword [nor] knife,” Anlaf Feilan and Yrp “[hit] out at one another” and “[struggle] in harsh anger body to body.” Rather than nimbleness, alertness and grace, these actions suggest clumsiness, awkwardness and slowness—the latter in more than one sense of the term, as Anlaf Feilan’s wandering thoughts may indicate.
Yet it is through his lack of concentration while in the midst of fighting with Yrp—in realizing that neither must use his blade to slay the other—that Anlaf Feilan comes to perceive, as his emotions convey, not only the dishonor in his actions but also the immorality of them; and *The Land the Ravens Found* reinforces the rightness of this view by detailing his defeat at Yrp’s (literal) hands and intimating his dismay at having attracted the attention of those who had been laboring in Yrp’s fields, both of which events ironically subvert the connection between violence and admiration that Anlaf Feilan made as a young adolescent. Having once desired to follow in the steps of his father and grandfather—thereby implicitly identifying himself as a conqueror—and having once desired the veneration of men in relation to war prowess, Anlaf Feilan now finds himself in the position of the deserved loser and the object of scrutiny on the part of some who as farm workers pertain to the domestic realm:

Suddenly in the middle of the fight the idea of being a king cleared right out of Anlaf’s mind and instead he was horribly ashamed: he was wrong and Yrp was right. And as he thought that, Yrp got his right arm loose and clouted him across the ear and face. And there was Anlaf Feilan on the ground with his nose bleeding and Yrp, Muirgheal’s son, standing over him breathing hard and grinning with pleasure. Worst, the men and girls who had been weeding were standing round staring and whispering. (Mitchison 168)

Anlaf Feilan’s visit to Coll and Thorgerd is the last occasion on which the former expresses any ambitions to succeed his paternal grandfather as a warrior and conqueror; his thoughts in the midst of his scuffle with Yrp signal a permanent disavowal of Anlaf the White’s actions and values, and the novel’s subsequent narrative compounds the importance of this moment in linking this rejection of conventional Norse masculinity to a rekindled intimacy with the feminine. When Yrp tells Muirgheal that Anlaf Feilan had deliberately trod upon his barley, Aud’s grandson admits his culpability; when asked what motivated him to do so, his answer is that he “‘was—in a bad dream, [he thinks]’ ” (Mitchison 169) and, notably, he then “[fingers] the cross on the chain round [Muirgheal’s] neck just as he always used to do [when he was a
small child]” (Mitchison 169)—the very chain that, as a young adolescent, he hung in the rafters of his grandmother’s Caithness Hall out of hostility towards the emblem of that which he associated with his contradictory feelings towards his maternal ancestry. And this reconnection with the maternal—Muirgheal, we should recall, is Anlaf Feilan’s former nurse, and casual references within The Land the Ravens Found indicate that she, more so than Thorrid, serves as a maternal figure to him and to his sisters—leads to a firm rejection of enmity that would emphasize past differences in social status on Anlaf Feilan’s part—and a later show of affection for him on Yrp’s—that contextually identifies him not only with the land, rather than with the sea, but more particularly with civilian existence, as the domesticated plants and animals that typify farm life imply:

“Now I’ve hit you, Anlaf,” [Yrp] said, “after your grandmother giving me my land. Are you going to be my enemy now?”

Anlaf got to his feet. “No,” he said.

* * * * * * * * * *

Anlaf had asked Yrp, with all the politeness that was in him, to show him how everything was doing on his land. Together they saw the rest of the crops, oats and rye mostly, the lambs which had doubled what was already a good flock, the calves, the sitting hens. Only they kept away from that barley field. Yrp began to tell Anlaf all his plans, asked for his advice which was carefully given, and suddenly put his arm round Anlaf’s shoulder. “I never liked you so well,” he said and then looked away quickly. (Mitchison 170)

When Anlaf Feilan and Yrp finish their tour of the latter’s farm, Muirgheal provides them with a meal and something with which to wash it down. It is within this context of hospitality—which again as a particularly female responsibility in Norse society anchors Anlaf Feilan to the domestic realm—that Muirgheal informs him that “‘Vivill and Haurd are having a feud’ ” and maintains that he is “‘the only one who can stop it. . . ’ ” (Mitchison 170). Doubtful that he will be able to end the conflict between Haurd and
Vivill yet equally confident that everyone “‘has] better to do than have feuds in Iceland’” (Mitchison 170) and that none exists between himself and Yrp, Anlaf Feilan departs for Haurd Dale, thinking “that it would be best if he talked first to Haurd and tried to get him to see the stupidity of this feud” (Mitchison 171).

In this way, before Anlaf Feilan even speaks to Haurd, *The Land the Ravens Found* reinforces the association between Anlaf Feilan’s embrace of the feminine and his renunciation of paternal tradition. To begin with, Muirgheal’s views, except for that which underlies her counternarrative to Aud’s history of the settlement of Iceland, tend to coincide with or complement those of the latter and which in light of their friendship arguably position her, the former slave, as the matriarch’s stand-in. Muirgheal’s influence over Anlaf Feilan, then, does not simply confirm his repudiation of his grandfather’s values but also conveys his identification with his grandmother. And if Muirgheal is in some way a double for Aud, then Anlaf Feilan’s response to his nurse’s comments represents a major reversal of his behavior towards his grandmother as described in the novel’s opening. If arrogant defiance and disobedience in relation to violence and paternal conventions inform his conduct when *The Land the Ravens Found* introduces him in its second paragraph, compliance and humility characterize his reaction to Muirgheal’s implicit demand that he dispel the hostilities between Haurd and Vivill. What is more, Anlaf Feilan’s identification with Aud takes the form of actively avowing her convictions and attempting to instill them in someone else through the use of abilities that arguably demonstrate his genealogical connection to her, even if the development of those traits owes itself to her upbringing of him. That Anlaf Feilan chooses to confront Haurd before confronting Vivill about this matter reflects his sense of strategy which in turn is rooted in shrewdness; and that he conceives of the tension between Vivill and Haurd in terms of “stupidity” underscores the novel’s implication that he, like Aud, is “deep-minded” which it thematically links to her attitude towards the violence of war.

And like his fight with Yrp, Anlaf Feilan’s conversation with Haurd structurally and substantively reflects the adult into whom he has matured. First, the reason for the dialogue in and of itself emphasizes the completeness of Anlaf Feilan’s development insofar as it calls attention to the trajectory of his
relationship with Haurd as it relates to violence and war. It is in Haurd’s company that Anlaf Feilan attends the “Midsummer sacrifice” as a thirteen-year-old; that his own attitude then towards bloodshed resembles the older Norseman’s is implicit in the thoughts that he has at the time as to whether or not his grandmother will chastise Haurd in the same way that she has chastised him. Haurd is Anlaf Feilan’s first sparring partner; it is only his unavailability (owing to his responsibilities at Aud’s Hall) that prompts the teenager to seek out Vivill as a substitute. More pertinently, it is Haurd who at critical junctures consistently pressures Anlaf Feilan to view his late father’s actual or probable actions as precedent and to act accordingly, and each of the young man’s respective responses to Thorstan’s old friend on these occasions demonstrates the extent to which his own mentality towards conflict subtly and incrementally diverges from convention. When Haurd claims that Anlaf Feilan is “‘not like a Viking’s son!’” (Mitchison 72) after learning that the latter will emigrate from Caithness instead of defending the territory won by his father, Thorstan’s heir is able to persuade the older man of the virtues of Icelandic settlement but does so not by asserting an anti-war stance but by appealing to his self-interest: for Haurd, going to Iceland is an opportunity to have land of his own that he would never have in Scotland. Later, when Anlaf Feilan ultimately complies with Haurd’s demand for a sacrifice on behalf of the Safe Farer in the midst of a crisis after having managed to evade the latter’s insistence upon the same for over twenty-four hours, that capitulation simultaneously takes the form of resistance in that, whatever doubts he may have about the efficacies of the “Old” or “New Faith,” he never has any intention of making--and does not in fact make--the sort of sacrifice that Haurd desires: the idea of taking a life, even that of one of the farm animals aboard the Safe Farer, makes Anlaf Feilan hesitate—when Haurd states that “‘[b]etter [is] a safe landing and no sheep at all,’” Aud’s grandson thinks that such a situation would be “going altogether too far” (Mitchison 111). And when Haurd tries to murder Vivill in an attempt to provide the kind of sacrifice he believes that the gods deserve, Anlaf Feilan neither hesitates to pull the old man off the Scot nor refrains, in reply to the latter’s gratitude from requesting that he “‘not be having too much of a feud with Haurd’” (Mitchison 122).
What Anlaf Feilan apparently fails to do in the aftermath of this event, however, is to call Haurd to task for endeavoring to murder Vivill, but his later remarks at Haurd Dale indirectly repudiate this assault. Haurd threatens to kill a slave “just to remind Vivill of what he had been himself not so long back” in retaliation for any more “mocking verse” that the former captive may choose to compose. Anlaf Feilan, in pointing out the consequences of such an act—that Haurd “‘would certainly get the worst of it in a law suit’”—implicitly identifies justice with the communal processes of the Thing rather than with the violence of private revenge.

Haurd then points out that he “‘might have friends too. . .among Thor’s folk’” (Mitchison 171), a comment that asserts his adherence not only to the “Old Faith” but to that deity who is most associated with conflict. Interestingly, Anlaf Feilan’s reply to this rejoinder is an inversion of that which he earlier assured Yrp: whereas his refusal to become the former slave’s adversary after their scuffle implies that being the recipient of land from Aud does not obligate the latter to tolerate her grandson’s destruction of his property, Haurd’s receipt of land from Aud does put him in the debt of both the matriarch and her grandson, and that price, as Anlaf Feilan implicitly defines it, is to maintain peaceful relations with Vivill: “‘Maybe. But you got your land from my grandmother, Haurd. I think it might be said that you owed her somewhat. And me’” (Mitchison 171).

But perhaps most striking is Anlaf Feilan’s reaction to Haurd’s accusations that Thorstan “‘would have stood by [him] against these Scots traitors and slaves! Who ought to have been branded and blinded—instead of setting themselves up like free men! Marrying into decent families! Making out they are as good

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228 After making it to shore in the aftermath of the Safe Farer’s disastrous landing, Vivill says to Anlaf, “‘They tell me that something happened— with Haurd—and yourself’” (Mitchison 122), to which Anlaf replies that “‘Haurd had promised the old gods a sacrifice, and you were the one he got his eye on’” (Mitchison 122). Given that Vivill, in the midst of Haurd’s attempt to murder him, knows only that there is “some clumsy fool jumping on top of him” (Mitchison 120), it is likely that the “something” between Haurd and Anlaf Feilan refers only to the latter pulling the former off the Scot rather than to a later confrontation between the two Norsemen.
as ourselves!’ ” (Mitchison 171). That is, Haurd once again invokes Thorstan as a contrast to his son; and
this time around, he explicitly conveys his adherence to those values that inform the Norse warrior
mentality: that the defeated should be subjugated and separated from their captors on account of their
(supposed) ethnic “inferiority.” Anlaf Feilan’s reply, that they “‘shall all have to live together in this new
land’ ” and that “‘...it is no use thinking about the past’ ” (Mitchison 172), addresses the pragmatic
aspects of avoiding conflict and implies that Haurd’s perception of how social relations between individuals
of different ethnicities ought to function is not relevant to their current lives, given the organization of
Icelandic society. More significantly, Anlaf Feilan’s response, which admittedly does not contradict or
refute the substance of Haurd’s remarks, nevertheless fails to convey any agreement with those opinions
which in light of his motivation for galloping over Yrp’s fields earlier in the same day demonstrates how
much his outlook has evolved in no more than a twelve-hour span.

Anlaf Feilan’s reaction to Haurd’s subsequent comments, which concludes their exchanges with
each other on this matter, implicitly does express his disagreement with the older man’s perspective,
however, thereby affirming the implications of the former’s “defeat” at Yrp’s hands and emphasizing the
subversion of patriarchal inheritance in The Land the Ravens Found. Haurd asserts that “‘[i]f [he were]
thinking about the past. . . [he] would remember that [Anlaf’s] mother’s mother was an Irish woman’ ”
(Mitchison 172) and scorns her conception of herself (“‘Calling herself a princess!’ ” [Mitchison 172]),
adding that he has additional things to say with respect to Anlaf Feilan’s maternal grandmother. Anlaf
Feilan, however, cuts him off by placing “his hand hard over Haurd’s mouth”:

“You had better not say anything I will not be able to forget,” he said, and suddenly,
happily, he felt himself strong again, Anlaf the Bull, as he had not been with Yrp. And
Haurd must have felt it in him, for he choked and went quiet. “Have some sense, Haurd,
old friend,” said Anlaf, “and I will try to make Vivill have some sense too.” (Mitchison 172)
Anlaf Feilan’s warning to Haurd implies that the former will hold no grudge against the latter for that which he has already said and that those comments will therefore cause no rift between them. Given the substance of those remarks, Anlaf Feilan’s response to them confirms his rejection of the old social order and affirms his reconnection with the maternal: no longer ashamed of his maternal lineage and any implications that it might have for his own identity, he is able to dismiss the intended insult in them. Significantly, it is from silencing Haurd, in preventing him from uttering anything that could rupture their friendship, that Anlaf Feilan gains a sense of strength; and if clamping his palm “over Haurd’s mouth” prevents the latter from speaking as much as his warning does, that act is a momentary measure of preclusion rather than a means of possibly indefinite subjugation. In other words, Anlaf Feilan derives that which is often identified with physical might—which, as that which in turn is intrinsic to the warrior ideal also relates to the consequences of war—from a “verbal triumph” motivated by a desire to evade the destruction of a long-standing relationship. And his final comment to Haurd associates this “victory” with Aud’s influence: in advising Haurd to “‘[h]ave some sense,’” Anlaf Feilan recommends that the older man emulate the landnámskona. But he also implies that Haurd ought to perceive things from his, Anlaf’s, own perspective. In short, Anlaf Feilan himself reflects “some sense,” thereby demonstrating the very quality that his grandmother, years earlier, before they leave for Iceland, asserts will eventually define him \(^{229}\) and hopes that he consistently will show. \(^{230}\)

It is following this apparent surge of power that Anlaf Feilan comes closest to articulating an anti-war stance. At Vivillsdale, Anlaf Feilan hears its owner’s side of the story and then “[makes] jokes so that [the feud between Haurd and Vivill] should all begin to seem less important...” (Mitchison 172) which has its intended effect: soon, Vivill, Signy, to whom he is lately married, and Anlaf Feilan are “all three laughing” (Mitchison 172). More to the point, Anlaf Feilan succeeds in persuading Vivill to vow that he will

\(^{229}\) See p. 68.

\(^{230}\) See p. 80.
speak to the former about how to deal with Haurd if need be instead of engaging in literal conflict with his nemesis; and when Vivill observes that he may go to his grave without ever having slain another man with the swords that Aud had returned to him and to others that they “‘should feel like free men,’ ” (Mitchison 173), Aud’s grandson asserts that he is “‘not sure that is such a bad thing’ ” (Mitchison 173). Notably, it is at this juncture that Aud herself confirms the extent of her grandson’s metamorphosis from youth to adult, her affirmation of his recent actions with respect to the tension between Haurd and Vivill posing a strong contrast with her chastisement of him for witnessing the “Midsummer sacrifice” shortly after the novel begins, and her philosophy of dealing with Haurd according with Anlaf Feilan’s treatment of him:

When he got home again he told his grandmother about this feud, and how he had tried to deal with it. “You did right,” said Aud, “and, although Haurd is a heathen and he and I have very often had quarrels about this or that, still he was a friend to your father and I would not like to have him put too much in the wrong. Even by Vivill,” she added, “whom I have liked as well as any young man, next to yourself and Coll.” (Mitchison 173)

XIX. “[Anlaf Feilan] took to wife Al-dis, the Barrey woman. . .”

Landnámaþók’s narrative of Auðr’s landnám concludes with an account of her death. In her old age, Auðr hosts a banquet to which she invites her family members and their spouses; when three days of this fête have passed, she disseminates presents and advice; orders the event to continue for another seventy-two hours; announces that it shall commemorate her death; and dies the following evening, after which she is “buried on the shore, below high-water mark, as she had ordered it herself; for she did not wish to lie in unhallowed ground, seeing that she was a baptized woman” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 84-85). 231 As I

231 “. . .ok vas grafen í flœðar-mále, sem hon hafðe fyer sagt; því at hon vilde eige liggja í óvigðre moldo, es hon vas skírð” (Hauksbók II. xv. xv).
discussed in the previous chapter, Auðr’s Christianity identifies her with several of her male peers—some of Iceland’s other, most renowned settlers—as does her largesse which also links her to war in that this trait likens her to a “host-king,” while her hospitality, wisdom and clairvoyance also reinforce her connection to battle even as they simultaneously emphasize her femininity as qualities that the Norse typically associated with women.

As my synopsis of it may imply, Landnámabók depicts Auðr’s demise as a narratively and thematically discrete event in and of itself; by contrast, in The Land the Ravens Found, the final processes in Anlaf Feilan’s coming of age comprise Aud’s old age and passing. The Book of Settlements relates that Auðr dictates the circumstances of her burial but does not indicate to whom she provides these instructions. In the 1955 novel, however, it is to Anlaf Feilan that she imparts these details which tacitly positions him as her heir. And while Auðr’s specifications in Landnámabók reinforce her identity as a Christian and, through that status, also underscore the extent to which she is one of the “best-born [male] settlers,” in The Land the Ravens Found, they emphasize the book’s identification of her, somewhat paradoxically, with the domestic realm:

She went on: “Anlaf, there is a thing I was wanting to say. My own folk are buried far from here, in Ireland and Scotland, and, although my brothers will surely be buried in Iceland, I am not so sure. I do not think that I want to lie in Aurlyg’s church, for that is a long way from those I knew, and indeed I would like to have my choice of a way to go. So I want to be buried below high tide mark, and then I shall be able to take myself overseas and at the Last Judgment I shall rise just as surely as though I had died with Safe Farer and been thrown overboard. For high tide is the end of the sea. So will you promise to bury me that way, Anlaf, whatever folk say?” (Mitchison 173-74)

On the one hand, Aud’s chosen location for her grave—“below high tide”—and her wish for her spirit to travel across the sea seem to link her to war, particular since her intention of returning to Ireland and
Scotland, which is implicitly rooted in her desire to be reunited with her husband and son, simultaneously signals a lack of interest in remaining with members of her natal family. But on the other, given that one’s legitimate son is one’s primary heir according to medieval Scandinavian law, Aud’s wish to be in the presence of her only child and her spouse arguably emphasizes her valuation of family—which in turn might be considered the core unit of society—in that, as the legal codes suggest, one’s legitimate offspring are one’s primary kin. Certainly Aud’s expectations of resurrection, which obviously reflect her Christianity, undermine her identification with war in light of the way in which The Land the Ravens Found associates the “New Faith” with both women and priests whom it contextualizes as non-combatants. In addition, Aud’s description of “high tide” as “the end of the sea” rather than as its commencement geographically affirms her affiliation with community in that it is not in the midst of the ocean but on the firmness of soil that civilization has established itself, and the beginning of land is implicit in “the end of the sea.” And it is Aud’s query to Anlaf Feilán that ultimately defines her intended burial in terms of her aversion to violence.

Whatever else it might be, Aud’s future burial is diametrically opposed to the funereal rites of the “Old Faith” which, as the novel describes them, involve the spectacle of sacrifice, both of domesticated animals and slaves, and her request that Anlaf Feilán vow to bury her in accordance with her own wishes despite others’ probable expectations of rites in keeping with pagan tradition associates her death with her grandson’s transformation into a young adult: if at the beginning of the novel, Anlaf Feilan is concerned with others’ opinions of him, it is Aud’s expectation now, towards the end of the book, that he will defy public scrutiny in order to honor his grandmother’s memory as she would have it honored.

In Landnámabók, Auðr announces that the banquet she is hosting will celebrate her passing, a declaration that the medieval work contextualizes as an occurrence of extrasensory perception. The Land the Ravens Found not only applies this telepathy to two separate moments but more importantly mitigates its impact as such in favor of depicting it as empirical perception with respect to the first instance and as pragmatic instinct based upon her own sense of her own limitations with respect to the second (which will
be discussed later in this chapter). The first manifestation of this trait occurs in the same conversation that Anlaf Feilan begins with Aud after arriving home from Vivill’s:

She looked at him and then walked him over into the light. “What have you been up to?” she asked, “were you fighting someone?”

“You are seeing clearly still, Grandmother!” said Anlaf, and told her about the fight with Yrp.

“Well, well,” she said, “that was maybe something that had to come. And I am glad it is over and in a Christian and decent way. You will be able to look one another full in the face at the next Thing-moot. And now I am asking you, Anlaf, would it not have been a wicked thing to have kept a man like Yrp as a thrall?”

“Yes,” said Anlaf, “but he would have been able to go on playing the harp to you. And you know you have never liked my playing as well as his!”

“I like it more every month,” said Aud firmly, “and your voice is getting stronger. But I think you need the thought of a lassie to be singing to.”

“Well,” said Anlaf, “maybe we shall hear from Barra one of these days.”

Once the spring work was over they began to plan the new Hall. Anlaf paced it out. (Mitchison 174-75)

Although Muirgheal cleans the blood off Anlaf Feilan after his fight with Yrp, it is perhaps implicit, given that Aud’s grandson ends up with a bloody nose from getting punched in the face, that his face is bruised and swollen when he arrives home. Aud’s question as to her grandson’s activities, coming as it does after she notices him and then scrutinizes him in a lit area, is both predictable and logical based upon the physical evidence before her eyes, and its importance lies in the fact that that which in Landnámabók identifies her with other Icelandic settlers of both sexes here functions as a catalyst for an exchange that subtly anticipates that which it frames as the pinnacle of Anlaf Feilan’s development, one that further substantiates his
reconciliation with the feminine. As mentioned earlier, Anlaf Feilan is thirteen years old when *The Land the Ravens Found* begins; Yrp, fourteen; Vivill, sixteen, and over a year has passed by the time Aud and her fellow travellers are settled in for the winter at Beorn’s where Vivill, now aged seventeen, meets and falls in love with Signy. Given the difference in maturity that often distinguishes older adolescents from younger ones, the indifference of fourteen-year-old Anlaf Feilan to his female counterparts at this time, other than to harass Signy for the purpose of annoying Vivill, certainly reflects that common reality. At the same time, as I have earlier discussed, Anlaf Feilan’s accosting of Signy, which resembles Thorstan’s handling of his prisoners, results from his frustration over the idea that, as he then feels, a marriage between Vivill and Beorn’s ward will elevate the Scot to a social position that he as an ex-slave ought not to attain. But Anlaf Feilan’s general attitude towards young woman his own age and his behavior towards Signy also, I would argue, speak to his antagonism towards the feminine and to the values of civility that domestic rituals such as marriage connote. As Jochens points out, the legal codes that regulated marriage in medieval Scandinavia reflect societal concern with “the orderly passing of property from one generation to the next” (*Women in Old Norse Society* 21) while “political as well as economic issues were at stake in marriage negotiations” insofar as “[m]en used the marriages of their womenfolk to create alliances in anticipation of hostilities or to cement unions between formerly feuding parties” (*Women in Old Norse Society* 27-28). In *The Land the Ravens Found*, marriages also reinforce existing familial relationships and friendships, as the following examples illustrate. Groa, the first of Thorstan’s daughters to get married within the novel’s actual time frame, weds someone whose mother is a cousin of her own mother Thorrid and whose paternal grandfather “had been a shipmate and cousin of Anlaf the White” (Mitchison 99) while Olof marries the son of one of Thorstan’s friends. Insofar as Signy is Beorn’s ward and Aud thinks of Vivill as “a kind of extra grandson” (Mitchison 163), it might be argued that the union between the two orphans strengthens the relationship between the matriarch and her favorite brother.

In any case, two years later, Anlaf Feilan is still rather uninterested in marriage:
There was... a letter from Stanmod, very glad that all was going well... At the end of the letter he said: “Tell Anlaf that my sister Aldis would make a good settler’s wife and a good mother of settlers.”

After Osc’s wedding, Aud spoke of this to Anlaf. Yes, he said doubtfully, if he was to marry he would as soon marry Stanmod’s sister as anyone. Aud could write and say so if she liked. And would she ask what Aldis looked like. Perhaps she was a little like Osc.

(Mitchison 164)

Somewhat amusingly from the reader’s perspective, Anlaf Feilan’s indifference to marriage is such that he has no objections to having his grandmother agree to a suggested match on his behalf. Nevertheless, his reaction to Stanmod’s recommendation does indicate some small shift in attitude from that which it is when he is fourteen years of age. If two years ago, young women were not on Anlaf Feilan’s radar, so to speak, now, when he is sixteen—the medieval Icelandic age of majority—his request that Aud inquire as to “what Aldis [looks] like” indicates his curiosity about her physical appearance. That he imagines that Aldis might resemble his sister perhaps also speaks to an unconscious desire for the female companionship of a peer: Osc’s own marriage means leaving Aud’s Hall, and of his six sisters, it is she, his junior by a single year, of whom Anlaf Feilan is fondest. In any case, by the end of the winter following the summer in which Osc marries Hallstan Godi, Anlaf Feilan “[is] beginning to wonder what Aldis of Barra [is] like” (Mitchison 167) which reflects an interest in her personal qualities.

Beyond this moment, The Land the Ravens Found more saliently (though still indirectly) links that which on the surface presents itself as individual curiosity—i.e., Anlaf Feilan’s wonderings about Aldis’ appearance and personality—to his overall development by positioning marriage as the epitome of war’s opposition. While Anlaf Feilan is still on his property, Yrp tells Aud’s grandson “that he [is] thinking of getting married, to the daughter of one of the respected older settlers” (Mitchison 170). Yrp’s nuptials, like Vivill’s, create an alliance between a prominent Icelandic family that the novel identifies as Norse—overtly,
in Vivill’s case, and implicitly, in Yrp’s—and an ex-slave of Celtic ancestry. Notably, Yrp divulges this information right after an exchange between Muirgheal and Anlaf Feilan in which Aud’s grandson, responding to his nurse’s comment that, in her opinion, he alone is capable of putting a halt to the tensions between Haurd and Vivill, asserts that everyone living in Iceland has more productive ways of spending their time than fighting with each other, and this conversation in turn occurs over the meal that Muirgheal provides for her son and Anlaf Feilan after the latter tramples Yrp’s barley, is knocked off his feet by him, comes to his senses vis-à-vis hierarchy, kingship and war, reconciles with Muirgheal’s son and with him tours his fields.

Similarly, Aud’s later remark to Anlaf Feilan that he “[needs] the thought of a lassie to be singing to” and his reply that he perhaps will receive communications about Aldis from Stanmod conclude a conversation in which Aud, having heard her grandson’s description of his fight with Yrp, affirms the Christian character of its aftermath and by linking that outcome to the idea that the two “will be able to look one another full in the face at the next Thing-moot” implies a connection between conflict resolution, Christianity, integrity and law. She then associates morality with liberty in asking whether continuing to enslave Yrp would “have been a wicked thing,” and when Anlaf Feilan agrees with her but points out that without Yrp at her Hall, he himself will be the only harpist in residence and that she has always preferred the music of Muirgheal’s son to his own, Aud claims that her fondness for his music increases “every month” and that his “voice is getting stronger” which is to say that she connects her grandson’s competency in the arts with the freeing of slaves.

In just a few brief exchanges, then, Aud articulates the spectrum of phenomena that divides civilization from war, each successive entity moving mankind closer to war’s ultimate opposite. The first step away from conflict is its cessation. The second is the establishment of legal code to mediate any issues in lieu of—and as a preventative measure against—violence. The third is the eradication of war as the structural basis of social relations between individuals. The fourth is the fostering of individual relationships
through mutual cultural interests. And the fifth is marriage which *The Land the Ravens Found* arguably posits as the epitome of human relationships, at least as far as the marital unions of its more significant characters are concerned.  

In short, the spectrum between war and its opposite encompasses experiences or structures that, as they move away from conflict, feature closer, more intimate relationships between people, and it is no coincidence that after Anlaf Feilan tells Aud that they perhaps shall receive some communications from Stanmod about his match with Aldis, *The Land the Ravens Found* states that following the conclusion of the “spring work,” the matriarch and her grandson start designing “the new Hall” which Anlaf “[paces] . . . out” (Mitchison 175). Affirming the connotations of its beginning, the novel’s juxtaposition of Anlaf Feilan’s reference to his future spouse and his efforts with respect to the construction of Aud’s new Hall defines this edifice as the metonym for that which it implies is the core of civility.

It therefore comes as no surprise that Anlaf Feilan’s relationship with Aldis should embody those qualities that we define in opposition to war—and ultimately identify him with Aud—while serving as the

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232 Mitchison’s concern with historical accuracy notwithstanding, *The Land the Ravens Found* as a twentieth-century novel does reflect contemporary notions about marriage—namely, that love, or at least attraction, is one of its components. Late in the novel, Aud receives a letter informing her that Thorrid, having returned to Scotland proper, has taken orders and established a “nunnery at the old Hall” where “every day, rain or shine, she [goes] out to visit the grave of her husband, Thorstan the Red, to pray for his soul” (Mitchison 160), an act that in light of her affection towards him much earlier in the book indicates her continuing devotion: “Thorrid was sitting on a cushion at Thorstan’s feet, her cheek against his hand” (Mitchison 21). Thorgerd and Coll’s love for each other is also obvious early on in *The Land the Ravens Found*: “Thorgerd was leaning over, pulling Coll by the ears and he was reaching up to kiss her” (Mitchison 21). Aud’s own memories of galloping through the Irish countryside accompanied by Anlaf the White, coupled with the facts that her conversion to Christianity directly results from her husband’s death and that her prayers seek mercy for him in his afterlife, reveal the endurance of her emotional bond to him, while in Vivill and Signy, *The Land the Ravens Found* depicts the beginning of a couple’s journey: “There was a girl called Signy who was some kind of relation to Beorn. . . . But Signy’s father had been drowned out fishing when a storm had come up suddenly, and her mother had died of some winter sickness. Beorn’s wife Geflach had been kind to Signy and brought her up; she was a well-mannered and handsome girl with a good temper, but apt to be a little sad. After a while it seemed as though she and Vivill were mostly sitting next one another. And she was much more cheerful and apt to sing” (Mitchison 138-39). And even Osc, who, when informed by her brother that Hallstan Godi is at Aud’s Hall to seek her hand and reminded by the former that she at one time had had no interest in marryng an Icelander because she did not wish to remain on that island for the rest of her life, answers without hesitation that “ ’t [that was before [she] saw Hallstan’ ” (Mitchison 163) and orders Anlaf Feilan to pass on that message to their grandmother.
logical endpoint of his maturation. Like his sister Groa’s marriage, Anlaf Feilan’s to Aldis deepens
genealogical ties: Aldis, of course, is Stanmod’s sister, and Stanmod, according to the list of characters at
the beginning of the novel, is Anlaf Feilan’s cousin. In addition, the dowry that accompanies Aldis to
Aud’s Hall and the “[handfasting]” (Mitchison 179) at the Thing that publicly binds Anlaf Feilan to his bride
in turn bind the latter to the community in which she will now settle while reinforcing her husband’s place
in it as conventional signifiers of marital union within Icelandic culture.

Anlaf Feilan’s marriage is, however, more than an affirmation of familial connections and societal
norms. To begin with, Anlaf Feilan finds Aldis physically appealing, so much that when they first meet, he
“[thinks] he [has] never seen a better-looking girl” (Mitchison 178). While we as twenty-first century
readers might find Anlaf Feilan’s reaction somewhat trite, The Land the Ravens Found contextualizes his
attraction to Aldis as the follow up to his earlier wonderings about her appearance which simultaneously
emphasizes by way of contrast how much he has matured: whereas the fourteen-year-old he once was barely
registered his female peers, at seventeen—the same age at which Vivill first encounters Signy—he notices
Aldis and is drawn to her.

More important than Aldis’ physical characteristics, however, are her personal qualities, for it is
through these attributes that she serves as a reflection of Anlaf Feilan’s growth and development. As I
mentioned earlier, the sister to whom Anlaf Feilan is closest is Osc. Given that, as I have also previously
said, she is only one year younger than he, it is perhaps to be expected that the siblings should have engaged
in recreational activities together during their years in Caithness, before their father’s death:

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233 It is not clear as to what degree of kinship defines the familial bond between Anlaf Feilan and Stanmod,
nor is it definitively known whether the two are related through Thorstan the Red or through his wife
Thorrid. There is, however, no indication in The Land the Ravens Found that either Anlaf the White or Aud
has other children besides Thorstan the Red, and since the novel states that Stanmod is “half Irish” and Anlaf
Feilan’s maternal grandmother was Irish, it stands to reason that Thorrid, not Thorstan, is Stanmod’s blood
relative, in which case the union of Aldis and Aud’s grandson reinforces the latter’s connection to the
maternal.
Stanmod and Anlaf were up on the cliffs, shooting at the seagulls; they were no use for eating, but good practice. Hauscoll came trailing after them, but he was no good yet. “I wish I had a brother of my own,” said Anlaf, “Osc tries to shoot sometimes but she doesn’t put her mind to it.”

“My sister Aldis can shoot,” said Stanmod, sighting along the arrow at a herring gull, “not with a full-size bow, but well enough.”

“What else can she do?” asked Anlaf.

“Oh, she has all the bower crafts,” said Stanmod, not really attending.

“But real things?”

“She is lucky at fishing,” said Stanmod. “I have seen her go out with her net when none of the rest of us were getting so much as a cuddie, and she came home with a full creel. I will be glad to see her again.”

“I wish you weren’t going so soon,” Anlaf said, gloomily.

“But I must,” said Stanmod, “and then the guarding of the Hall will be on your shoulders.”

Hauscoll tried a shot then, but as usual his arrow went wide. Patiently, Stanmod showed him where he went wrong, held his hand over his arrow, saw that he was standing solidly on his feet. The next shot was a better one. (Mitchison 63-64)

One of the ways in which Anlaf Feilan has spent time with Osc is shooting arrows at which, for lack of attention that probably indicates a lack of interest, the latter is not particularly skilled. Insofar as Aldis is the same age as Osc, Stanmod’s claims with respect to his sister’s abilities with a bow and arrow define her as a “better” version of Anlaf Feilan’s sister and therefore as a more fitting companion for him in that both he and Aldis are talented shooters whose achievements as such implicitly convey their mutual interest in archery, a shared affinity that the novel emphasizes in describing the circumstances of their first encounter
with one another. In the season following the spring in which he tramples Yrp’s fields, Anlaf Feilan attends the Thing where he takes part in an archery contest which attracts a wide audience that includes some women as well as (mostly) men. Anlaf Feilan’s efforts catch the attention of a “tall and fair-haired” young woman “wearing a blue cloak with a hood that [comes] well over so that one [does] not see much of her, only her fair hair blowing out of it” (Mitchison 177-178). After winning third place in the contest—which obviously attests to his gifts and focus—Anlaf Feilan, speaking to his youngest and oldest sisters, respectively (Wigdis and Thorgerd), mentions his “‘need’” for “‘a new bow string’” (Mitchison 178) at which point the young woman announces her wish to give him that which he requires and grasps his bow:

Anlaf was rather surprised. “Why,” he began, “I can get a bow string myself—.”

But the girl said: “Lend me your bow for a minute, Anlaf Feilan. And an arrow.” He was too astonished to do anything but hand it over. She shook the cloak back over her shoulder and drew the bow, then let fly the arrow and it hit the mark. She handed back the bow and now the hood was off her hair and Anlaf thought he had never seen a better-looking girl.

“How are you?” he said.

She smiled a little and her eyes dropped. Then she lifted her head and looked at him in full. “I am Aldis of Barra,” she said. (Mitchison 178)

In fact, Stanmod’s reference to his sister’s talent for netting fish compounds the extent to which her companionship is superior to Osc’s: fishing, as we know early on the The Land the Ravens Found, is how Anlaf Feilan spends a pleasurable afternoon in the company of his cousin Runolf and his nephew Hauscoll. But the context in which Stanmod first describes his sister to Anlaf Feilan—as well as its broader implications in relation to his overall presence in The Land the Ravens Found—also informs Aldis’ thematic significance in the novel, as will become evident later on in this chapter. Stanmod and Anlaf Feilan are engaged in the very
activity that the latter enjoys in the company of his younger sister Osc; and his reference to the lack of attention with which she aims her bow and arrows is both prefaced and contextualized by regret that he lacks a brother, someone who presumably would be a more enthusiastic and better shot than Osc, and, perhaps more importantly, someone who unlike Stanmod is not a temporary guest, as Anlaf Feilan’s lament over his cousin’s impending departure for Barra makes clear. In other words, only the impermanence of his stay in Caithness disqualifies Stanmod from taking on the role of Anlaf Feilan’s brother, and the significance of this implication lies in the fact that at eighteen, Conal of Barra’s son is not only a suitable companion to Aud’s grandson by virtue of their shared interest in archery and fishing but also a role model whom Thorstan the Red holds up as an examplar for his own heir; and the fact that Anlaf Feilan as a thirteen-year-old rejects his father’s suggestion to follow Stanmod’s lead with respect to gaining literacy matters less than the composite of the latter that the novel provides—and the ultimate response of Thorstan’s son to that synthesis. Early on in the novel, Thorstan the Red mentions that Stanmod will accompany him on one of his circuits to quell any rebellious stirrings on the part of the Scots. Yet this reference is the only “evidence” of Stanmod’s actual participation in this mission, which is to say that weighing the implications of his own actions against his intentions according to Thorstan suggests that on the whole, The Land the Ravens Found identifies Conal’s son with domesticity rather than with war, an association that the book often heightens by way of contrast. During the Yule holiday, Anlaf Feilan’s cousin Runolf creates and sings lyrics “about the man he had killed” (Mitchison 43) while on his first raid with Thorstan the Red who, notably, refuses to partake of this aspect of the festivities, having decided that “he couldn’t be bothered to make up songs” (Mitchison 43). That is, Runolf’s music explicitly underscores his own conscious identification with war—one that his actual performance emphasizes in that he transgresses the conventions of etiquette by “[singing his tune] with one foot on the table” (Mitchison 43)—while Thorstan the Red’s apathetic attitude signals his disengagement with culture. Stanmod’s lyrics, in opposition to Runolf’s, concern not war but “a maiden” (Mitchison 43), and his (admittedly clichéd) description of her in terms of nature defines her in terms of
land, rather than in terms of the sea, while his shy admission that the young woman in question is “back in Barra” (Mitchison 43) affirms his connection to his own community: “He called her Spring-fair and snow-white and corn-hair; honey-sweet and rose-lips he called her, but never gave her name. When they asked him he laughed and would not tell, only that she was back in Barra” (Mitchison 43).

Stanmod’s presence at Aud’s Hall while Thorstan is once again touring the territory he has conquered deepens the contrast between the two men. The possibility of rebellion notwithstanding, Thorstan’s circuit is largely an offensive campaign while Stanmod and his men remain at the Hall as protective forces although, interestingly, their number is such that that property is “guarded more by fear and repute than by swords” (Mitchison 53). But Stanmod’s official reason for staying behind at the Hall is that he will be returning “to Barra as soon as the weather [is] good enough for sailing” (Mitchison 53), and to the extent that *The Land the Ravens Found* associates Stanmod with both security and home, it anticipates his participation in the blessing of Aud’s Hall which in turn reinforces his identification with femininity. As I discussed earlier, to bless is to invoke God’s protection through the rites of consecration; and this ritual, as *The Land the Ravens Found* depicts it, is not only feminized, in that all of the women but only several of the few men at the Hall partake of this ceremony, but also refined in that it encompasses the chanting of psalms. Stanmod is amongst those who follow the priest as he walks “round the Hall, blessing the doors, sprinkling door jambs and threshold with holy water” (Mitchison 56-57), his presence explained by the fact that he is “half in the New Faith” (Mitchison 57). That Stanmod is a Christian man whose demonstration of his faith posits him in the company of equally devout women and a cleric intensifies the novel’s implicit identification of him with womanhood as a literate man whose ability to write (and therefore to read) is, according to thirteen-year-old Anlaf Feilan, a priestly and womanly skill.

Indeed, *The Land the Ravens Found* further undermines the connotations of those moments when Stanmod might be implicated in war. Stanmod oversees the reparations to his sailing vessel. Given that Viking ships are a metonym for aggression, Stanmod’s intimacy with the workings of his boat initially seems
to link him to conflict. Yet his intent in readying his vessel for departure—which again is to return to his home in Barra—subverts that symbolism, while some of the preparations that pertain to his upcoming voyage reinforce his connection to domesticity: Aud herself, along with her daughter-in-law, Thorrid, provide a store of food for Stanmod’s journey while other women repair the tears in his sail; and as I have discussed previously in this dissertation, medieval Scandinavian women maintained primary responsibility for transforming raw materials into edible preserves as well as for refining the wool out of which they stitched sails. Similarly, there is no question that Stanmod (and Anlaf Feilan) are engaging in violence when they aim their bows and arrows at seagulls in order to practice their marksmanship. Yet the main subject of their conversation is not war but Aldis; and while Stanmod’s descriptions of her abilities constitute either a comparison with Osc or answers to Anlaf Feilan’s questions about her, it is clear, both from his remark that he “will be glad to see her again” (Mitchison 64) and from Anlaf Feilan’s opening lament that he has no brother and that Osc doesn’t concentrate on the task at hand on the rare occasions when she does shoot with him, that their minds are focused not on conflict but on companionship. Indeed, it is worth noting that Stanmod attempts to foster this quality when he provides shooting guidance to Hauscoll who has followed him and Anlaf Feilan to the cliffs from which they are sighting their targets.

Yet the sensitivity that Stanmod demonstrates in making an effort to include Hauscoll in his and Anlaf Feilan’s activities is inextricable from his mentorship of the boy; and loyalty, commitment and—indirectly and directly—wisdom inform Stanmod’s few, brief appearances in the novel thereafter. Stanmod’s sense of connection to his Caithness relatives motivates his proposal to delay his return to Barra after the slaying of Thorstan the Red. Because Aud and Coll turn down this suggestion on the basis that Stanmod’s “men would be angry if he stayed longer and both [think] that there [is] no immediate danger” (Mitchison 67), he remains in Caithness for that which apparently is no more than a week after conveying his proposition, but it is significant both that he voices his proposal to stay in Scotland at the beginning of the counsel meeting in which he, Coll and Aud stand witness to Anlaf Feilan’s first major decision as his father’s
successor and that he leaves for Barra after Thorstan’s son, through the deductive guidance of his grandmother, confirms his decision to immigrate to Iceland instead of to fight for the territories that his late father seized. Similarly and more significantly, Stanmod’s letter to Aud cements his fealty, constancy and guidance in his embrace of domestic life. To begin with, Stanmod writes that he is “very glad that all [is] going well” (Mitchison 164). This remark is an obvious indication that he corresponds with Aud on an ongoing basis, the regularity of which calls attention, once again, to his engagement in an activity that identifies him with Christianity and with womanhood. He then announces the fact of his own recent marriage “to the lassie of his song” (Mitchison 164), thereby linking his cultural pursuits to a commitment that *The Land the Ravens Found* contextualizes as the core unit of domesticity. And in advising Anlaf Feilan through Aud to marry Aldis, Thormod defines his sister in terms of her alleged promise as an embodiment of traditional womanhood: “‘Tell Anlaf that my sister Aldis would make a good settler’s wife and a good mother of settlers’” (Mitchison 164).

That Anlaf Feilan’s marriage to Aldis represents a reversal of his initial refusal to follow Stanmod’s example therefore enriches its status as the culmination of his maturity. But the quality of this union is as much an indication of Anlaf Feilan’s coming of age as is the fact that he follows Stanmod’s lead. As I mentioned earlier, it is through her individual traits that Aldis functions as a barometer of her husband’s evolution, and the couple shares both an enthusiasm and a talent for shooting and fishing. But it is at the fête of their marriage—which in *The Land the Ravens Found* doubles as the last banquet that Aud’s counterpart hosts in *The Book of Settlements*—that Anlaf Feilan, having “turned towards Aldis and [having taken] her hand” (Mitchison 187)—thinks to himself that “[h]aving her with him would be like having Stanmod again. But different, but better, but making every day like the best of spring days” (Mitchison 187). In marrying Aldis, then, Anlaf Feilan pledges himself to a young woman who is not only a companion for him on a personal level but who also (and more significantly in light of the argument that I have been making here) is a version
of the “older brother” figure whom he was meant to emulate, an individual whose example consists of his identification with the domestic realm.

Yet Aldis is not merely her brother’s female counterpart: she is a superior “edition” of him, which quality is implicit in those details pertaining to her that superficially seem minor or purely descriptive. As Stanmod informs Anlaf Feilan when they are shooting at birds together, Aldis “‘has all the bower crafts’” (Mitchison 63). Given how Aud occupies her time in her own bower and that Muirgheal’s niece untangles her aunt’s tresses in that same space right before the end of the novel, Stanmod’s statement suggests that Aldis is literate as well as skilled at grooming, the latter of which was yet another dimension of women’s labor in medieval Iceland (Jochens 125). When she arrives at Aud’s Hall and explores her lands, Aldis shows interest in the various aspects of agricultural life with which Norse women typically engaged. Medieval Scandinavian women produced all dairy products; Aldis climbs “up to the hill grazing, where the cows were, to see all the different kinds of cheese that were made. . .” (Mitchison 180).

Similarly, Norse women sought and gathered berries (Jochens 122); Aldis inquires into the process of “fermenting [the fruit] for wine” (Mitchison 180). The household, of course, is the center of domesticity; Aldis is “delighted” with some of its accoutrements, namely its “pillows and beds filled with eider down. . .” to the point that she feels that “[s]he must go out after the eider duck herself!” (Mitchison 180), and it is notable that women traditionally have handled the processing of eider down since the middle ages (Berglund 119-120). And the gifts that accompany Aldis to the Hall reflect her awareness of and sensitivity

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234 Stanmod’s comment that Aldis “‘has all the bower crafts’” answers Anlaf Feilan’s question as to what abilities the girl has in addition to her talent with a bow and arrow, and it is indicative of where Anlaf Feilan is in terms of his development at this point in the novel that he dismisses the reply he gets with the question “‘But real things?’” (Mitchison 63).

235 Jochens specifically discusses the cleaning of men’s hair and bodies on the part of women, but it makes sense that disentangling hair with a comb after washing it would be part of this ritual. Jochens does say that there is no indication in the sagas that women ever shampooed the hair or soaped the bodies of other women, but the fact that the book’s depiction of Muirgheal having her hair combed out by her niece may be an anachronism does not undermine the factually informed implication that one of the duties of Norse women was to provide grooming services to others.

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to the needs and affinities of their respective recipients: to Thorgerd she presents “some gold and silver embroidery threads” that are “just what [she needs] for Coll’s winter shirts” (Mitchison 180); to Anlaf Feilan who likes rings and collars made of gold she imparts “a gold ring set with a clear ruby”; and to Aud she brings “fur-lined doe-skin brogues” because her own brother, Stanmod, “had remembered that she liked them” (Mitchison 180). In short, Aldis’ identification with those aspects of the Hall that result from women’s labor, as well as in her husband and his relations, arguably binds her more closely to the domestic realm than Stanmod’s love for the sweetheart of his song, his loyalty to Barra and his steadfast relationship with Aud connect him to the same.

More important, however, is the way in which some of the details pertaining to Aldis evoke comparisons that identify her with Aud even as they demonstrate that she is less connected to war than the matriarch herself and/or Stanmod is—and therefore imply her superiority to the latter. The gifts that Aldis brings to her grandmother-in-law, her sister-in-law and her husband are indicative of a generosity that parallels Aud’s. Yet Aldis’ presents associate her with a magnanimity that, unlike Aud’s, plausibly may not implicate her in war at all. For one thing, the gifts that Aldis dispenses are reciprocal and therefore do not indebted her recipients to her in a way that creates an analogy between the young woman’s relationships with her in-laws and those between military leaders and their retainers even as the text itself undermines that parallel: Aldis gives Thorgerd sewing thread after the latter presents to her “a short coat lined with eider skins, warm and very light” (Mitchison 180); and if the book is silent as to what, if anything, Anlaf Feilan and Aud respectively give Aldis, the material wealth of Thorstan’s son and his grandmother, as we already know, is such that reciprocation would not be an issue. For another thing, each of Aldis’ gifts is a true gift, while the swords that Aud presents to her former slaves aboard the Safe Farer are their own previously confiscated weapons. But the “gold ring set with a clear ruby” is, perhaps, a symbolic return to Anlaf Feilan of the gold arm ring that he earlier throws into the sea as a sacrifice to the pagan gods when the Safe Farer is about to wreck itself on Iceland’s coast, a multiplied reincarnation untainted by conquest. Its subversive
implications aside, Anlaf Feilan’s original arm ring starts off as plunder that Thorstan takes from the body of his dead enemy. By contrast, there is no indication that Aldis’ present to Anlaf Feilan is recycled booty which Stanmod and Aldis’ heritage supports. Although their grandfather, \footnote[236]{Aud is referring to Aulwe Bairn-carle (Olvir the Child-Sparer). According to Landnámabók, however, Aulwe Bairn-carle is Stanmod and Aldis’ great-grandfather, not their grandfather which is to say that The Land the Ravens Found positions Olvir as Conal’s father instead of as Conal’s grandfather.} as Aud tells Aldis, “‘. . .was one of the greatest of the Vikings. . .’” (Mitchison 182), Stanmod and Aldis are “‘half Irish’” (Mitchison 28) as Anlaf Feilan earlier remarks to Thorstan. Ireland was a source of riches in the forms of gold and silver between approximately 850-1050 A.D. (Wallace 836), so it is altogether possible that Aldis has legitimately inherited the rings that she gives to Anlaf Feilan which, if so, are an emblem of matrilineal descent.

Stanmod and Aldis’ father, Conal, has an Irish name. Since Aulwe Bairn-carle (Olvir the Child-Sparer) as a Viking might have been expected to give his son a Norse name, the fact that his son does not have one suggests that Stanmod and Aldis’ paternal grandmother was Irish.

When Aldis visits the cows at the Hall, she also pays attention to “the Icelandic ways of setting bird snares” (Mitchison 180), presumably because she intends to learn how to set them herself. Although killing the animals is inherent in the reason for trapping them, such violence serves a domestic function in that the purpose of catching the birds is to serve them as part of a meal. This motivation, in addition to the indirect nature of Aldis’ future culpability for the birds’ death, establishes another parallel between her and Aud who, with the men at the Hall in Caithness, earlier goes “round, deciding which [bovines are] to be killed” in order to be “salted down in great tubs for the next six months’ food” (Mitchison 35). At the same time, Aldis’ focus on the “bird snares” implicitly and favorably compares her with Stanmod. If Aldis’ intention of using the snares implicates her in violence, that motive is inextricable from her future efforts to maintain community by sustaining those who live at the Hall; by contrast, when Stanmod and Anlaf Feilan are shooting at birds in Caithness, their violence results in waste since the seagulls at which they are aiming are
“no use for eating” (Mitchison 63), and their rationale for doing so—“good practice” (Mitchison 63)—is to destroy other communities rather than to preserve them.

Indeed, Stanmod (and Anlaf Feilan’s) shooting practice calls attention to one more way in which Aldis is superior to her brother. Although Stanmod informs Anlaf Feilan when they are together that “Aldis can shoot”  (Mitchison 63), he does not specify that at which she aims. When The Land the Ravens Found depicts Aldis four years later, as a young woman of sixteen, with Anlaf Feilan’s bow and arrow, the circumstances in which she shoots are clear. She aims at a target used for the competition in which Aud’s grandson has just earned third place. She shoots for the purpose of testing the bow she has just restrung with a string that she has provided as a needed and spontaneous gift to Anlaf Feilan whom she likely has acknowledged to herself as her future spouse. 237 And the competition in question takes place at the Thing. Unlike Stanmod and Anlaf Feilan, then, who shoot from “the cliffs” (Mitchison 63)—an exposed location from which they apparently can perceive nothing but ocean and the boundary of the woods—in order to kill some birds for no real reason beyond honing their aim in order to kill other people, Aldis shoots at an inanimate target that has served as the focus of friendly rivalry and camaraderie in a location that is synonymous with Icelandic law in order to ensure the quality of the gift she has given to her future spouse. To the extent that Anlaf Feilan’s participation in the contest signals yet another shift in his mentality towards maturity, Stanmod thus remains alone in identifying with war through his deployment of bow and arrow, while his sister’s engagement with these components align her with community.

More significantly, Aldis’ shooting demonstrates the extent to which the novel simultaneously identifies her with Aud. An arrow, of course, is a long, narrow instrument whose pointed head pierces its target. In this way, the arrow that Aldis has borrowed from Anlaf Feilan is not so different from Aud’s pin.

237 While Thorgerd is watching Anlaf Feilan compete, Aldis approaches her and inquires as to Anlaf Feilan’s identity. Because it is summer, and because we know that Anlaf Feilan has been waiting since the spring for correspondence from Barra in reply to Aud’s letter on his behalf stating that he is willing to marry Aldis, we may assume that she learned of her betrothal back in Barra before coming to the Thing.
Yet this similarity is rooted in an ironic difference that Aldis’ physical appearance at the Thing emphasizes in an equally ironic way. That she may or may not have killed someone in self-defense notwithstanding, Aud’s use of her pin as a weapon turned a domestic object into an instrument of war, while Aldis’ shooting of Anlaf Feilan’s arrow—which is an instrument of war—leads to their handfasting at the Thing. Within this context, Aldis thus embodies the subversion of conflict, as her clothing reveals. Aldis wears “a blue cloak with a hood. . .” (Mitchison 177) which is exactly what, in the medieval short prose narratives and Icelandic sagas, men don “when they are off to kill” (Wolf 71).

XX. “When she was well-stricken in years, she bade to her house her kinsmen and sons-in-law [sic], and prepared a costly feast for them”

To reiterate, in *The Land the Ravens Found*, Aud’s death is part and parcel of Anlaf Feilan’s coming of age; and aside from the fact that his marriage to Aldis is its culmination insofar as the novel not only frames marital union as the centre of domesticity but also depicts his bride as a fitting companion by virtue of her closer connection to the domestic realm and lack of association with war relative to those of her brother, it also, in light of the parallels that the book establishes between her and Aud, represents a “changing of the guard” that affirms his (Anlaf Feilan’s) status as his grandmother’s successor. Indeed, Aud’s admission of fondness for Stanmod—and her conviction that she will feel similarly about his sister—subtly anticipate as much, as does the fact that the “doe-skin brogues” that Aldis gives to Aud are like her own footwear: of “soft doe-skin” (Mitchison 180).

And Aud herself more explicitly positions Anlaf Feilan as her successor. *The Land the Ravens Found* turns that which in *The Book of Settlements* is a moment of prescience in which Auðr predicts her own death into two moments of non-telepathic perception, the first of which I have already discussed. The second moment occurs when Aud comments that she “[thinks] this will be the last feast [she] shall give and. . . [wants] it to be such that it will be remembered’ ” (Mitchison 182). As the deployment of the verb “to
think” suggests, Aud’s conjecture reflects instinct, not second sight. But the source of Aud’s thoughts matter less than that which they convey, as Anlaf Feilan’s response makes clear: “‘I wish you would not say that!’ said Anlaf, ‘even when I am married Aldis will not want to take the rule of the household out of your hands!’ ” (Mitchison 182). And later, at the feast itself, Aud “[declares] solemnly that her lands and wealth [are] to go to her grandson Anlaf” (Mitchison 185).

It is therefore fitting, from a thematic perspective, that the moment in which Aud announces that Anlaf Feilan is her official heir should symbolically embody both her imminent passing and the subversive dynamics that underlie her grandson’s status as her successor. When Aud officially names Anlaf Feilan as her heir, she is “sitting on the high seat between her brothers” (Mitchison 184) which emphasizes the fact that that which he inherits is the legacy of his grandmother rather than that of his namesake. And Aud is “in a dress of soft, deep red stuff, glittering with gold at throat and belt and hem, above all at braceleted wrists. . .” (Mitchison 183). Red apparel in Old Icelandic emblematizes various themes, including one’s position in society and individual worth (Roscoe 53-54), which certainly speak to Aud’s authority and importance. But donning red is often an augur of one’s own demise as a result of being assaulted by someone else (Roscoe 50). Aud’s outfit, then, signals the nearness of her death, but as I shall shortly discuss, that end occurs peacefully in her sleep, thereby undermining her garment’s conventional connotations of violence and creating yet another parallel between her and Aldis whose cloak also subverts its traditional associations. In any case, Anlaf Feilan’s own thoughts in the midst of his wedding celebrations, somewhat after his grandmother’s announcement, speak to his position as her heir while reinforcing the fact that it is her legacy, not Anlaf the White’s, that he will continue: when “[h]is hand [tangles]. . .in the soft rough gold of [Aldis’] hair streaming loose from the bridal crown of flowers and ribbons,” Anlaf Feilan imagines how “[o]nce his mother must have been like that. And his grandmother” (Mitchison 187). And he mentally pictures his own heir: “a lovely golden-haired daughter” (Mitchison 188).
Anlaf Feilan and Aldis, for obvious reasons, are the focus of this banquet; but Aud is its official host, and it is not surprising that this event in and of itself should convey the connotations of her speech by affirming her lineage and legacy, as well as her connection to culture and to community, while subverting traditional masculinity and undermining its connotations of war. Hosting Anlaf Feilan’s wedding fête begins with finishing off the construction and furnishing of Aud’s new Hall so that the old one can house their guests. Aldis and Anlaf Feilan, as Aud did years before in Caithness, go “to look at the beasts which were to be killed for the feast” (Mitchison 183) which is to say that the newlyweds are party to the slaying of animals whose roasting will transform them into vehicles of community, bringing together friends and family alike, along with other bountiful offerings such as “mounds of butter, golden honey from the south, apples and pears, white bread, almond paste, raisins, fresh and preserved sea fish, cheese of all sorts, seaweed jelly and sweet or sour cream” (Mitchison 185). That Beorn provides a large quantity of the beer 238 for this occasion emphasizes Anlaf Feilan’s position as Aud’s heir. Beorn is Aud’s brother, the one with whom she lived in the winter months following her arrival in Iceland and whose generosity matches her own, and making beer is a cultural practice that in medieval Iceland was a women’s task (Jochens 121; 127). The décor of the Hall is such that it marks the significance of the occasion: “No such splendour had been in any Hall in Iceland since the beginnings. The floor was strewn deep with rushes and sweet herbs and the candles were lit. Even on the lowest tables the drinking horns were set with silver or worked bronze” (Mitchison 184). And if Aud’s tableware, like the meats served to her guests, are implicit in violence in that some of her “cups and dishes” of “gold and silver” (Mitchison 184) are spoils taken by Anlaf the White in Ireland, the purpose that they serve, in conjunction with the composition of Aud’s guests, subverts this association somewhat:

It was a time for peacemaking and those who were known to be quarrelling were brought together where possible. Anlaf and Coll had both done their best with Haurd and Vivill,

238 Beorn also supplies “wine, ham, honey and some wheaten flour” for the banquet (Mitchison 184).
but they did not think that any friendship there would stand the kind of test it would be bound to have. The older colonists had all accepted Yrp completely as one of themselves but were a little less certain about Vivill and Sunkwolf and the others who had been thralls. Some were quoting old proverbs about how thralls’ blood will show, but others, especially the younger ones, were friendly enough. The settler who had been for a time young Muirgheal’s master, was there; he was nobody at all important and sat at a low table, while young Muirgheal herself was sitting up with the family. (Mitchison 186)

That the respective relationships between Vivill and Haurd or the long-settled Icelanders and Aud’s former slaves except for Yrp are fragile or cautious matters less than the fact that Aud, in inviting and welcoming these individuals to her grandson’s wedding banquet, not only gathers those who are at odds with each other in an attempt to dispel the tensions between them but also, whatever their attitudes towards each other, undermines the social distinctions between them that are based in war insofar as to be a slave is synonymous with being amongst the defeated. And although the differing heights of the feast tables apparently correlate to the status of those sitting at them, it is notable that the one specific description of how these distinctions operate reverses the status of the young Irishwoman who had once been enslaved and that of the man who once owned her. Indeed, Yrp affirms the purpose of this occasion and its subversive implications through his song, which later refers to Aud, her Hall, Anlaf Feilan and Aldis, but which starts off by “welcoming everyone with phrase or so for each and linking the families” (Mitchison 186): in connecting each clan, Yrp creates community while the fact that he acknowledges each one with a similarly brief greeting defines them as equals; and the fact that Yrp sings calls to mind the extent to which Anlaf Feilan has matured and his appropriateness as Aud’s successor. And if Aud’s feast is “the same kind of bridal feast that had been held among the Norse people since the old days” (Mitchison 186), the “blessing” of the priest “on the bridal” and the “[signing of] their first cup with the cross” on the part of several attendees (Mitchison 186) stress the peaceful connotations of the occasion while defining that which conventionally
was a pagan celebration of a union that perpetuated patriarchy as “a commercial contract. . .negotiated between two males of equal standing” (Jochens 30) in terms of both Christianity and, by way of association within the novel, femininity.

XXI. “The next night [Aud] died. . .”

*Landnámabók* states that Auðr dies the evening after she announces that her fête should continue for three more evenings because it will be “her funeral feast or *arrval*” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 84/ “hon kvað þat vesa skyldo erbe sítt” *Hauksbók* II. xv. xv); how she spends the hours in between her declaration and her demise goes unrecorded. In *The Land the Ravens Found*, however, Aud stops by each table after announcing that Anlaf Feilan is her heir for the purpose of “seeing that they all had what they liked best” (Mitchison 185) and then leaves the feast, returning to her “bower” where “[h]er women [are] waiting to help her to bed, but Muirgheal [has come] for old time’s sake and [takes] off the new doeskin brogues which [have] come from Barra” (Mitchison 185). That is, having identified Aud with domesticity in opposition to war from the very beginning of its narrative, the 1955 work reinforces this association by intensifying it through its description of Aud’s activities within the time that elapses between her announcement at her banquet and the discovery of her death. Aud’s concern with ensuring the satisfaction of her guests is indicative of her hospitality which was a defining aspect of the lives of Norse women (Jochens 107; 125-26) and which also reflects her personal interest in the welfare of the community she has temporarily gathered under her roof. When she leaves “the main hall” (Mitchison 185)—the locale of the feast—and returns to her “bower,” Aud goes from the most public space in her Hall to its most private which the presence of the other women in that room accentuates: they are there for the purpose of getting her ready for bed, a ritual that is both personal and intimate, and they, by virtue of their attendance upon Aud, call attention to the complete absence of men in this locale. And Muirgheal’s presence particularly underscores the contrast between “the main hall” and the “bower”: although the first space is part of Aud’s residence and is currently
the seat of hospitality where invited guests have convened to celebrate a union that typifies what the book contextualizes as the core unit of domesticity, among those guests are individuals such as the former owner of Muirgheal’s niece, people who are acquaintances of Aud’s and whose inclusion likely reflects her fulfillment of social duties rather than any personal affinity that she might have for them. By contrast, it is Muirgheal alone, despite the presence of the others, who assists Aud; and she, as I have discussed, is Aud’s confidante and “partner-in-crime,” so to speak.

It is therefore not unexpected that Aud’s conversation with Muirgheal, which constitutes her last appearance while still alive in *The Land the Ravens Found*, should continue to intensify the novel’s identification of her with the domestic realm in a subtle manner while implicitly affirming her rejection of war:

“What are they saying about me, my dear?” Aud asked.

“They are saying you are a queen!” said Muirgheal happily, “and there is nothing I like better than to hear the best said of you!”

“Well, well,” said Aud, almost in a whisper, “Anlaf would have liked that. He was a king. My own Anlaf, my own man. Pull the blankets well over me, Muirgheal, and draw the curtains. And now, good night.” (Mitchison 185)

Muirgheal’s delight in the wedding guests’ hyperbole aside, Aud’s response to her guests’ admiration of her is to point out that their comments would have pleased her late husband; and through the juxtaposition of this observation and the statement that “‘[h]e was a king,’ ” she intimates that his status as such, along with its connotations of conquest and power, would have underlain his appreciation for such praise, while she herself is explicitly silent with respect to her own feelings about her guests’ opinion of her. Yet Aud’s subsequent remarks implicitly convey the substance of those feelings. In referring to her late husband as her “‘own Anlaf, [her] own man,’” Aud undermines his public identity as a warrior and conqueror by redefining him in the unofficial and therefore private terms of her own affection for him. In so doing, she
also rejects the public status that would make her complicit in war by virtue of its relation to kingship—which her penultimate request of Muirgheal affirms. Aud asks Muirgheal to swathe her in her bedding and to close her bed curtains, an appeal that retrospectively emphasizes that she dies peacefully in her sleep. Such a death is antithetical to the Norse ideal of how a warrior should die: in the midst of battle so that he spends his eternity in either Vallhalla (“the Hall of the Slain” [Cleasby,Vigfusson and Craigie 310]) or Fólkvangr (“sword-field” [Cleasby,Vigfusson and Craigie 678]).

The Book of Settlements describes Audr’s burial and nothing else that is related directly to her death; The Land the Ravens Found, however, details the discovery of her passing and provides a broader context for the circumstances of her burial, all of which underscores the thematic implications of her final appearance as a living being in the book itself. The morning after his wedding banquet, Anlaf Feilan decides to bring “a cup of morning ale to his grandmother” and pours into “her favourite goblet of blue and green glass. . .ale that had been heated with a red-hot poker stuck in it” and goes into her “bower” (Mitchison 188). Insofar as the “serving [of alcohol] was. . .normally done by women” (Jochens 107), Anlaf Feilan, in his willingness to perform as a woman, affirms his adulthood and his status as Aud’s successor. It is he who discovers his grandmother’s body (although Muirgheal and her niece are in the room with Aud, her bed curtains are still closed), and it is again a mark of his maturity and his position as Aud’s heir that it is from Muirgheal from whom he seeks comfort upon realizing that his grandmother is dead and whose advice he heeds:

“Muirgheal!” he called, “oh, Muirgheal, come, come quick!” And then Muirgheal was standing beside him and he began to sob quietly and hid his face on his nurse’s shoulder.

“She knew,” said Muirgheal gently, “and this was how she wanted it. With everything going well. Above all, for you.”

“She said it would be her last feast,” said Anlaf, “but I never thought--”
“You must go and tell them,” said Muirgheal, “and tell them worthily, Anlaf Feilan, without tears.”

He nodded and left her and knew that, when he went, she would feel herself able to let go and weep for Aud. By now most people were in the hall talking and drinking the first ale of the day. When he called them to listen the rest came in and everyone fell silent, because of something in his voice. He told them all that Aud, Cetil’s daughter, Aud the Deep-Minded, was dead and that now this feast would be her wake as well as his own bridal. Everyone thought this was the right thing for him to say. (Mitchison 189)

It is Anlaf Feilan who in The Land the Ravens Found announces that which his grandmother declares in Landnámabók: namely, that her fête shall mark the occasion of her death, and the importance of this seemingly insignificant change lies in its anticipation of the subsequent sentence which in turn highlights the extent to which Thorstan’s son is his grandmother’s grandson: the wedding guests’ approval of Anlaf Feilan’s words matches their approval of “the noble bearing of his grandmother” (Mitchison 189) which is to say that the quality of his deportment resembles hers. And this likeness, by way of contrast with his behavior at the beginning of the novel when he defied Aud by going to the “Midsummer sacrifice” “‘out of pride,’ ” as she said, “‘[s]o that it would not be said [he was] ruled by women’ ” (Mitchison 13), emphasizes his coming of age and his shift away from war in that that which wins him the esteem of his guests is not a celebration of violence in defiance of women but rather a decision to acknowledge his grandmother’s passing in a socially appropriate way. And it is no coincidence that Anlaf Feilan’s subsequent request that Yrp compose lyrics to commemorate his grandmother also reiterates these themes: no longer the boy who tripped his nurse’s son after the latter sang and played his harp at Aud’s request, Anlaf Feilan asks the man who has become his friend to honor and to perpetuate the memory of his grandmother through artistic creation that she would have appreciated and admired.
XXII. “Aud was a worshipful lady”

*The Land the Ravens Found* concludes with a description of Aud’s burial and the conversation that occurs between Anlaf Feilan, Vivill and Thorgerd while it happens. I have already discussed the particular implications of Aud’s desire to “lie below high tide mark so that she could be free to go where she would over the sea, and maybe back to Caithness for awhile before the day of the Last Judgment” (Mitchison 190) which again is more or less faithful to *Landnámabók*’s version of the same in terms of the exact location in which the protagonist wishes to be put to rest and its evocation of her Christianity. 239 What is important here is how one final time, in providing a final image of its heroine, *The Land the Ravens Found* disassociates Aud from war while identifying her with civilian life through its emphasis upon her legacy within the person of her grandson, as the placement of Aud’s corpse “on the high seat” (Mitchison 190) intimates:

> They dressed Aud’s body in all her best clothes and set it on the high seat and everyone drank to her, as the custom was. There were some who wanted to have her burnt on a pyre in the old way, and in the boat she had built for her visiting with much riches in with her. But Anlaf remembered what she had asked him to do for her and how, since there was no hallowed ground near, she wanted to lie below the high tide mark so that she could be free to go where she would over the sea, and maybe back to Caithness for a while before the day of the Last Judgment. And so it was settled and a grave dug for her deep in the sand. (Mitchison 190)

If previously Anlaf Feilan garners the approval of his guests by making his wedding celebration also a commemoration of his grandmother and then asks his friend to honor her life through a form of cultural expression in which she found pleasure, he now defies public opinion in order to honor his grandmother’s

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239 Audr is “buried on the shore, below high-water mark, as she had ordered it herself; for she did not wish to lie in unhallowed ground, seeing that she was a baptized woman” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 84-85/“... ok vas grafen í floðar-mále, sem hon hafðe fyrer sagt; þvi at hon vildi eige liggja í óvigðre moldo, es hon vas skíð” [Hauksbók II. xv. xv]).
memory as she would have it honored which, like his heeding of Muirgheal, shows that he has come full circle. But this time, it is not propriety that guides his choice but his sense of integrity, as well as his respect for his grandmother’s wishes, qualities that ground him in the domestic realm insofar as his decision is rooted in the intimacy of his relationship with her and more specifically in the privacy of her trust in him: there is no indication in the novel that she ever tells anyone else how she wishes to be buried, and it is not clear from the passage above that Anlaf Feilan reveals to the others why he buries her by the shore. At the same time, Anlaf Feilan’s accordance with Aud’s request is a rejection of war. Alighting a corpse on a pyre involved the slaying of slaves and domestic animals (canines and equines) as accompanying sacrifices, as I already explained in discussing Thorstan’s burial, and these elements also apparently characterized medieval Scandinavian ship burials (Price 133).

And it is the quality of Aud’s relationships that is to be her ultimate legacy, ones that transcend even the bounds of the social structures that officially define them:

“It will be her blood in the Orkneys and the Faroes and here in Iceland for hundreds of years,” said Anlaf, thinking about this strange business of a family reaching out across land and sea and away through time.

“And the blood of those she had made her own,” said Vivill. “She set me free under law and custom, but I was no more out of her hand than if I had been her son.” (Mitchison 190)

Yet it is through deliberate and conscious movement away from the culture of violence that fosters opposition and contempt, towards the civilizing structures that make sustained community possible, that such transcendence may occur. Aud’s journey to and settlement in Iceland, as well as the broader circumstances that inform these actions, embody this process whose conclusion highlights the contrast between her and her counterpart from The Book of Settlements. Before depicting her feast, death and burial,
*Landnámabók* says of Auðr that she “was a worshipful lady” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 84). This tribute cements her place among the other “best-born settlers,” all of whom are men, and a majority of whom, like her, the text identifies in some way with conflict. Yet Auðr’s demise is also the end of her influence—“[b]ut after this the faith of her kinfolk went wrong [i.e. they turned heathens]” (trans. Vigfusson and Powell 85/“—Efter þat spilltesk trua frænda hennar” [*Hauksbók* II. xv. xv])—which in *The Land the Ravens Found*, as I have repeatedly emphasized, and as Vivill’s emotional bond with Aud indicates, it is certainly not.

In sum, then, from its opening description of the path from the sea to the Hall in Caithness to its depiction of Aud’s death and burial and in between through each of its junctures that corresponds to and expands upon the events that *Landnámabók*’s account of Auðr’s settlement comprises—Thorstan’s death in Scotland; Aud’s construction of her ship; her departures for the Orkney Islands and the Faroes where she marries off Groa and Olof, respectively; her journey to Iceland and the wrecking of her ship upon her arrival; her reunion with Helgi Beolan and then with Beorn and her stay at the latter’s throughout her first winter in Iceland; her exploration of Broad Firth, settlement in Hwamm Fjord and the planting of her crosses; her generosity to her former slaves and to Haurd; the marriages of her younger granddaughters; her upbringing of Anlaf Feilan and his marriage to Aldis—*The Land the Ravens Found* identifies Aud with traditional womanhood, conventionalizing a medieval figure whom *The Book of Settlements* esteems even as it implicitly associates her with war. Yet if Aud is more traditional than Auðr, her influence, which endures beyond her death, is not one of stasis but rather is one of progression, as the final lines of the novel imply:

> “She built *Safe Farer,*” said Thorgerd[,] “and brought us here. She made everything different.”

> “And better,” said Anlaf Feilan. (Mitchison 190)

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240 “Auðr vas vegs-kona mikil” (*Hauksbók* II. xv. xv).
CHAPTER THREE:  
“‘Comely-faced [and] fair of fame’”:  
Derdriu in *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* (*The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu*)

The twelfth century *Book of Leinster* contains (among other things) the oldest manuscript of *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*, the earliest narrative featuring Derdriu and the sons of Uisliu.\(^{241}\) The antiquity of this tale (which scholars variously have dated to the eighth, ninth or tenth centuries \(^{242}\) and which accounts for the fact that Vernam Hull’s scholarly edition and translation of this work serve as the basis of my discussion here), reflects a chronology that transcends the story’s existence as a written work. In its earliest conception, *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* “may have been a struggle for kingship” whereby “[t]he struggle over Derdriu was not conceived of as simple rivalry for a lovely girl, but was seen as the struggle of two men of equal stature for a woman fit by her beauty to be the mortal symbol or personification of the Sovereignty, if not the Sovereignty herself” (Tymoczko 155).\(^{243}\) Indeed, the importance of *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* may have lain in its relation to the “heroic cycle” that once comprised it (Tymoczko 158). Insofar as every “heroic cycle” demands a reason as to “why the heroic age did not persist to the present” (Tymoczko 158), *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* may have depicted the cause of that era’s end: the battle over “Sovereignty” between Conchobor and Noisiu (Tymoczko 158).

\(^{241}\) *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach* (*The Violent Death of the Children of Uisneach*) dates to the 1300s or 1400s (Thomson 561) but does not appear “in any manuscript that can be dated before approximately the beginning of the sixteenth century” (Hull 1). In the introduction to his edition and translation of *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*, Vernam Hull details the variances that distinguish the earlier story from *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach*, the most notable of which (according to Hull himself) is the latter tale’s amendment to the plot of the earlier story. *Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach* excises the events that in *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* lead up to the flight of Uisliu’s sons from Ireland while “[expanding] and likewise [modifying] the remainder of the story” (Hull, Introduction to *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* 2).

\(^{242}\) According to Vernam Hull, a scribe may have compiled *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* as early as 700 A.D. and more likely at some point during the ensuing century (Introduction to *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* 32); Máire Herbert argues that the work was committed to writing between the ninth and tenth centuries (53).

\(^{243}\) Tymoczko points out that while *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* as it currently exists comprises some vestiges of this theme—Noisiu and his brothers “bear the characteristics of the ideal sovereign” (156)—Derdriu’s flight from Ireland and her suicide undermine the extent to which we may conceive of her as an allegory of “Sovereignty” (157).
Given this apparent history, it is not surprising that Derdriu should be central to the narrative of *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*. Yet her significance to the written myth in which she features belied the decreased importance of the tale itself in later centuries as reflected by its place in the Ulster cycle: by the time a monastic scribe copied *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* into the *Book of Leinster*, it had lost its initial thematic significance (Tymoczko 159), and this tale that as an oral narrative probably existed before any stories concerning Cuchulainn were even part of the Ulster cycle became a mere “ancillary” to those myths (Tymoczko 159), one that “has less power and less interest than it [did] as a tale about the end of the heroic age” (Tymoczko 159). More to the point, Derdriu’s import to *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* contradicted her own mitigated worth in the eyes of contemporary audiences:

[*Longes Mac n-Uislenn*] may have been falling into abeyance from the eighth through the eleventh centuries. It is striking that there are no references to Deirdriu herself during this period even though we find references to Noisiu or the sons of Uisliu. Whatever form the story took at the time, Deirdriu herself was not apparently a compelling figure in the narrative tradition of the period. (Tymoczko 159)

To the extent that Derdriu’s trajectory initially situates her as an important allegorical figure and then witnesses her decline in significance and popularity relative to the increase in meaning and esteem of Cuchulainn, Noisiu and his brothers, it posits her in opposition to them. This binary, coupled with the deterioration of Derdriu’s reputation over time among medieval Irish audiences, anticipates Máire Herbert’s reading of Derdriu in *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* as an Irish Eve. According to Genesis, the “mother of all the living” (Genesis 3.20) disobey’s God’s injunction against eating from the “tree which is in the midst of paradise” (Genesis 3.3) and is instrumental to Adam’s violation of the same ban. These acts result in their expulsion from Eden and, therefore, in the suffering that defines human existence from then on. Similar to

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244 Tymoczko comments that “[a] striking feature of the earliest extant version of *LMU* is its focus on Deirdriu” and observes that her counterparts in the Welsh and Irish analogies to this work do not occupy such a central role in the respective myths in which they appear (160).
Eve, Derdriu, too, contravenes “patriarchal authority” (Herbert 61) and “lure[s] a man to transgression along with her” (Herbert 61) by inducing Noisiu to run away with her, an act that ultimately leads to massacre and destruction among the Ulaid (Ulstermen). Derdriu’s appearance in _Longes Mac n-Uislen_, Herbert concludes, thus “reflects the concern of [the story’s] Christian author that depictions of male-female relations should not be seen to privilege female freedom, but rather that they should underline the consequences of repudiating established societal and moral authorities” (61-2). That is to say, if Derdriu begins as an emblem of “Sovereignty” over whom battles on the part of men result in the conclusion of the Ulster cycle and then becomes a non-entity relative to Noisiu, the Christian ideology that in Herbert’s view informs _Longes Mac n-Uislen_ further savages Derdriu’s character in attributing the devastation of Ulster to both her defiance of Conchobor and her sway over Noisiu.

Herbert’s observations are significant and illuminating, not least for the ways in which they situate this chapter in light of the thematic implications of her own argument. Herbert begins “The Universe of Male and Female: A Reading of the Deirdre Story” by acknowledging the paradoxical nature of _Longes Mac n-Uislen_ as “a product of the literate monastic milieu of early Christian Ireland” whose “setting and subject matter refer to a secular, pagan, preliterate [and therefore pre-Christian] milieu” (53) and asking how we are to decode it. Herbert, like Tymoczko, ultimately interprets the plot of _Longes Mac n-Uislen_ in light of pagan notions concerning the ideal relationship between sovereignty and nature but relates its expression to the Catholic values of those who transcribed it. However, her references to the relationship between the story’s depiction of Derdriu and medieval Irish perceptions of Eve and to the views of _Longes Mac n-Uislen_’s writer, whom she more specifically defines as an “Irish monastic scholar” (61), implicitly legitimize an approach to the text as a reflection of the cultural values that were pervasive throughout Ireland at the time that it was initially compiled.

In keeping with this methodology, then, I will read _Longes Mac n-Uislen_ in light of the late seventh-century _Lex Innocentium_ (697 A.D.) and the eighth-century _Collectio Canonum Hibernensis_ (716-25 A.D.)
Contextualized by these legal works, my analysis will, like Herbert’s, reveal the fusion of two entities that, like Christianity and paganism, typically are in binary opposition to one another. My examination here will argue that the extent to which Longes Mac n-Uislenn blames Derdriu for the bloodshed among the Ulaid reflects societal ambivalence about female violence in medieval Ireland between the eighth and tenth centuries. This inconsistency, as I shall demonstrate, reveals itself in Longes Mac n-Uislenn not only through the text’s identification of Derdriu with both warfare and the domestic and cultural practices that reflect civilian life but also through the inextricability of aggression from domesticity and civil custom.

I. “This is the Enactment of the Law” 245

The Lex Innocentium (the Law of the Innocents) is alternatively referred to as the Cán Adomnán or the Law of Adomnán who was Abbot of Iona between 679 and 704 A.D. The text of the treatise of this law frames itself as a godly decree conveyed to the Irish (and British) populace through Adomnán that was subsequently “enjoined upon the men of Ireland and Britain as a perpetual law until Doom, by order of their nobles, clerical and lay, together with their lords and ollams and bishops and sages and confessors. . .” (trans. Ní Dhonnchadha 18). That is, the Lex Innocentium explicitly depicts itself as a code whose [implicit] values have been agreed upon by the ruling patriarchy of Ireland both within and outside the Church. The précis of this edict, which appears in the sixth paragraph of the Law and which is elaborated upon in subsequent paragraphs, reads as follows:

On Pentecost eve a holy angel of the Lord came to [Adomnán], and again at Pentecost after a year, and took a staff and struck his side and said to him: ‘Go forth into Ireland and make a law that women be not killed in any manner by man, whether through slaughter or any other death, either by poison or in water or in fire or by any beast or in a pit or by dogs, except [they die in childbirth] in lawful bed.’ (trans. Ní Dhonnchadha 19)

245 This heading comes from the text of the Lex Innocentium as Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha has translated it (18).
On the surface, the core of the *Lex Innocentium* seems deceptively simple: it prohibits men from murdering women and in describing the methods by which the former might do so obviously makes an attempt to close its own potential loopholes. Yet this synopsis complicates itself in subtly and simultaneously defining men and women in relation to violence. By delineating the various ways in which men might commit violence against others, the passage I have just quoted implicitly classifies men as slayers whose destruction warrants legal restriction. More to the point, the exception to the rule subtly emphasizes the law’s applicability to men alone in acknowledging their procreative role and rendering them guiltless for the indirect and presumably unintentional consequence of that role in cases of maternal death in childbirth while situating women in relation to violence as its victims. At the same time, this statute’s allusion to “lawful bed” implicitly defines women in terms of their legal and official status as wives, while the circumstances of their respective deaths classify them as mothers which is to say that the *Lex Innocentium* identifies women with domesticity while contextualizing them as the targets of aggression rather than as its perpetrators.

In fact, the seventh paragraph of the *Lex Innocentium* (i.e. the paragraph following the one from which I have quoted), not only reinforces legal understanding of women as sufferers of violence but also, in grouping them with priests, infants, boys and youths, implies their exclusion from participation in war. This section legislates the shielding of both the Church in all of its manifestations (i.e. its human representatives, emblems, asylums and possessions both organic and inorganic) and its laity (Cáin Adomnán 20) from any official charge that may be brought against them because of their adherence to the *Lex Innocentium*. That it grants this “immunity” (trans. Ní Dhonnchadha 20) to “law-abiding laymen with their legitimate spouses” (trans. Ní Dhonnchadha 20) underscores the *Lex Innocentium’s* conception of men as agents and women as the objects of agency in defining the legal protection of the wives as an expansion of that provided to their husbands on account of their (that is, the husbands’) upholding of Adomnán’s statute. In any case, this paragraph states that the “enactment” (trans. Ní Dhonnchadha 20) of this rule “enjoins a perpetual law on behalf of clerics, and laywomen, and innocent children until they are capable of killing a person, and of
taking their place in the *túath*, and until their drove be known” (trans. Ní Dhonnchadha 20). Insofar as the protection offered to the “innocent children” no longer applies when they have reached adulthood, and the terms “clerics” and “laywomen” obviously refer to two distinct groups of adults, it follows that this section implicitly defines the “innocent children” as boys who become laymen. And insofar as “until they are capable of killing a person” means ready to participate in war (trans. Ní Dhonnchadha 20), this segment of the *Lex Innocentium* equates secular masculinity with the deployment of violence.

Yet the *Lex Innocentium* complicates the opposition it poses between men and women with respect to violence in describing the specific consequences of certain actions. In addition to detailing the penalties that any man who murders any woman, Church representative or child shall incur, the seventeenth paragraph of the *Cáin Adomnán* details the penalties incurred for physically harming, but not killing, any woman, Church representative or child. The *Law of the Innocents* specifies financial penalties of “five wethers” for “[w]omen’s hair-fights” and “three wethers” for “women-combat with degradation” (trans. Ní Dhonnchadha 21) while according to the following paragraph, adults of both genders are “equally liable. . .for all fines, small and large” (trans. Ní Dhonnchadha 21) charged on account of any “non-mortal wound” they “inflict on a laywoman or a cleric or an innocent child. . .up to women-combat” (trans. Ní Dhonnchadha 21)—situations that tacitly acknowledge the existence of female violence against other women, men and children and that on the face of it posits women as its instigators.

In the eighteenth paragraph, The *Law of the Innocents* also acknowledges that women are capable of murder in detailing the punishment that a given “laywoman deserves for her killing of a man or a woman, or for ministering poison from which one dies, or for arson, or for digging beneath a church. . .” (trans. Ní Dhonnchadha 21). Although the language here is somewhat ambiguous in that it is not clear if the references to “arson” and “digging beneath a church” imply that they, like the “poison,” are instruments of murder or whether these are offenses that carry the same penalty as outright killing or poisoning, it is worth noting the extent to which this section echoes the earlier prohibition against the killing of any woman by a given man.
Implicit in Paragraph Six is the fact that the ways in which men kill women include outright slaying and poisoning, as well as, presumably, drowning (“in water”), burning (“in fire”), setting wild animals or attack dogs upon them (“by any beast. . . or by dogs. . .”) and, apparently, burying them alive (“in a pit”). Paragraph Eighteen makes clear that the ways in which women kill men and other women include outright slaying and poisoning, and if the references to “arson” and “digging beneath a church” are mentioned here as implicit methods of murder, women, like men, kill others by burning or burying them alive.

Men face different consequences than women do for killing another person, a disjunction that perhaps reflects the *Lex Innocentium*’s overall construction of women as victims of violence rather than as its perpetrators. The man who “kills a woman shall be condemned to a twofold punishment, that is, before death, his right hand and his left foot shall be cut off and after that he shall die” (trans. Ní Dhonchadha 19) 246 while female killers are “to be put in a boat of one paddle at a sea-marking out at sea, to [see if she will] go ashore with the winds. Judgment on her in that regard [rests] with God” (trans. Ní Dhonchadha 21).

Finally, the *Law of the Innocents* addresses the participation of women in war in a statement that like the first passage I quoted is superficially transparent [in its meaning] but is more complex than it at first appears. Paragraph Twenty-Five states that the penalty for “making use of laywomen in a massacre or a muster or a raid” is “seven *cumals* for every hand [involved] as far as seven, and [it is reckoned as] the crime of one man from that onwards” (trans. Ní Dhonchadha 22). That is, the *Law* insinuates that women take part in war only as instruments deployed by men and therefore bear no legal responsibility for their role in conflict which falls upon the shoulders of the men who direct their actions. However, the mere mention of women’s involvement in war is in itself an admission that their relation to violence is not simply one of

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246 In addition to his own punishment, the “kin” of the male killer “shall pay seven full *cumals* and [the commutation for] seven years of penance” (trans. Ní Dhonchadha 19). Alternatively the guilty party may be assessed a financial penalty, as follows: “If a payment has been imposed instead of life and amputation, [the commutation for] fourteen years of penance and fourteen *cumals* shall be paid” (trans. Ní Dhonchadha 19).
passivity. In addition, the division between exercising individual will and being used by others is not always easy to determine.

The *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*, which is also referred to as the *Irish Canons*, compounds the ambiguity of the *Lex Innocentium* in overtly expressing the cultural values that underlie this legislation. The twenty-fifth section of the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*, “On the names of the sexes” (which consists entirely of a quotation from Augustine), unambiguously posits men and women in binary opposition to one another, and insofar as this section of the statute identifies men with combat, it also places women in binary opposition to conflict:

Augustine: The name ‘man’ (*vir*) comes from ‘strength’ (*virtus*), that is, for making war, working, defending, ruling and public speaking; the name ‘woman’ (*mulier*), on the other hand, is derived from ‘softness’ (*mollitia*), that is, from fragility, weakness, lowliness and subjection. (trans. O’Loughlin 16)

Indeed, the thirty-fourth section of the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*, “That the husband of an intact wife is not to go to war” (which follows Deuteronomy 20.7), not only affirms the distinction between men and women that the twenty-fifth section of the same statute asserts but also implicitly echoes the *Lex Innocentium* in both identifying women as the victims of warfare and associating them with domesticity:

The Law says: That man to whom a wife is betrothed, and who has not yet consummated the marriage with her, let him go and return to his house lest perhaps he die in battle and another man take her. (trans. O’Loughlin 17)

The indirect injunction here, that a man “who has not yet consummated [his] marriage” ought to “return to his house” in order to do so, implicitly situates women within a domestic space. At the same time, the consequences of what would happen in the event that a given man might be killed in the midst of warfare without having “consummated [his] marriage” underscore the passivity of women in relation to bloodshed: if women are not casualties of it, they are, as the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* seems to indicate, its spoils.
II. “‘O Woman with Destiny’” 247

The opening scene of *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* reflects the ambivalence of the *Law of Innocents* toward women’s involvement with violence, as follows:

The Ulstermen were drinking in the house of Feidlimid mac Daill, the storyteller of Conchobor. Now the wife of Feidlimid was attending upon the host, standing up and she being pregnant. Drinking horns and portions [of food] circled around, and they uttered a drunken shout. (trans. Hull 60) 248

Superficially, the initial setting of the story seems to embody domesticity, which arguably is war’s binary opposite: it consists of a social gathering in the dwelling of a man who, presumably, has been using his narrative gifts to entertain his guests; his spouse’s attentiveness to the aforementioned visitors underscores her connection to the home in that medieval Irish women were largely responsible for providing hospitality to company (Patterson 131); and women from Ireland’s privileged classes 249 had status as wives because the success of the recreational activities available to their guests reflected her organizational skills (Patterson 307). Moreover, Feidlimid’s wife is pregnant, a condition that according to the *Law of the Innocents* explicitly makes them sources of life (“For great is the sin when anyone kills one who is mother...” (trans. Ní Dhonnchadha 19)) and implicitly emphasizes the essential distinction between women and men.

Yet the broader social context of this scenario suggests that domesticity is inextricable from war.

To begin with, the presence of the “host” in and of itself renders Feidlimid’s house a military zone. This

247 This (edited) heading, as well as all subsequent ones, comes from the text of *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* as Vernam Hull has translated it.

248 “Bátar Ulaíd oc ól i taig Feidlimthe maic Daill, scelaigí Conchobuir. Bái dano ben ind Feidlimthe oc airiuc don t-sluag osa cinn is sí thorach. Tairmmell corn ocus chuibreann ocus ro ‘lasat gáir mesca” (*Longes Mac n-Uislenn* 43).

249 The earliest redaction refers to Feidlimid as a “scelaigí,” a storyteller. Presumably, since the *Uraicecht Becc* (*Little Primer*) mentions only categories of poets, and since poets were expected to tell stories as well as compose and recite poetry, Feidlimid was technically a poet and therefore a member of Ireland’s elite.
occupancy is not merely a material entity, however, but rather, in a paradoxical way, a cyclical occurrence that inculcates war into social practice. The medieval Irish calendar comprised two seasons: summer and winter, the latter of which commenced on the first of November “with the festival of Samain” (Patterson 119). From this date until the beginning of the summer, tenants sheltered and provided board to the retinues—and, more pertinently, the fian (“warrior bands” [Patterson 122])—of their overlords, which is to say Ireland’s aristocracy and its rulers (Patterson 122). In recompense for this generosity, the fian were obligated not only “to preserve order and prevent wrong-doing for the kings of Ireland” but also to “[protect] and [guard] the coast of the kingdom against the invasion of foreigners” (Keating qtd. by Patterson 123). In addition, although Samain concluded “the season of true warfare” (Patterson 123), technically speaking, records from this period testify to the frequency of slayings that occurred after the winter had officially set in (Patterson 123): notably, “[h]ouse parties made it easy to trap and burn enemies” (Patterson 123). And perhaps more to the point, it was in the six months following Samain, before summer commenced on the first of May with the celebration of Beltene, that individuals forged and cemented the relationships resulting in “kinship organization” and “patron-client relationships”—and also in conflict (Patterson 121).

Indeed, the diction of Longes Mac n-Uislenn in describing the scenario taking place inside Feidlimid’s home affirms the fusion of domesticity and war that the presence of the Ulstermen embody. The tale states that “[d]rinking horns and portions [of food] circled around” (trans. Hull 60), for which the corresponding Old Irish is as follows: “Taírmchell corn ocus chuibrenn. . .” (43). “Taírmchell corn ocus chuibreann” translates more literally as “the circuit of horns and of portions” (Hull 71), the importance of which lies in the narrative’s employment of the term “taírmchell.” In keeping with proper custom, guests in medieval Ireland resided with a given host for a period of no longer than seventy-two hours (O’Sullivan 212). In light of this rule, it therefore comes as no surprise that between Samain and Beltene, kings would circuit their respective realms which is to say that they, accompanied by their attendants and fianna, would go from the home of one tenant to another, the recipients of hospitality at each residence (Bhreatnach 20). “Taírmchell
corn ocus chuibrenn,” then, not only describes what is actually happening at Feidlimid’s residence but also calls attention to the broader context of this scene.

Longes Mac n-Uislenn then moves beyond The Law of Innocents and the Collectio Canonum Hibernensis in linking their respectively implicit and explicit disapproval of female conflict to its consequences while simultaneously identifying its female protagonist with passivity insofar as the Lex Innocentium places women and clerics in the same category. After the carousing ends and the household is preparing to retire for the evening, the as yet unborn child screeches so loudly from her mother’s womb that everyone in her father’s dwelling hears her shriek. This sound causes “each man within [to arise] from the other so that they were shoulder to shoulder (?) in the house” (trans. Hull 60). 250 When, Feidlimid’s wife at the order of Sencha mac Ailella comes before the household and her husband queries as to the source of the cry, she appeals to the seer, Cathbad, to provide the answer to what she herself does not know, and her entreaty begins as follows: “‘Hear handsome Cathbad of the comely face. . .’” (trans. Hull 61/ “‘Cluinid Cathbad cóem-ainech. . .’” [Longes Mac n-Uislenn 43]). “Comely face” is a translation of “cóem-ainech” which is precisely what Derdriu will have according to Cathbad’s own predictions: “‘O Derdriu, you will destroy much/[i]f you are comely-faced [and] fair of fame’ ” (trans. Hull 61/ “‘A Derdriu, maindera már,/[d]ia-msa cóem-ainech cloth-bán’ ” (Longes Mac n-Uislenn 44). 251 That Derdriu will have a “comely face” just as Cathbad does identifies her with him; that “Christian missionaries were regarded as foreign druids” (Carney 452) in turn suggests an equivalence between Cathbad and the Catholic clerics who came to Ireland. In likening her to Cathbad, then, Derdriu’s “comely face” implicitly defines her as an object of violence rather than as its wielder.

250 “At’ raig cach fer di alalíu is’tíg lasin scréich í-sín co´mbátar cinn ar chin isin tig” (Longes Mac n-Uislenn 43).
251 Although the present subjunctive form of the copula, “[d]ia-msa,” technically defines the beauty of Derdriu’s face as a mere possibility, these lines constitute the first two of a prophecy that Cathbad speaks after Derdriu’s birth and thus speak to what definitely is to come.
Yet Derdriu’s possession of a “comely face” guarantees that she shall become an active agent of
destruction, according to Cathbad’s prophecy, and this pronouncement, which the seer utters shortly after
Derdriu’s birth, underscores the implications of his reply to Feidlimid’s wife. In answer to her entreaty to
discern what she is carrying to term, Cathbad provides the following description of the woman who will be
known as Derdriu:

“In the receptacle of your womb there cried out
A woman of yellow hair with yellow curls,
With comely, grey-blue irised (?) eyes.
Her purplish-pink cheeks [are like] foxglove;
To the color of snow I compare
The spotless treasure of her set of teeth.
Lustrous [are] her scarlet-red (?) lips—
A woman for whom there will be many slaughters
Among the chariot-fighters of Ulster.

“There screams in your womb which bellows
A woman fair, tall [and] long-haired,
Concerning whom champions will contend,
Concerning whom high kings will ask.
They will be in the west with oppressive bodies of troops (?),
Supported by the province of Conchobar.
Her scarlet-red lips will be
About her pearly teeth—[. . .]” (trans. Hull 61) 252

Cathbad explicitly links the unborn child to violence as someone “‘for whom there will be many slaughters/[a]mong the chariot-fighters of Ulster’” and “’[c]oncerning whom champions will contend,’” the latter of whom will, alongside “‘high kings,’” “‘be in the west with oppressive bodies of troops’” (trans. Hull 61). Moreover, Derdriu’s physical qualities also connect her to warfare, albeit through subtlety and implication. Damien McManus has noted that the literary works of medieval Ireland collectively delineate the qualities possessed by kings. One of those characteristics is “martial prowess” (McManus 58), a trait whose indispensability comes as no surprise given that according to the thirteenth Heptad, 253 a king who loses a conflict is one of the seven monarchs who forfeits his honour-price (Jaski 46). Another characteristic is brains, and a third is flawlessness of physical form (McManus 58). As McManus observes, the texts pay particular attention to the aesthetic qualities of the hair and faces of these figures. Their colouring not only matches Derdriu’s to significant degrees but also is described in similar, if not identical terms. McManus states that the lines he cites allude “‘to teeth like a ‘shower of pearls,’ to lips like ‘rowan-berries,’ to the cheeks like a ‘mountain-foxglove’ and to the body being ‘whiter than snow’” 254 (63). Derdriu shares her “foxglove” cheeks, the respective shades of her teeth and lips and her flaxen “curls” with Niall Noigiallach (i.e. Niall of the Nine Hostages) as the late-tenth/early eleventh-century poet Cúan Úa Lothcháin (d. 1024) describes him in “Echtra Mac Echdach Mugmedóin” (“The Adventures of the Sons

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252  "Fot chriöl bronc becestair/Be fuilt buidi buide-chass/Séigdaib suilib sell-glassaib./Sian a grúade gorm-chorchraí;/ Fri dath snechtaí samlamar/Sét a détgne diámín./Niamdai a béoil partuing-deirg--/Bé dia’mhbiát il-ardbe/Eter Ulad erredaib./Gessid fot brú búirethar/Be find fota folt-lebor,/Imma curaid ‘cossenat,/Imma n-ard-rig ‘iarfassat. Biáit Íarthur trom-thoraib/Fo chlí chóicid Chonchobuir./Biáit a béoil partuing-deirg/Imma deta nemanda . . . ’” (Longes Mac n-Usleann 43-44).

253  The Heptads appear in the Senchas Máir which comprises many of the extant statutes pertaining to secular life in medieval Ireland (Charles-Edwards 337).

of Echdach Mugmedóin’). Conchobar as he is depicted in "The Death of Conchobar" is also flaxen-haired. And except for the shade of his hair, Cormac mac Airt’s colouring mirrors Derdriu’s, even down to the color of his irises: “Like blue-bells were his eyes…” (trans. Stokes qtd. by McManus 60/ “Cosmhl fri bug[hi]a suili” [qtd. by McManus 59]). In short, the similarity of Derdriu’s colouring to that of kings identifies her with war insofar as being a warrior was implicit in the role of the ruler, and Cathbad, in proclaiming that Derdriu “‘will destroy much/[i]f [she is] comely-faced [and] fair of fame’” connects this association to the harm that is yet to come.

In fact, Derdriu also shares the respective colors of her teeth and lips with Noisiu, a similarity that affirms the connection between the future destruction of the Ulstermen and Derdriu’s beauty that Cathbad’s prophetic description of her implies. However, the most significant trait that Derdriu and Noisiu have in common demonstrates that her identification with war goes beyond her physical similarities to renowned monarchs who by definition are also warriors. After detailing what Derdriu will look like—and before providing specific details of the carnage to come—the druid “put[s] his hand on the stomach of the woman so that the infant resound[s] under his hand” (trans. Hull 61) and proclaims her: “‘True [it is]. . . that a girl is there, and her name will be Derdriu, and concerning her there will be evil’” (trans. Hull 61).

Derdriu’s name derives from the verb “derdrethair” (Buttimer 7). One of the (possible) meanings of this word, according to the Dictionary of the Irish Language (DIL), is “resounds” (“Derdrethair”). “Resounding,” therefore, defines her being. “To resound,” according to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), is “to echo [or]

255 "Yellow as standard gold refined (was) the splendour of the noble locks of Niàll son of Eochaid” (trans. Joynt 1910 qtd. by McManus 63/ “Buiddir bronnór mbrethach/niàb nàrfult Neill meicc Echdach. . .” qtd. by McManus [63]).

256 “. . . the colour of Conchobor’s hair was the same as the colour of gold” (trans. Meyer 9).

257 “Dó’rat iar suidiu in Cathbath a láim for a broinn inna mnà coro’derdrestar in lelap foa láim” (Longes Mac n-Uislenn 44).

258 “‘Fir, ‘ar-se, ‘ingen fil and ocus bid Derdriu a hainm oclus biaid olc imep’” (Longes Mac n-Uislenn 44).

259 Anne Dooley makes a similar point in “The Heroic Word: The Reading of Early Irish Sagas” (155).
“to ring” (“Resound,” v.1, def. 4a), and “to ring” means “[t]o sound loudly or resonantly” (“Ring,” v.1, def. 5a). “Resounding” is precisely what Noisiu does, with no small implication:

Melodious . . . was the andord [edit. Buttmer 10] of the sons of Uisliu. Each cow and each animal that heard [it], two thirds of surplus milk always was milked from them. Each person who heard it always had a sufficient peaceful disposition (?) and musical entertainment. Good also were their arms. Although the [whole] province of the Ulstermen were in one place about them, they might not gain the victory over them on account of the excellence of the parrying and the self-defence, provided that every one of the three of them put his back against the other. As swift as hounds, moreover, they were at hunting. (trans. Hull 63) \(^{260}\)

The word “andord” is Old Irish for “song” and is used by the story’s author in reference to Noisiu’s singing. The term also alludes orthographically etymologically and phonologically to the dord fian (Buttmer 11), \(^{261}\) a parallel that reinforces Cornelius Buttmer’s assertion that the brothers’ musicality, military skills and hunting ability distinguish them “as members of a fian, ‘a larger or smaller band of roving warriors in [Kuno] Meyers’ cogent terms” (11). The passage above, therefore, positively associates musicality with male heroism insofar as Noisiu’s singing has an aesthetic and calming effect upon other people as well as upon, presumably, the cows, sheep and goats.

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\(^{261}\) “Its exact character is uncertain, but the utterance may resemble sounds like humming and buzzing which are also covered by the meanings of the noun dord. . . [the sound of which] evokes both positive and negative reactions. Its impact is felt in the realms of men and animals alike. The particular endowment of the sons of Uisliu, the andord (101), parallels the role of its Fíanaigecth counterpart and shares the same basic element dord” (Buttmer 11).
The effects of Derdriu’s own sound contrast with those of Noisiu’s, and the author’s use of the word “derdrethar” in relation to the sequence of events leading up to the druid’s prophecy underscore the notion that women are naturally docile, as is implied by the passage from Augustine quoted in the Collectio Canonum Hibernensis, and that for them to be otherwise makes them “droch–mná” (“evil women”) and instruments of ruin. The initial shriek that Derdriu releases from within her mother’s womb reaches the ears of everyone within the walls of Feidlimid’s home and causes each member of Conchobar’s army to “[arise] from the other so that they are shoulder to shoulder” (60). Significantly, the Old Irish phrase to which the English phrase “[arise] from the other” corresponds (“cach fer di alailiu”) is extremely similar to another Old Irish phrase whose Latin counterpart, alter adversus alterum insurgens, has connotations of aggression (Hull 72). “Cach fer di alailiu” might therefore, Hull argues, be more accurately rendered as “Each man fell upon (attacked) the other” (72). In this light, Derdriu’s shriek has the opposite effect of Noisiu’s song: her screech catalyzes human conflict instead of defusing its underlying tensions, and this difference suggests that Derdriu’s expression of a male-defined characteristic that defines its possessors as warriors and that therefore associates her with warfare has ominous implications. Unlike her colouring, which merely associates her with future violence, Derdriu’s shriek is an agent of it. And Feidlimid’s query to his wife, followed by his description of the scream’s effect on anyone within hearing distance of it, emphasizes this fact. It is Feidlimid who first uses the verb “to resound” (Old Irish “derdrethar”) to describe what Derdriu’s screech does: “‘What [is] the violent noise that resounds. . . /That rages throughout your bellowing womb? . . . /It crushes him who hears with ears’ ” (60). 262 And although the Old Irish word for “rages” that the author of Longes Mac n-Uislenn deploys is not “derdrethar,” it is worth pointing out that according to the Dictionary of the Irish Language, “rages” is the other definition listed for “derdrethar.”

262 “Cia deilm dremun derdrethar. . . /Dremnas fot broinn būredaig?/Bruī[t]h cluasaib cluineathar” ” (Longes Mac n-Uislenn 43).
In any case, it is years before Derdriu meets Noisiu; her birth follows Cathbad’s declaration that “‘concerning her there will be evil,’ ” upon which occasion the druid prophecies the events that the conclusion of *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* comprises. Not surprisingly, Cathbad implicates Derdriu in several of them: “‘...jealousy will be/ [a]blaze on [her] account. . .on account of [her]/[[t]hat will be] the exile of Fergus from the Ulstermen/[a] a deed for which weepings should lament, /[t]he slaughter of Fiachna mac Conchobuir [and] it [will be] for [her] crime/[[t]hat will be] the slaying of Gerrce mac Illadain/[a]nd a deed, the penalty of which [will] not [be] less,/[[t]he killing of Eogan mac Durthacht’ ” (trans. Hull 62). 263 But Cathbad also identifies Derdriu as an actual instigator of conflict, foretelling that she “‘will destroy much’ ” 264 and that she herself “‘will perform a horrible, fierce deed/[f]or anger against the king of the noble Ulstermen’ ” (trans. Hull 61-62). 265

III. “‘And she will be reared according to [Conchobor’s] own will’ ”

Not surprisingly, having heard what Cathbad foretells, the Ulstermen request that the infant “‘be slain’ ” (trans. Hull 62/ “‘Marbthar ind ingen!’ ol ind óic” (*Longes Mac n-Uislenn* 45). Conchobor, however, refuses to comply:

> By no means,” said Conchobor. “I shall carry off the girl tomorrow,” Conchobar added, “and she will be reared according to my own will, and she will be the woman who will be in my company.”

And the Ulstermen did not dare to set him right with respect to it. That, moreover, was done. She was reared by Conchobor until she was by far the most beautiful girl who

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263 at “Biáid etach cid iar tain/[d]ot daíg, a bé for lassair . . .Is triü̇t, a bé co mbail,/[l]onges Fergusas ó Últàib, [o]cus gnì um ar’coindf guil/[g]luin Fiachnai maic Conchobuir.
   “‘Is it chin, a bé co mbail,/[g]luin Gerec maic Illadain,/[o]cus gnì um nì ghu smacht,/[o]rgain Eogain maic Durthacht’ ” (*Longes Mac n-Uislenn* 44-45).
264 at “‘A Derdriu, maindera már. . .’ ” (*Longes Mac n-Uislenn* 44).
265 at “‘Do’gena gnì um nì granda ngarg/[a)r feirg ri rì g n-Ulad n-ard’ ” (*Longes Mac n-Uislenn* 45).
[ever] had been in Ireland. In a court apart it is that she was brought up in order that no
man of the Ulstermen might see her up to the time that she should spend the night with
Conchobar, and no person ever was allowed into that court except her foster father and
her foster mother and Leborcham; for the last-mentioned one could not be prevented, for
she was a female satirist. (trans. Hull 62) 266

That Conchobar ultimately intends to make Derdriu his consort superficially defines her in terms of
domicity insofar as her marital relationship with him will determine her future status. That foster parents
raise Derdriu within the architectural bounds of “a court” (trans. Hull 62/ “llis” [Longes Mac n- Uislenn 45])
also, on the surface, links her to the domestic realm in that this familial arrangement reflects the
pervasiveness of fosterage as a social practice throughout medieval Ireland. Yet the context of this very
environment simultaneously undermines that connection. Because Derdriu’s social circle throughout her
childhood and adolescence comprises no one but her foster parents and Leborcham, she matures into
adulthood outside of society rather than within it. Although western society traditionally has conceived of
the home as a feminine space, masculinity pervades the “court” in which Derdriu spends her infancy,
childhood and adolescence: it is Conchobar who officially “[rears]” (trans. Hull 62) Derdriu according to
Longes Mac n-Uislenn, and the manner in which her foster parents bring her up is in accordance with the
king’s mandates. More to the point, while the text refers to Derdriu’s foster mother (“a mumme” [Longes
Mac n-Uislenn 45]), she is literally no more than a nominal presence in it. By contrast, Derdriu’s foster
father (“a haite-sí” [Longes Mac n-Uislenn 45]) appears as an actual figure in Longes Mac n-Uislenn, and it is he
whose actions set in motion the events that will ultimately result in the fulfillment of Cathbad’s prophecy:

266 ʻNi-thó!’ ol Conchobar. ʻBerthair lim-sa ind ingen i mbarach,’ ol Conchobar, ʻocus ailebthaír dom réir
fén ocus bid sí ben bias im farad-sa.’

“Ocus níra-lámatar Ulaid a chocert immi. Do-ńuither ón dáno: Ro-ált la Conchobar co-mbo si ingen
as móir-áíllem ro-boí i n-Herinn.Is i llis fo leith ro-ált connach-acced fer di Ualtaib cosin n-úair no-foad la
Conchobar ocus ni-bai duine no-leicthe issin les sin acht a haite-sí ocus a mumme ocus dano Lebarcham, ar
ni-éta gabáil di ssidi ar ba ban-cháinte” (Longes Mac n-Uislenn 45).

261
7. Once upon a time, accordingly, the foster father of the maiden was skinning a weaned (?) calf on snow outside in the winter to cook it for her. She saw a raven drinking the blood on the snow. Then she said to Leborcham:

“Beloved would be the one man on whom might be yonder three colors—that is, hair like the raven, and a cheek like blood, and a body like snow.”

“Dignity and fortune to you!” said Leborcham. “He is not far from you. He is inside near to you, even Noisiu son of Ulisliu.”

“I shall, indeed, not be well,” she said, “until I see him.” (trans. Hull 63) 267

Although the efforts of Derdriu’s foster father to prepare food for her are reflective of his engagement with the practices of the domesticity, they simultaneously testify to his employment of violence in that he obviously had to slay the “calf” before beginning to “skin” it. The bloodshed that results from this brutality attracts the raven whose image, actions and visual contrast with the “blood” and the “snow” inspire Derdriu’s notion of her ideal counterpart. That it is Leborcham who identifies Noisiu as the one who possesses the characteristics that Derdriu seeks in a partner and facilitates the young woman’s encounter with him by indicating his proximity to her notwithstanding, it is Derdriu’s foster father who, within an environment that isolates her from Ulster’s community, exposes her to the violence that stirs her desire for Noisiu.

Derdriu’s encounter with Noisiu (its flirtatiousness notwithstanding) not only reaffirms the idea that female identification with war is a destructive force but intimates its danger more specifically to society itself even as it paradoxically redefines the “court” in which the young woman has lived for nearly all of her

267 “Fecht n-and didiu baí a haite na ingine oc fennad loíg fothlai for snechtu i-mmaig issin gimriuth dia funi di-sí. Co’n-accasí ní, in fiach oc ól inna folam forsin t-snechtu. Is and as’bert-sí fri Lebarcheim:

“‘Ro-pad immin oen-fer fora’smbetis na tri dath ucet .í. in folm mal in fiach ocus in grúad amal in ful ocus in corp amal in snechta.’

“‘Orddan ocus tocad duit!’ ar in Lebarcheim. ‘Ni cíam úait. Atá is’taig it arrad .í. Noisi mac Usnig.’

“‘Ni-pam slán-sa âm,’ ol-sí, ‘conid’n-accur-saide’” (Longes Mac n-Uislen 45).
life thus far as a feminine space and associates her with its domesticity. When the two first meet, they engage in the following exchange:

“Fair,” he said, “is the heifer that goes past me.”

“Heifers,” she said, “are bound to be big where bulls are not wont to be.”

“You have the bull of the province,” he said, “namely, the king of the Ulstermen.”

“I would choose between the two of you,” she said, “and I would take a young bullock like you.” (63) 268

As Maria Tymoczko points out, the corresponding Old Irish for “heifer” deployed by the author of Longes Mac n-Uislenn is the word “samaisc” (150). Fergus Kelly notes that although many academics (including Tymoczko) render this term as “two-year-old-heifer,” it more accurately refers to a three-year-old heifer that has yet to be mated and that therefore generates no milk since cows do not produce milk until they give birth (113). In addition, cows in Old Irish society were the standard measure of exchange, and a three-year-old heifer was worth half as much as a milch cow whose value was interpreted so as to tacitly include the value of her calf (Kelly 113). When, therefore, Noisiu appraises Derdriu as she walks by him, he acknowledges her beauty as that of a woman who has yet to become a wife and mother and whose value to society is accordingly reflected in its relation to that of a woman who has taken up her proper role.

Derdriu’s response, that heifers “‘are bound to be big’ ” in the habitual absence of bulls, intimates what Noisiu’s reply in turn somewhat paradoxically emphasizes: despite the fact that Conchobor has dictated how Derdriu has been raised, he himself has been physically absent from the “court” in which she has resided, and although her foster father has been a palpable presence in her life, his status as such disqualifies him as a potential husband. What Derdriu means, then, is that she has grown “big” with desire in the absence of a

268 “‘Is cáin,’ ol-se-sseom, ‘in t-samaisc tête sechunn!’

   ‘Dlegtair,’ ol-si-si, ‘samaisci mòra bale na’bit tairb.’

   ‘Atá tarb in chóicid lat,’ or-se-sseom, ‘i. ri Ulad.’

   ‘No’togfainn-se etruib far ndis,’ or-si-si, ‘ocus no’ gebainn tarbín óag amalt-so’ ” (Longes Mac n-Uislenn 46).
partner who might satisfy it. Significantly, such longings on the part of women in medieval Irish texts make them “aggressive, uncontrolable, even mad” (Bitel 69)—the first two adjectives of which certainly apply to Derdriu in that her assertion to Noisiu that she “‘would choose between [him and Conchobor]’ ” and “‘would take a young bullock like [Noisiu]’ ” boldly flouts Conchobor’s dictates. Yet it is in her disobedience that Derdriu emulates Leborachham who in marked contrast to Conchobor has exerted her influence over the young woman. And to the extent that Leboracham has been a de facto presence during Derdriu’s upbringing, the latter’s defiance of the king’s mandates links her to domesticity.

Indeed, it is in the culminating moment of Derdriu’s encounter with Noisiu that Longes Mac n-Uislenn reveals how exactly female militarism threatens society, and in a way that demonstrates the appropriateness of her name. After Noisiu refuses Derdriu in an attempt to prevent the druid’s prophecy from coming true, she “[makes] a leap to him and [grasps] both ears on his head” (trans. Hull 63/ “La sodain fo’ceird-si bedg cuci corro’ gab a dá n-ó for a chin” [Longes Mac n-Uislen 46]):

“These are two ears of shame and of derision,” she said, “unless you take me away with you.”

“Go away from me, O woman,” he said.

“You shall have that,” she said.

Thereupon, his tenor (?) song arose from him. As the Ulstermen yonder heard his tenor (?) song, each man of them arose from the other. (trans. Hull 63) 269

As Philip O’Leary has discussed, Derdriu’s clenching of Noisiu’s ears is a “ritual invocation of geis” 270 (“Honour-Bound: The Social Context of Early Irish Heroic Geis” 98) that obligates him to defend her from

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269 “Dá n-ó mele ocus cuitbiuda in-so,’ ol-si, ‘maním’ bera-su latt.’
   “‘Eirg uaim, a ben!’ ol-se.
   “‘Rot’ bia ón,’ ol-si-si.
   “At’ racht la sodain a andord n-ass. Amail ro’chualatar Úlaid in-nunn in n-andord, at’raig cech fer dib di alailiu” (Longes Mac n-Uislen 46).

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harm, “thereby challenging his honour” (98). This act is also, as Vernam Hull asserts, distinct from that of the medieval Irish poet when refused the concession of his demands:

If the evidence furnished by the gloss in the _Auraisept Na n-Éces_ as well as by Cormac’s _Glossary_ and the _Immacallam In Dá Thúarad_ may be trusted, the poets of ancient Ireland seem to have possessed a _nemthes_ or special privilege which enabled them to coerce a person who denied them any request that they might demand by means of a process called _Briamon Smethrach_. This process the poets apparently exercised in the following manner: They grasped the lobe of their ear which they then rubbed between their fingers or pulled, and, at the same time, according to the testimony of Cormac, they regarded the person whom they were seeking to constrain by their malediction. (Hull, _Miscellanea_ 327)

Implicit in Hull’s description of _Briamon Smethrach_ are two points: first, that medieval Irish society acknowledged and sanctioned the performance of _Briamon Smethrach_ on the part of its poets as one of its formal rituals; and second, that a given poet’s enactment of _Briamon Smethrach_ linked compliance with physical force—even if he did not direct his aggression towards his refuser but rather inflicted it upon himself. Explicitly, Hull emphasizes the fact that the right to perform _Briamon Smethrach_ belonged to the poet alone and as such was an act of authority that distinguished him from others within medieval Irish society.

Taken together, both the denotive description of _Briamon Smethrach_ and its implications underlie the significance of Derdriu’s wrenching of Noisiú’s ears, Hull’s differentiation of these acts notwithstanding. As _Longes Mac n-Uislenn_ itself informs us, Leborcham’s presence in the “court” where Derdriu spends her

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270 The _Dictionary of the Irish Language_ (DIL) defines a “geis” as “a tabu, a prohibition” (“geis,” def. (a)), among other things.
childhood is in defiance of Conchobar’s decree that no one but her foster parents lay eyes on the girl until the occasion of her marriage to him. The text accounts for this lack of compliance on Leborcham’s part—and failure to control her on the king’s—by attributing it to her status as “a female satirist.” As James Carney has observed, “[i]n early Ireland a woman could apparently be an official poet” (453) and although translators typically render the term “bancháinte” as “female satirist,” we cannot be certain that satire constituted the entire repertoire of those who identified as such (Carney 453). Implicit in the adjacency of these statements, combined with Carney’s subsequent references to other poets in pre-1000 Ireland who were women, is the idea that the bancháinte was a poet. Longes Mac n-Uislenn’s depiction of Leborcham suggests as much insofar as her presence within the “court” where Derdriu grows up is reflective of an autonomy shared by no one else that in its exclusivity parallels the right of medieval Irish poets to perform Briamon Smethrach.

In this light, it is not difficult to perceive Derdriu’s behavior towards Noisiu as a distorted performance of Briamon Smethrach, one that deviates from and subverts what she herself has witnessed and now poorly imitates: Leborcham’s own performance of this ritual. This interpretation is in keeping with Tymoczko’s observation—with respect to this very exchange between Derdriu and Noisiu—that Leborcham’s status as “one of [Derdriu’s] three human companions” means that “we should not be surprised that [the latter] knows something about satire and shaming” (151). Indeed, Tymoczko states that Derdriu “[approaches] Noisiu the way she would a recalcitrant beast” and that this treatment is not surprising “given her upbringing apart from people” (151). While Tymoczko’s characterization of Derdriu’s conduct towards Noisiu certainly affirms my own earlier assertion that the environment in which the young woman comes to maturity is more or less devoid of socialization, it is worth noting that the disjunction between Briamon Smethrach as it was supposed to be enacted and Derdriu’s imitation of it emphasizes the extent to which her coercion of Noisiu aligns her with war as an act of aggression. Although Derdriu clenches Noisiu’s ears for the same reason that the medieval poet would tug on one of his own ears (because a denial is and was the
response to their respective requests), she directs her violence outwardly and externally towards another person, in contrast to the bard who directs it towards himself. But just as importantly, Derdriu’s performance of *Briamón Smythrach*, unlike that of the medieval poet, breaches the cultural norms and regulations of Ulster society: Derdriu, of course, is not a poet and therefore has no legal right to perform *Briamón Smythrach*. And yet, Derdriu’s version of this ritual affirms her connection to domesticity as an imitation of a practice carried out by Leborcham whom *Longes Mac n-Uislen* arguably depicts as a second, unofficial foster mother to the young woman. It is Leborcham to whom the young woman confides her longings for “‘the one man on whom might be yonder three colors’” (trans. Hull 62/”Ro-pad inmain oen fer forsa-mbetis na tri dath ucú” (45)) and whose influence enables Derdriu not only to find Noisiu and to stage an encounter with him, but also to compel him to conform to her wishes.

At any rate, Noisiu’s final reaction to having his ears wrenched and the consequences thereof substantiate the connection between Derdriu and violence that *Longes Mac n-Uislen* establishes through her performance of this act. Following Derdriu’s aggression towards Noisiu and accompanying threat, the man begins to sing. It is not clear, given the exchange that immediately precedes the singing, whether Noisiu’s tune is an expression of relief or contentment at having been let go (though to twenty-first century readers, the exchange seems to consist of him telling Derdriu to “leave him alone” and her articulation of her compliance, which implies the accompanying action of letting go of his ears). In any case, what is significant here is that Noisiu’s singing has the same effect upon the Ulstermen that Derdriu’s initial shriek has on them at the beginning of the story. Indeed, the Old Irish in these two instances is nearly identical (“atraig cach fer di alailiú” (43) versus “atraig ceech fer dib di alailiú” (46)). Noisiu’s song, once a calming force that implicitly defused hostility, has transformed into a catalyst for conflict. Female violence, it seems, turns men into its own instruments by resounding through them.

Indeed, the response of Noisiu’s brothers to his singing reinforces Derdriu’s status as an agent of war: upon hearing him, they approach “to hinder their brother” (trans. Hull 63/ “do thairmesc a mbrathar”
[Longes Mac n-Uislen 46]) and, after inquiring as to “‘[w]hat ails [him]’” (trans. Hull 63/ “‘Cid no’taí’” [Longes Mac n-Uislen 46]), demand that he “‘[l]et not the Ulstermen slay one another for [his] crime’” (trans. Hull 63/ “‘Na ‘mma ngonad d’Ulbtaib it chínaid!’” [Longes Mac n-Uislen 46]). Noisiu’s “crime” is that he has stirred “the Ulstermen” to the brink of battle against one another which, as I said in the previous paragraph, establishes a parallel between his “tenor” and the unborn Derdriu’s screech. But Longes Mac n-Uislen’s diction also underscores this parallel between Noisiu and Derdriu. The word “chínaid” (“crime”) is the accusative form of the noun “cín”—the very word that Cathbad earlier uses to describe Derdriu’s elopement with Noisiu: “‘O woman with destiny, it is for your crime/[t]hat will be] the slaying of Gerrce mac Illadain/[a]nd a deed, the penalty of which [will] not [be] less,/t]he killing of Eogan mac Durthacht’” (trans. Hull 62). 271 A “crime,” of course, is a legal transgression against the societal rules that preserve civilian life rather than lead to its destruction, as war usually does. After Noisiu informs his brothers about the exchange he has had with Derdriu, they predict that “‘[e]vil will ensue’” while assuring their sibling that “‘[a]lthough there may be [e]vil resulting therefrom], [he] shall not be under disgrace as long as [they] shall be alive’” (trans. Hull 64/ “‘Biaid olc de,’ ol ind óicc. ‘Cia beith, noco-bia-so fo mebail céin bemmit-ni i mbethaid’” [Longes Mac n-Uislen 46]). Notably, the use of the term “olc” (“evil”) on the part of Noisiu’s brothers is the same word that Cathbad earlier employs when he identifies her in her mother’s womb: “‘True [it is]. . . that a girl is there, and her name will be Derdriu, and concerning her there will be evil’” (trans. Hull 61/ “‘Fir,’ ar-se, ‘ingen fil and ocus bid Derdriu a hainm ocus biaid olc [my italics] limpe’” [Longes Mac n-Uislen 44]).

In fact, the plans that Noisiu’s brothers implement as a consequence of their support for their sibling, like their use of the words “chínaid” and “olc,” echo the beginning of Longes Mac n-Uislen, thematically speaking. Noisiu’s brothers determine that their best course of action is to travel with Derdriu

271 “‘Is it chín, a bé co mbail,/[g]uim Gerrci maic Illadain,/í]cus gním nat lugu smacht,/í]rggain Eogain maic Durthacht’” (Longes Mac n-Uislen 44-45).
beyond Ulster’s borders because “‘[t]here is not in Ireland a king who will not give welcome to [them]’ ” (trans. Hull 64/ “‘Ni·fil i n-‘Herinn rig na·tibre failti dún’ ” [Longes Mac n-Uislenn 46]). That is, their plan entails a literal, physical move towards the hospitality that the [idea of domesticity (among other things) metonymically implies.] Yet the brothers depart from Ulster with an entourage of “their hundred and fifty warriors, women, dogs and servants; and among them [is] Derdriu mingled in with everybody [else]” (trans. Hull 64/ “Ro·imthigsetar in n-aidchí sin .i. tri coicait láech dóib ocus tri coicait ban ocus tri coicait gilla ocus Derdriu i cumusc cáich co·mbai etarru” [Longes Mac n-Uislenn 46]): by leaving Ulster in the midst of a warrior band, Noisiu and his brothers thereby fuse domesticity and war. More to the point, Derdriu is “mingled in with everybody [else]” in this crowd. Rather than group her with the “hundred and fifty . . women” (“tri coicait ban”)—who by virtue of the text’s distinction of them from the “hundred and fifty warriors” are implicitly separate from those who metonymically identify with war—Longes Mac n-Uislenn places her amidst not only the women, but amidst the “hundred and fifty . . servants and, most pertinently for the argument of this chapter, amidst the “hundred and fifty warriors.”

IV. “‘In [Derdriu’s] Time it is . . the Exile of the Three Sons of Uisliu’”

What happens after Noisiu, his brothers and Derdriu quit Ulster affirms Cathbad’s prophecy that “‘[i]n [her]time . . [t]hat will be] the exile of the three sons of Uisliu’ ” (trans. Hull 62/ “‘Is it aimsir . . /Longes tri mac n-Uislene’ ” [Longes Mac n-Uislenn 44]), and I would argue that the myth implicitly recalls this moment—thereby accentuating Derdriu’s connection to the occurrence of this event—by respectively perpetuating and recapitulating some of its thematic and narrative contexts. The trio and Derdriu are “under protection all around Ireland” (trans. Hull 64/ “for foesamaib cén móir mó·thimchell n·Érenn. . .” [Longes Mac n-Uislenn 46]) even as “the Ulstermen” (“Ulaid”), at Conchobar’s orders, pursue them with the goal of achieving “their destruction” (trans. Hull 64/ “a ndith” [Longes Mac n-Uislenn 46]). This situation embodies the inextricability of war and domesticity: while the Ulaid’s motive for
stalking Uisliu’s sons and Derdriu obviously relates their activities—and those of their prey—to conflict, the “protection” that the other rulers in Ireland extend to the foursome has its roots in hospitality and therefore in domesticity: as the Dictionary of the Irish Language points out, the noun “protection” (“fáesam”) may, in a legal sense, refer to “the immunity from legal process which a person of high rank confers on an inferior, usually a client (céle), who has entertained him and his retinue in accordance with the obligations of clientship” (“fáes(s)am,” 1c). Longes Mac n-Uislenn’s use of the word “fáesam” in its dative form, “foesamaib,” therefore reminds us of its own initial setting, the home of Derdriu’s father, Feidlimid mac Daill. The myth then compounds this allusion in employing the phrase “mór-thimchell n-Érenn.” “Mór-thimchell” translates as “great circuit” which refers not only to the traditional paradigm of Irish medieval kings as they travel within their respective realms but also to the passing of food and drink that occurs in Feidlimid’s house in the hours before the unborn Derdriu makes her presence known to everyone in her father’s household.

Noisíu, his brothers and Derdriu manage to evade the Ulaid by fleeing to Scotland where they initially reside “in the desert” (trans. Hull 64/ “i ndithrub” [Longes Mac n-Uislenn 46]); as a refuge from those who would kill Uisliu’s offspring and Derdriu, Scotland is a place of shelter and protection. But the refugees’ own activities (for reasons that, in their proper historical context, are quite understandable) quickly transform this haven into a battlefield: when the exiles apparently meet with no success while hunting for food in the Scottish highlands, they seize the cows and bulls owned by the native Scotsmen who (naturally) respond to this theft by hounding the thieves with intent “to destroy them” (trans. Hull 64/ “Do’chótar side dia ndilgiund. . .” [Longes Mac n-Uislenn 46]). Thus, Scotland parallels Feidlimid’s house as a space that embodies both conflict and the connotations of home, and the Scotsmen’s pursuit of the asylum seekers echoes the Ulstermen’s own hunting of them.

The refugees go to Scotland’s king; like Ireland’s kings beyond Ulster’s borders, the Scottish ruler provides hospitality to Uisliu’s sons, thereby compounding the tale’s allusion to its own opening setting. That the brothers become mercenaries for the King of Scotland and accordingly set up residence “on the
green” (trans. Hull 64/ “issind faithchi” [Longes Mac n-Uislen 46]) emphasizes the thematic fusion of domesticity and war that Scotland represents. And the way in which Derdriu figures into these events recalls the ambivalence of the law texts with respect to women’s relationships with violence even as it emphasizes the masculinity of her domestic environments past and present. When referring to the actions of the exiles in Scotland, Longes Mac n-Uislen employs verbs in the third person plural but no subjects, leaving it ambiguous as to whether or not Derdriu participates in the theft of the livestock and is consequently hounded by the Scotsmen. That Noisiu and his siblings construct their abodes in such a manner as to conceal Derdriu’s existence from the Scottish king and his retinue points to the fact that she is not present when they seek his protection and take up military service on his behalf. The brothers’ desire to conceal Derdriu from the community in which they now live recalls the conditions in which she grew up.

Yet the allusion to Derdriu’s childhood atmosphere simultaneously emphasizes the extent to which her Scottish circumstances arguably associate her more closely with warfare than did the ones in which she matured. If Derdriu spent her infancy, childhood and adolescence cut off from Ulster’s society at Conchobar’s behest and if her foster father introduced her to violence by slaying and “skinning” the “calf,” the “court” in which she lived until adulthood also included feminine presences in the forms of her foster mother and Leborcharm, and the latter also clearly exerted some social influence, even if the young woman’s imitation of the same was both a distortion and a flouting of social convention. In Scotland, Derdriu resides in a house, the metonym for domesticity, but those with whom she shares her dwelling are not only all men but have become mercenaries. More significantly, the disjunction between Conchobar’s motives in isolating Derdriu from society and the brothers’ reasons for doing the same reflects an intensification of her connection to war; while Conchobar hid Derdriu so that no other man would glimpse and thus desire her, Uisliu’s sons do so because this same reason would result in their deaths: “On account
of the maiden the houses were made so that no one with them might see her in order that they might not be killed with respect to her” (trans. Hull 64). 272

*Longes Mac n-Uislen* accentuates this difference by once more alluding to the festivities at Feidlimid’s home and affirming the synthesis of domesticity and aggression. The “steward” (trans. Hull 64; “rechtaire” [Longes Mac n-Uislen 46]) of the Scottish king—whose official duty was to manage the monarch’s residence (Sayers, “Ceí, Uniferth and Access to the Throne” 129)—happens one morning to glimpse the still slumbering Derdriu and Noisiu while making his rounds. By virtue of his professional role and his performance of a circuit that calls to mind the passing of victuals and ale in Feidlimid’s home, the “steward” emblematizes domestic life. It is he, however, who mels his own connotative meaning with that of conflict. The “steward’s” discovery prompts him to hasten to the king with the news that a woman who is a match for the ruler is sleeping with Noisiu; his advice to his liege to have Noisiu slain so that he, the king, may claim her as his queen intertwines one of the major defining rites of civilization and symbols of domestication, marriage, with the motive to slay, an act of war. The king himself initially aligns himself with domesticity when he rejects this plan and instead orders the “steward” to meet privately with Derdriu and seek her hand on his behalf. When these proposals meet with no success, however, Noisiu and his brothers find themselves “enjoined to go into dangers, battles and hazards in order that they might be killed” (trans. Hull 64), 273 and the trio abandons Scotland in the darkness of night for an unidentified island when they become the targets of Scotsmen who have gathered for this purpose. Thus the King of Scotland, who by virtue of the sanctuary and the positions he has given to Uisliu’s sons already represents the melding of domesticity and war, deepens his own thematic significance with respect to his desire for Derdriu.

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272 4. *“Im déigin ina ingine dóróna na tige conna’haced nech leo hí ar dáig naro’marbtas ime”* ([Longes Mac n-Uislen 46]).

273 4. *“. . . no’erálta for maccaib Uislen dul i ngabthib ocus i cathaib ocus i ndrobeláib ar dáig coro’mmarbtais”* ([Longes Mac n-Uislen 47]).
But what augments Derdriu’s relation to war more than any other aspect of this context is her own direct involvement in its machinations. In Conchobor’s “court,” she is merely a witness to her foster father’s “skinning” of the “calf”; in Scotland, she reports the content of her daily exchanges with the king’s “steward” to Noisiu each evening, and it is she who advises Noisiu to quit Scotland immediately one evening lest he be slain the following day—after having discussed and participated in the devisement of the Scotsmen’s plot to assassinate the brothers. In other words, Derdriu in Longes Mac n-Uislen is a double agent.

When, therefore, the plight of the brothers comes to the attention of the Ulaid, Derdriu’s activities in Scotland inform and compound the significance of their remark to Conchobor that it would be dreadful and shameful “for the Sons of Uisliu to fall in hostile lands through the crime of a bad woman” (trans. Hull 65/ “‘maic Uislenn do thuitim i tírib námait tre chin droch-mná’” [Longes Mac n-Uislen 47]), particularly with respect to their deployment of the term “crime” (“chin”). Whereas the use of this noun on the part of Cathbad and, later, Noisiu’s brothers indirectly implicate Derdriu in battle, the Ulaid’s employment of this term refers not only to her coercion of Noisiu and their subsequent elopement but also to her dealings with the Scotsmen—even if there has never been any question as to where Derdriu’s loyalties have lain.

V. “‘A Woman for Whom There Will be Many Slaughters’”

In any case, having apparently granted the Ulaid their request—namely, that the trio be granted amnesty on the grounds that such would be preferable to their being slain by the Scotsmen—Conchobar stipulates that “‘sureties [must] go for them’” (trans. Hull 65/ “. . .ocus tiagat commairgi friu” [Longes Mac n-Uislen 47]), to which Uisliu’s offspring agree, naming Fergus, Dubthach and Cormac mac Conchobuir as their guarantors. These three men indeed provide the brothers with “accompaniment from the sea” (trans. Hull 65/ “Tiagait side co-ngabsat a llama di muir” [Longes Mac n-Uislen 47]). But because of Cochobar’s underhanded schemes, Fergus (as well as Dubthach) ultimately fails to accompany his charges to their destination, “the green of Emain” (trans. Hull 65/ “faithchi na Emna” [Longes Mac n-Uislen 47]). It is
through the nature of Conchobar’s machinations that the myth once again affirms Derdriu’s culpability for the turmoil that has already occurred and that is yet to come by once more emphasizing the inextricability of domesticity and hostilities that implicitly characterizes Feidlimid’s household. Noisiu and his brothers having vowed that Conchobar shall serve them the first meal that they eat upon their return to Ireland, the king suggests that some parties (whom Longes Mac n-Uislenn does not identify) engage in a “contention” (trans. Hull 65 / “imchosnam” [Longes mac n-Uislenn 47]) so as to win the right to issue Fergus an invitation to a feast. That this hospitality is the result of a contest, however friendly it may be, in itself embodies both domesticity and strife. But because Fergus’ geis 274 obliges him to attend the dinner hosted by the winner of the “contention,” the sons of Uisliu in turn must make their way to Emain without their main guarantor (and, as it turns out, also without Dubthach who accompanies Fergus to the feast). That is, the real motive behind the competition is not to honor Fergus but to leave the homecomers without his protection and thus defenseless in the face of attack. The “ale-banquets” (trans. Hull 65 / “chormannaib” [Longes Mac n-Uislenn 47]) therefore connote bloodshed as much as social ritual.

It is on “the green of Emain” that Uisliu’s sons ultimately meet their deaths, and this setting implicitly points to Derdriu’s culpability for the slaying of the brothers and accentuates her responsibility for the massacre follows through the contrast it creates between her and the other women even as it simultaneously distances her from all that occurs. Longes Mac n-Uislenn states that “[t]he Sons of Uisliu”—Noisiu and his two brothers—“[come] until they [are] on the green of Emain” (trans. Hull 65). 275 A little while later, the narrative informs us that Noisiu and his brothers are in the center of “the green” and that the “women [are] in their seats on the rampart of Emain” (trans. Hull 65). 276 The word “rampart,” meaning “[a] defensive wall or mound of earth, with a broad top and usually a stone parapet; a walkway along the top of such a structure” (“rampart,” def. 1a), clearly and implicitly defines “the green” as a site of combat—as

274 Fergus’ geis is that he may not refuse an invitation to a feast (MacKillop 191).
275 “. . .ocus do·llotar ma`c Uislenn co·mb`at for faithchi na Emn`a” (Longes Mac n-Uislenn 47).
276 “. . .ocus batar inna mna` inna suidib for dou na h-Emn`a” (Longes Mac n-Uislenn 47).
becomes demonstratively obvious in short order when, at Conchobar’s instigation, Eogan mac Durthach, 
accompanied by “his body of troops (?)” (trans. Hull 65/ “thur” [Longes Mac n-Uisленn 47]), impales Noisiu 
whose brothers subsequently die in the slaughter following that initial killing. Of significance is the fact that 
Longes Mac n-Uislen implicitly contextualizes “the green” as a masculine space by positing the women on its 
physical boundary. And Dubthac’s retaliatory massacre of “the maidens of Ulster” (trans. Hull 66/ 
“ingenrad Ulad” [Longes Mac n-Uislenn 48]) reinforces the idea of women as war’s victims rather than as its 
perpetrators. That Longes Mac n-Uislenn makes no mention of Derdriu’s whereabouts when it indicates the 
arrival of Noisiu and his brothers in Emain initially seems to disassociate her from the violence that is to 
come. Yet the fact that “she [is] brought over to Conchobar so that she [is] beside him, and her hands [are] 
bound behind her back” (trans. Hull 65) 277 after Eogan mac Durthacht and his men skewer Uisliú’s sons 
implicitly testifies to her culpability as an agent of war: the king’s impediment of her mobility indicates her 
potential to flee—which, of course, is exactly what caused the Ulaid to attempt the destruction of Noisiu 
and his brothers in the first place.

VI. “‘[She] will perform a horrible, fierce deed’”

For a year after the massacre “on the green of Emain,” Derdriu resides in Conchobar’s household, 
hers bereavement so profound that she neither eats nor sleeps and so “[w]henever, therefore, they [bring] the 
musicians to her” (trans. Hull 66), 278 she sings a eulogistic poem in commemoration of Noisiu and their life 
together. In the second stanza of this dirge, Derdriu recalls “‘Noisiu with good hazel-mead/[h]im she]
washed at the fire—’ ” (trans. Hull 66/ “‘Noisi co mmid chollan chain—/[f]ölculd lim-sa dó con tein—’ ” 
[Longes Mac n-Uislenn 48]), an image that not only identifies her with domesticity but that more particularly

277 “. . .ocus rucad- sí in-nunn co Conchobar co-mbaí fora láím ocus ro-cumrigthe a llama íarna cúl” (Longes 
Mac n-Uislenn 48).
278 “In tan didiu do- mbertis na hairfí di. . .” (Longes Mac n-Uislenn 48). It should be noted that the musicians 
in the medieval text are complicit in Derdriu’s estrangement from the comforts of home.
associates her with womanhood in medieval Ireland in that medieval Irish women would typically gather by a stream or a spring in order to cleanse both themselves and clothing worn by household members (Bitel 153).

Yet Dardriu’s verse also exposes her estrangement from those rituals that distinguish civilian life—and more particularly, those practices in which women engage—from existence on the battlefield. In Conchobar’s residence, she “‘[d]oes not redden [her] fingernails’” (trans. Hull 67/ “‘Ocus ní corcu m’ingne’” [Longes Mac n-Uislen 49]), nor has she “‘a big house’” or “‘fair adornment’” (trans. Hull 68/ “‘Na tech mér na cumtach cáin’” [Longes Mac n-Uislen 50]). And in fact, Dardriu’s eulogy underscores Longes Mac n-Uislen’s identification of her with combat. To begin with, a good portion of Dardriu’s overt admiration for Noisiu refers to his standing as a “warrior” (trans. Hull 67/ “óclach” [Longes Mac n-Uislen 49]); in this light, it is not surprising that his coloring and his singing, two characteristics that the myth associates with hostilities or that Dardriu now links to warfare, come to mind when she recalls him. 279 But most importantly, she herself claims responsibility for his demise on “the green of Emain”: “‘For him I have poured out—host over a height (?)--/[tí]he deadly draught of which he has died’” (trans. Hull 67). 280

At the end of his prophecy, Cathbad foretells that Dardriu will “‘perform a horrible, fierce deed/[tí]or anger against the king of the noble Ulstermen. . . ’” (trans. Hull 62/ “‘Do·gena gním ngranda

279 “‘Beloved [is] the [little] crop of hair (?) with yellow (?) beauty;/[c]omely [is] the man, even. . . /[s]orrowful it is [indeed] that I do not expect today/[tí]o await the son of Uisliu (“‘Inmain berthán áilli blai./[tí]uchtach duine cid dind-blai. Ba dirsan nád-[tí]resco in-diú/[m]ac Uislen do idnáidiu’” [Longes Mac n-Uislen 49]).

“‘Beloved [is] the desire, steadfast [and] just;/[b]eloved [is] the warrior, noble [and] very modest./After a journey beyond the forest’s fence,/eloved [is] the . . in the early morning (“‘Inmain menma cobsaid cáirí; [l]mmain óclach ard inmair. Iar n-imthecht dá feda fál/ [l]mmain costal i tuignár’” [Longes Mac n-Uislen 49]).

“‘Beloved [is] the gray eye that women used to love;/fierce it used to be against foes. After a circuit of the forest—a noble union—/eloved [is] the tenor (?) song through a dark great wood ” ([trans. Hull 67]/ “‘Inmain súil glass cardais mná; [b]a hamnas fri ecraí. Iar cúairt chaille—comul saer—[l]mmain andord tria dub·ræd” [Longes Mac n-Uislen 49]). It should be noted that Dardriu sings a second song in response to Conchobar’s attempts to calm her, and that that song also implicitly and explicitly links Noisiu to war in describing his physical appearance and equipment.

280 “‘Dor’dalius—dron tria alt—/[l]n dig tonnaid dia·n·erbalt’” (Longes Mac n-Uislen 49).
ngarg/ a r feirg ri ríg n-Ulad n-ard” [Longes Mac n-Uslenn 45]). This prediction comes true at the conclusion of Longes Mac n-Uslenn with Derdriu’s suicide. At the end of the year in which Derdriu has lived with Conchobar, he inquires as to what she most despises, to which she replies that she hates him and Noisiu’s slayer, Eogan mac Durthacht. Conchobar’s response is that she will live with Eogan during the following year. A day later, Conchobar, Eogan and Derdriu are in a “chariot” (trans. Hull 69/ “carput” [Longes Mac n-Uslenn 51]) on their way “to the assembly of Macha” (trans. Hull 69/ “do oenuch Macha” [Longes Mac n-Uslenn 51])—the very place where, according to her own vows, she will never stand in the presence of both men with whom she is travelling. Shortly after Conchobar remarks to her that “‘it is a sheep’s eye between two rams that [she makes] between [him] and Eogan’ ” (trans. Hull 69), 281 Derdriu notices “a great stone boulder in front of her” against which she subsequently “[dashes] her head. . .until she [has] made a mass of fragments of her head so that she [dies]” (trans. Hull 69). 282

Implicit in both Tyomczko’s and O’Leary’s respective analyses of this final scene is the ambiguous relationship that Derdriu has with war. Tyomczko indirectly aligns Derdriu with arms in asserting that “destruction of the social context” (152) is one of the consequences of her choices even as she argues that the suicide she calls a “second” act of defiance forestalls “potential carnage and bloodshed” (154). O’Leary’s focus is not the averted aftermath of Derdriu’s suicide but its motive; and his observations implicitly note that her reason for killing herself speaks to her own identification with the values of Ulster society even as her final act ultimately identifies her not only with masculinity but with the valour of the warrior in that men in medieval Ireland chose to die while engaged in conflict when confronted with the possible loss of their “personal honour” (O’Leary, “The Honour of Women” 41):

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281 281 “Maith, a Derdriu,’ ol Conchobor, ’súil chaerach eter da rethe gníi-siú etrum-sa ocus Eogan’ ” (Longes Mac n-Uslenn 51).
. . .[Derdriu] does not kill herself until she is out of the privacy of the house and on her way to the great Assembly of Macha, where her degradation will be presented as a public spectacle. Furthermore, it should be noted that Conchobar’s crude sexual joke underlines the exact nature of the shame she faces. Confronted by the thought of ridicule and disgrace, she reacts as would a male in such a dilemma and opts for death. . .while women like Deirdre may at times have rebelled against the dictates of the honour code, what is ultimately suggested by this literary evidence of female suicide is that most women very rarely questioned its essentially public nature. For the women, as for the men, honour was validated or negated by the consensus of their society, from which there was no appeal.

(O’Leary, “The Honour of Women” 42-3)

Yet when all is said and done, it is (and perhaps ironically so given the ambivalence of Irish medieval law towards the relationship between women and violence) the law itself that unambiguously defines Derdriu as an agent of bloodshed through her final act. Suicide is, of course, a demonstration of violence directed towards oneself. The legal statutes of medieval Ireland, however, categorized suicide as a form of “kinslaying” (Murray 67). When Derdriu commits suicide, she therefore commits homicide against a kinsmen from a legal perspective, and slaying another person certainly is an act of warfare as a manifestation of violence towards another individual that hence identifies her with bloodshed. In addition, the nature of Derdriu's suicide is arguably equivalent in its gruesomeness and horror to that which characterizes the massacres of warriors and soldiers in combat, especially—and most significantly-- Noisiu. 281

281 “Eogan welcomed [Noisiu and the son of Fergus] with a thrust of the great spear into Noisiu so that his back broke through it. Therewith, the son of Fergus threw himself and put both arms around Noisiu and brought him under him and cast himself down upon him, and thus it was that Noisiu was struck from above through the son of Fergus” (trans. Hull 65/ “Feraid Eogan failtí friu la béim forgama do gai mór i n-Noisin co’ rróim id a drum triít. Fo’ ceird la sodáin mac Fergus co’ tuc a dì lám dar Noisin co’ tuc foi ocsus co’ tarlaic fair anúas ocus is samlaid ro’ bith Noisiu tre mac Fergus anuas” [Longes Mac n-Uislenn 47]).
In the last stanzas of his prophecy, Cathbad addresses the newborn Derdriu. In its last two lines he tells her, “‘Your little grave will be everywhere./It will be a famous tale, O Derdriu’” (trans. Hull 62 / “‘Biaid do lechtán i mnach dú; /[b]íd scél n-áirdirc, a Derdriu’” [Longes Mac n-Uislenn 45]). What the druid means is that the story of her life will become so widespread that people in all parts of Ireland will claim their realm as the site of her final resting place. That narrative is testament to the values and practices of a society that no longer exists, a truth that is in keeping with the fact that the author of Longes Mac n-Uislenn perceived Derdriu as the source of Ulster’s destruction. But that community is resurrected again and again every time Longes Mac n-Uislenn is retold or reread. And over and over, Derdriu has inspired its resurrection insofar as writers from the end of the medieval period through the twentieth century have adapted or revised Longes Mac n-Uislenn for the purpose of retelling the legend of her existence. That first account, as I have discussed here, situates her ambiguously in relation to warfare but never attempts to mitigate or to deny her culpability for it. The extent to which William Butler Yeats’ 1907 play Deirdre upholds this relationship between its title character and conflict will reveal itself in the following chapter.
In a letter to John Quinn, dated 6 July 1904, William Butler Yeats informed his patron that he intended “to start a play on Dierdre [sic]” (Yeats, *Collected Letters*, Vol. 3 616). As the writer himself contextualized it, this project would broaden and challenge his skills as a playwright in that he had “never written a part for a woman of any importance since [he had] had experience of the stage and [he was] going to try and do it in this play” (Yeats, *Collected Letters*, Vol. 3 616-17).

Yeats’ declaration explicitly frames the writing that would over two years later make its debut as *Deirdre* at the Abbey Theatre as the result of his still developing artistry. At the same time, it simultaneously and implicitly situates that work within the entirety of his own corpus to date. According to his father, John Butler Yeats, Yeats had co-written a play in verse with one of his classmates while still a secondary school student in 1881, when he was sixteen (Foster 35); other plays followed in subsequent years, including *Mosada*, “which appeared in the June 1886 issue of the *Dublin University Review*” (Foster 38) and which “was reprinted as a twelve-page pamphlet by the Dublin firm of Sealy, Bryers & Walker” (Foster 39) in the autumn of that same year, and *The Land of Heart’s Desire*, which opened eight years later, in 1894, in London (Maxwell ix). By July of 1904, Yeats had written nine plays, either alone or in collaboration, that actors had performed before public audiences, and although by this time he had also published several volumes of poetry—the genre with which, I would argue, both the general public and academia have primarily identified him insofar as it is upon the quality of his poetry that his reputation as one of the most prominent modernists rests—this particular année marked the halfway point of a period in which Yeats was particularly productive as a playwright, producing twelve plays in the twelve years stretching from 1899-1910.
Deirdre’s status as a revision of a medieval Irish myth connects it not only to some of Yeats’ other dramas, but also to his essays, compilations, poetry, fiction, manifestos, and, most of all, to the literary and political movements in which these participated. In the spring of 1885, two poems by Yeats, “Voices” and “Song of the Faeries,” appeared in the *Dublin University Review* (Foster 37) whose supporters “would help launch WBY on his chosen career” (Foster 39); by the summer of the following year when it published *Mosada*, the periodical that Charles Hubert Oldham, then of Dublin’s Trinity College, and T.W. Rolleston had established in order “to reflect a pluralist approach to national themes” yet “hold aloof from current politics” (Foster 39) had long since decided to welcome and to publish submissions concerning political and social issues under debate in Ireland (Foster 41). Also by June of 1886, Oldham’s other brainstorm, the Contemporary Club, had been meeting for seven months; its attendants included “a curious cross-section of literary and artistic people” (Foster 41) who, on Saturday nights and sometimes into early Sunday morning, conversed about recent matters concerning politics, literature and society (Foster 41). It was within this company that Yeats encountered, among others, Douglas Hyde whose 1892 speech to the National Literary Society, “The Necessity for De-Anglicizing Ireland,” supposedly motivated the 1893 establishment of the Gaelic League “and became a canonical text of Irish cultural nationalism” (Foster 126), and John O’Leary whose activities on behalf of the Irish Republican Brotherhood—namely, his involvement with the Fenian newspaper, *The Irish People*—had earned him a stint in prison followed by exile. Towards the end of 1885, influenced by O’Leary, Yeats had signed himself up as a member of the nationalist Young Ireland Society (Foster 43). It may also have been O’Leary who introduced Yeats to the poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson which in turn resulted in the younger writer’s ferreting out of the Royal Irish Academy’s and the Irish Texts Society’s publications of Irish myth (Foster 44). In any case, as “an introduction not only to the acceptable face of the extremist Fenian tradition, but also to a kind of free-thinking Catholic intelligentsia of whose existence Sligo Unionists were blissfully ignorant,” O’Leary “indicated ways in which . . . [the Anglo-Irish Protestant] Yeats could ‘belong’ to the new Ireland: a world where like-minded people of both religious
traditions could share a pride in an ancient culture, rather than remember the conflicts and dispossessions of the past” (Foster 43).

And such “ways” arguably served as the underpinnings of Yeats’ literary production (which owing to its prolixity I only partially recount here). To commemorate the death of Sir Samuel Ferguson in August of 1886, Yeats wrote an essay, “The Poetry of Samuel Ferguson,” that ran in truncated form in the October edition of the Irish Fireside and again, in its entirety, in the Dublin University Review the following month (Foster 52). His discovery of two narratives in The Transactions of the Ossianic Society, one on the mythological Fionn MacCumhaill and the other on his son, Oisin, resulted in a lengthy essay that appeared in Gael the following year, while the tale pertaining to Oisin also served as the basis of the title poem of the collection that Kegan Paul released as The Wanderings of Oisin and Other Poems (Foster 56) at the beginning of 1889. The spring of the previous year had witnessed the publication of the Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland which Yeats had edited and which contained some of his own poetry (Foster 75); later, in the early fall of that same year, 1888, Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry was published and included his own poetry and work by Douglas Hyde (Foster 76). By 1904, the debut of two additional poetry collections, The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics (1892) and In the Seven Woods (1903)—the subtitle of which is “Being Poems chiefly of the Irish Heroic Age”—and of compilations such as Representative Irish Tales (1891), an anthology for children, Irish Fairy Tales (1891) and The Celtic Twilight (1893) more explicitly underscored via their respective titles Yeats’ commitment to the Irish Literary Revival through which he and other writers “aimed at fostering an Irish national culture that was independent from London” (Ingelbien 191), while The Secret Rose (1897), a collection of his short fiction, contains several tales whose protagonist is

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284 A “revised and extended new edition” (Foster 267) of this work came out in 1902.
Hanrahan the Red whom the writer modeled in part upon “actual eighteenth-century Gaelic poets like Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin who had achieved legendary reputations” (Foster 178).²⁸⁵

If, however, Yeats’ literary essays, poetry and fiction stand as testimony to his interest in creating a national literature for Ireland, their “message” is (unsurprisingly) subtler than that of both his initiatives and his manifestos, which (among other things) together served as a context for the staging of many of his plays, including Deirdre. Yeats contributed to the founding of both London’s Irish Literary Society in 1891 and Dublin’s National Literary Society in 1892 for the purpose of promoting the production of recognizably Irish literary works in English (Maxwell 8). In October of 1892, Yeats’ “Hopes and Fears for Irish Literature” appeared in the United Ireland urging the creation of national “literature of conviction” in opposition to the aestheticist sensibilities of his counterparts in England (Foster 125). That Douglas Hyde’s November, 1892 lecture “The Necessity for De-Anglicizing Ireland,” in which he asserted that only in the Irish language could an authentic Irish literature exist, also happened to be his “presidential address to the National Literary Society” (Foster 125) did not prevent Yeats from arguing against this stance: using “Hyde’s own translations” in order to defend his own position—and dismissing Irish Gaelic as passé (Foster 126)—Yeats declared in the United Ireland, almost a fortnight before the end of the calendar year, that “Irish literature could be written in English, but in a Gaelic mode” (Foster 126). Three years after Yeats’ Land of Heart’s Desire enjoyed a six-week run at London’s Avenue Theatre in the spring of 1894, he, Lady Augusta Gregory and Edward Martyn announced their plans for the Irish Literary Theatre which opened its doors in 1899. This organization was to reinvent itself twice, renaming itself the Irish National Dramatic Society and Company two years after its establishment and becoming the Irish National Theatre Society two

²⁸⁵ The end of Yeats’ dedication of this volume to his fellow writer, A.E. (George Russell), however, explicitly defines it as an Irish text: “So far, however, as this book is visionary it is Irish; for Ireland, which is still predominantly Celtic, has preserved with some less excellent things a gift of vision, which has died out among more hurried and more successful nations: no shining candelabra have prevented us from looking into the darkness, and when one looks into the darkness there is always something there” (Dedication from The Secret Rose vii).
years later in 1903—under the latter of which auspices Deirdre debuted in 1906. Despite substantive metamorphoses across these years, the aims of the Irish Literary Theatre’s founders underpinned it in all of its reincarnations (Cusack 4) and were as follows:

We propose to have performed in Dublin, in the Spring of every year certain Celtic and Irish plays, which whatever be their degree of excellence will be written in a high ambition, and so build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature. We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our desire to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will ensure us a tolerant welcome, and that freedom which is not found in theatres of England, and without which no new movement in art or literature can succeed. We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism. We are confident of the support of all Irish people, who are weary of misrepresentation, in carrying out a work that is outside all the political questions that divide us. (Gregory qtd. by Cusack 4)

If, as Phillip L. Marcus interprets it, the “ancient idealism” to which the passage above refers itself alludes to Ireland’s mythic legends (Yeats and the Beginning of the Irish Renaissance 279), then it is easy to discern how Deirdre, as a twentieth-century revision of an Ulster cycle narrative, in one sense reflects Yeats’ and his colleagues’ aspirations for the Irish Literary Theatre which “was to offer a model for Irish identity that allowed the Irish people and the world at large to think of Ireland as an independent nation rather than a colonized territory” (Cusack 6). Yet “the power dynamics that the Literary Theatre [envisioned] between itself and its audience actually [mimicked] the class structure employed by English colonialism, a structure in which the Anglo-Irish acted as stewards who were meant to educate the native Irish in the ways of English citizenship” (Cusack 6), and this perspective is pertinent both to Yeats’ explicit goals in composing the play and to Deirdre’s reception by the Irish public during its 1906 run at Dublin’s Abbey Theatre. Deirdre
made its debut on the 24th of November 1906 (and ran for an entire week, ending with a matinée on the 1st of December) before a full house attracted by the play’s lead actress, Letitia Darragh, and its subject matter (Schuchard 219) which reflected “Irish fascination with the legendary Deirdre” (Schuchard 219). By the following evening, however, Deirdre’s audience had diminished sharply to the point that the Abbey Theatre’s business manager, W.A. Henderson, remarked that “the scattered audiences were the smallest he had seen since he became connected with the theatre” (Schuchard 220). The architect Joseph Holloway, who had overseen the transformation of the Mechanics’ Institution into the Abbey Theatre, surmised that the empty seats were owing to the public’s distaste for the verse form of the play or to the company’s decision to assign the title role to a London-based actress instead of to a local one (Schuchard 220), two possible reasons that underscore the cultural gap between the Anglo-Irish executive committee of the Irish National Theatre Society and Dublin’s majority populace which was uneducated and Catholic.

But newspaper reviews indicated “that Yeats’ Deirdre contained too much sensuality and lust, a concern intensified for many by Darragh’s overly low-cut dress” (Schuchard 220)–and one that reflects a chasm between popular nationalist conceptions of womanhood—as embodied by renderings of Erin, Ireland’s allegorical embodiment—in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth century and those depicted in Anglo-Irish drama of the period. Erin, as scholar L. Perry Curtis has described her, “suggested all that was feminine, courageous and chaste about Irish womanhood, and she made an ideal Andromeda waiting to be rescued by a suitable Perseus” (qtd. by Innes 17). In addition, during an era “when catholicism [sic] and nationalism were increasingly identified with one another by Irish Catholics” (Innes 23), images of Erin also came to embody, for Irish Catholicism, an “increasingly puritanical and asexual ideal of women” (Innes 22). More importantly, nationalist language and literature itself fused Erin with the Virgin Mary (Innes 23) such that, broadly speaking, native allegories of Ireland pictured it as either “maiden” or “mother” (Innes 15-16).

286 The three members of this committee were W.B. Yeats, Lady Augusta Gregory and John Millington Synge.
These views contextualized expectations of Yeats’ *Deirdre*, not least because of the ways in which the character of Deirdre in other works appeared to channel Erin, as the popularity of the former in drama from the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the next attested (Innes 33):

Deirdre’s appeal may have something to do with her analogy . . . to the figure of Erin, a figure fought over and betrayed. Her situation as a possession to be contested, the focus of conflict between the sons of Usnach and a possessive old man, a patriarchal figure, perhaps up the father-son conflict which runs through so much nationalist or anti-colonial literature. Certainly as the maiden/queen who summons young men to fight and die for her in order to liberate her from an oppressive suitor, she has much in common with the image of Cathleen ni Houlihan, and no doubt the two images reinforce one another.

Unlike the warrior-queen Maeve, she also forms a contrast with the typical male hero favoured by Irish cultural nationalists, and who become focused on Cuchulain. . . once having made her fatal choice, Deirdre is passive and sorrowing, Cuchulain is active and aggressive. . . . [Ashis] Nandy argues that the discourse of colonialism and anti-colonialist nationalism helps to produce an extreme division between what are seen as male qualities of militarism, and female qualities of passivity and submission. The preservation of this dichotomy is particularly strong in the journalism and rhetoric, as well as the poetry and drama, produced by adherents of the Gaelic League. . . (Innes 34-35)

To a certain extent, then, hostility on the part of Catholic nationalists to Yeats’ *Deirdre* and to other plays performed by the Irish National Theatre Society owed itself to the playwrights’ transcendence of these boundaries in their dramatic works (Innes 35), insofar as they imbued their female protagonists with “sexual desire and power” in opposition to the “emblematic mothers or desexualized spiritual maidens” (Innes 35) who for the nationalists defined ideal Irish womanhood (Innes 35). And what is important about this disparity is not its existence in and of itself but rather what it implies about Yeats as *Deirdre’s* writer. By
contemporary standards, *Deirdre* reflects a comparatively enlightened attitude towards women on the part of its creator, one that in retrospect anticipates the progressive cultural changes that have affected the status of women in Irish society throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. And it is through this stance that the play affirms Yeats’ status as a modernist insofar as one of the defining characteristics of modernist literature was that it was, in its time, contentious, in large part because its writers “wished to represent the body and sexuality as fully as possible, and, more generally, wished to depict the full range of human behaviour without having to place it in a moral frame” (Whitworth 15).

As with my chapter on Naomi Mitchison, then, my analysis here is meant to interrogate the divide between the terms “modern” and “medieval”—in this case, through an exploration of Yeats’ *Deirdre*, complicating the writer’s status as a modernist in light of the way his oeuvre compares to its medieval predecessor, *Longes Mac n-Usllenn*, upon which he did not directly base his adaptation.287 And as with Chapter Two, some of the scholarly research upon which I have based my interpretations, particularly that pertaining to medieval or to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Irish culture, was not published before 1937, the year in which MacMillan and Co. published the edition of *Deirdre* that I analyze here, and therefore would not have been available to Yeats. Yet this fact, I would argue once again, does not invalidate my observations. For one thing, it is mostly with respect to *Longes Mac n-Usllenn*, rather than to *Deirdre*, that I allude in this chapter to most of my sources as they relate to medieval Irish culture. For another, whatever cultural knowledge underlies my analysis of the play arguably reflects information that Yeats could have gleaned from other sources that were accessible to him. In his notes to the fifth volume of *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, William H. O’Donnell states that John O’Leary is supposed to have given

287 According to Virginia Rohan, Yeats’ sources for this myth included Samuel Ferguson’s “The Death of the Children of Usnach” (1834); P. W. Joyce’s “The Fate of the Sons of Usna” (1879); John Todhunter’s *Three Irish Bardic Tales* (1896); Douglas Hyde’s *Deirdre* (1899); Lady Augusta Gregory’s *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* (1902); and A.E.’s (George Russell’s) *Deirdre: A Legend in Three Acts* (performed 1902 [“Yeats and Deirdre: from Story to Fable” 35]). Vernam Hull’s definitive edition and translation of *Longes Mac n-Usllenn*, upon which I have based my analysis in Chapter Three, was not in print until 1949.
Yeats two nineteenth-century works by the scholar Eugene O’Curry, *Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History* and *On the Manners and the Customs of the Ancient Irish: A Series of Lectures* (409). My post-1937 sources for late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ireland attest to the social conditions of the period, ones to which Yeats would have been privy simply by virtue of his having lived in Ireland off and on throughout his life. At any rate, it is my argument here that the title character of William Butler Yeats’ *Deirdre* (1907) embodies medieval and late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century conceptions of Irish womanhood insofar as the play itself—its own feminism notwithstanding—identifies her with stereotypically female traits and, most significantly, mitigates her relationship to violence by inviting comparison not only between her and her counterpart in *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*, but also between her and two other figures from Irish mythology, Ætain and Derbforgaill, to whom allusion in the play has attracted little scholarly attention.

I. “PERSONS IN THE PLAY; *A Guest-house in a wood*”

On its face, the title “Deirdre” positions the 1907 play to which it corresponds within the bounds of Ireland’s Anglophone literary tradition: like Jonathan Swift’s “Phyllis; or the Progress of Love” (1716),

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288 Bettina Knapp has referred to Étain, noting briefly that the chess episode in *Deirdre* has a counterpart in the *Tochmarc Étaíne* (*The Wooing of Étaín*). Jacqueline Genet alludes to both Étain and Derbforgaill, the latter of whom Yeats calls “the seamew” and does not identify by name; Genet, too, observes that Yeats’ use of the chessboard thematically engages the *Tochmarc Étaíne*. She also points out that the play’s allusions to Lugaid Redstripe and his spouse foreshadow “Deirdre and Naoise’s fate” (Genet 125): “[a]t the end of the play Deirdre will be assimilated to an eagle; in the same way in Redstripe’s legend, the girl becomes a bird” (Genet 125). Gordon Wickstrom retells the story of Derbforgaill and, notably, says of it that Yeats “apparently found [it] too strong and disturbing for his purposes in *Deirdre* and therefore modified [it] into the more restrained version of Lugaidh [sic] and Derbforgaill at chess” (473). “However, neither Knapp, nor Genet nor Wickstrom examines *Deirdre* closely in light of the *Tochmarc Étaíne*, the *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (*The Destruction of Dá Derga’s Hostel*) in which Étain figures briefly, or the *Aided Derbforgaill* (*The Violent Death of Derbforgaill*).

289 All subheadings quote (edited) text from Yeats’ *Deirdre*.

290 *Deirdre* debuted at Dublin’s Abbey Theatre on the twenty-fourth of November, 1906; in July of the following year, Macmillan included the work in Volume Two: Dramatical Poems of *The Poetical Works of William B. Yeats in Two Volumes*, while A.H. Bullen in London and Maunsel and Co. in Dublin published it
novelist Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1801) and playwright Dion Bouicault’s *Janet Pride* (1855), for instance, “Deirdre” names the protagonist of the work it announces and identifies that figure as a woman. Like Robert Dwyer Joyce’s *Deirdrê* (1876), Patrick Weston Joyce’s “The Fate of the Sons of Usna” (1879), and Sir Samuel Ferguson’s *Deirdre* (1880), William Sharp’s *The House of Usna* (1900), among others, “Deirdre” also places the work to which it corresponds within the conventions of the Irish Literary Revival in announcing it as yet another adaptation of *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*.

Yet if “Deirdre” contextualizes Yeats’ play as an adherent to custom with respect to both Anglo-Irish literature as a whole and, more narrowly, to the Irish Literary Revival, this title simultaneously feminizes the title of the tale it revises. “Longes Mac n-Uislenn” translates as “The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu.” The focus of the medieval narrative, as its title indicates, is an event rather than a particular individual, and one that it defines in terms of both masculinity and patriarchal descent. Yeats’ dedication of *Deirdre* “TO MRS. PATRICK CAMPBELL. . .” emphasizes this titular change and its implications while the following month as *Deirdre, Being Volume Five of Plays for an Irish Theatre*. The publication of *Deirdre* in the summer of 1907 occurred after Yeats had revised the play on two separate occasions: once after the play’s 1906 debut; and again, after the staging of the revised work during the following spring (Rohan, *Deirdre: Manuscript Materials by W.B. Yeats I*). Yeats then revised *Deirdre* again after Mrs. Patrick Campbell, in October of 1907, announced her intentions to perform its title role during the Abbey Theatre’s fall 1908 season (Rohan, *Deirdre: Manuscript Materials by W.B. Yeats I*); the poet began these amendments while the Shakespeare Head Press was in the midst of readying *Deirdre* for publication as part of a two-volume collection of Yeats’ works, and when that publisher released the second volume of *The Collected Works in Verse and Prose of William Butler Yeats* in the early fall of 1908, its appendix included a little under half of that which would constitute the whole of the revision for the play as it would be produced with Mrs. Patrick Campbell as its star (Rohan, *Deirdre: Manuscript Materials by W.B. Yeats Iii*). The November, 1908 edition of the journal *Samhain* contains the entirety of the revision that Yeats had written for *Deirdre* as it was performed that same autumn, as does *Alterations in Deirdre* which came out later that same year, and the Shakespeare Head Press’ edition of the play, which it released in the summer of 1911, reflects these changes as well (Rohan, *Deirdre: Manuscript Materials by W.B. Yeats Iii*). Subsequent editions of the play feature other emendations (Rohan, *Deirdre: Manuscript Materials by W.B. Yeats Iii*). I have based my analysis here upon the play as it exists in Yeats’ *Nine One-Act Plays* which Macmillan and Co., Limited published in London in 1937. The table of contents for this volume gives 1907 as the year of *Deirdre*’s original publication. The play itself as MacMillan published it in *Nine One-Act Plays*, however, features revisions that Yeats made after 1907, some of which date to 1922 or to 1934 (see Bushruı 126-152), and is substantively identical to the version of *Deirdre* that appears in Russell K. Alspach’s *Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats* (1966).
underscoring the work’s superficial adherence to tradition in framing Deirdre as its focus: it was she “who
in the generosity of her genius. . .played [his] Deirdre in Dublin and London with the Abbey Company. . .”

Indeed, the play’s *dramatis personae* extend Yeats’ feminization of *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* beyond his
choice of title even as, like “Deirdre,” it seemingly perpetuates established paradigms. The following are the

“PERSONS IN THE PLAY” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 113):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Musicians</th>
<th>A Dark-faced Messenger</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fergus, <em>an old man</em></td>
<td>Conchubar (<em>pronounced Conochar</em>),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naoise, <em>a young king</em></td>
<td><em>the old King of Ulad, who is still</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deirdre, <em>his queen</em></td>
<td><em>strong and vigorous</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Dark-faced Executioner (Yeats, *Deirdre* 113)

Two more or less parallel columns consisting of four lines each and a fifth line that is aligned with neither
column comprise the *dramatis personae* for *Deirdre*. Retrospectively, this listing conforms to tradition in that,
read vertically down the left column followed by the right, it identifies the play’s characters more or less in
the order in which they appear on-stage. The exception to this chronology is the transposition of Naoise
and Deirdre. That the *dramatis personae* define Deirdre with respect to Naoise explains this inconsistency
while seeming to maintain *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*’s identification of Deirdre with masculinity. But the *dramatis
personae*’s description of Deirdre simultaneously, if implicitly, emphasizes her status as a woman. To be

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291 Mrs. Patrick Campbell performed the title role when the Abbey Theatre staged four performances of
*Deirdre* during its 1908 season. It was Florence Darragh who originated the role of Deirdre when the play
debuted at the Abbey Theatre in 1906; Mona Limerick succeeded Darragh in the role for the Abbey’s 1907
spring performances of the play. The significance of these dates lies in the fact that Yeats’ dedication of the
play to Campbell in *Nine One-Act Plays* (1937), in light of its reference to her performance as Deirdre, is not
original to the play as A.H. Bullen, Maunsel and Macmillan respectively published it in 1907, the date that
the 1937 anthology gives as Deirdre’s date of composition and publication.

292 Technically, the Second Musician and the Third Musician are on-stage when the play begins, while the
First Musician comes on-stage shortly after the curtain rises, as the stage directions that I will be imminently
quoting below seem to imply. That said, all three of these women do appear on-stage before any other
characters.
“[Naoise’s] queen” is to be “[t]he wife or consort of a king” (“Queen,” def. I. ii). But to the extent that Deirdre’s position as “[Naoise’s] queen” is to be his spouse, it also defines her in terms of domesticity—the realm to which women properly belonged according to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ireland. That “many women worked and contributed to family finances, and also that a high proportion of Irish women remained single” after the famine notwithstanding, “the role of wife and mother was held up as the social ideal for women” (Innes 39).

Although both “Deirdre” and the *dramatis personae* inform our perceptions of Deirdre herself before she actually appears on-stage, the former encompasses Yeats’ drama in its entirety; that its implications should anticipate the title character through other elements of the play, such as its set and props, is not surprising. The stage directions for *Deirdre*, which follow the *dramatis personae*, are as follows:

A Guest-house in a wood. It is a rough house of timber; through the doors and some of the windows one can see the great spaces of the wood, the sky dimming, night closing in. But a window to the left shows the thick leaves of a coppice; the landscape suggests silence and loneliness. There is a door to right and left, and through the side windows one can see anybody who approaches either door, a moment before he enters. In the centre, a part of the house is curtained off; the curtains are drawn. There are unlighted torches in brackets on the walls. There is, at one side, a small table with a chessboard and chessmen upon it. At the other side of the room there is a brazier with a fire; two women, with musical instruments beside them, crouch about the brazier: they are comely women of about forty. Another woman, who carries a stringed instrument, enters hurriedly; she speaks, at first standing in the doorway. (Yeats, *Deirdre* 113)

According to Richard Taylor, “[t]he rough room in which the action takes place is unremarkable in itself. . .” (57), particularly as it contrasts with the views of nature that are visible to the audience through the cabin’s vistas which provide an atmosphere of “silence and loneliness” (57). Yet if the set design and its
accompanying props are somewhat basic in and of themselves, none of these details is superfluous in relation to the unfolding of the play itself, as this chapter will eventually demonstrate, and more importantly for the argument that I am presenting here, this scene in its totality is the first on-stage manifestation of Yeats’ domestication of Longes Mac n-Uislenn. Deirdre is a one-act play. Yeats’ foregrounding of the “[g]uest-house” as his set therefore emphasizes the fact that the physical context of his drama is not only a domestic space but one that serves a particular social purpose. Furthermore, the “[g]uest-house’s” furnishings and provisions embody the domestication of forces that, generally speaking, are in binary opposition to civilization. Both the “unlighted torches” and the “brazier” are man-made devices that mediate and regulate fire—a natural phenomenon—or its by-products for human usage. More pertinently, the “chessboard” and its “chessmen” are components of chess. Chess, of course, is a game. Given, however, that its point “is to place the adversary’s king in checkmate” (“Chess,” def. 1a), a situation that in real life occurred in conflict, it represents a socialized form of war.

II. “I have a story right, my wanderers”

The first characters to appear on-stage are the “Musicians.” Their appearance is in accordance with the set directions provided above that in turn affirm the dramatis personae. More to the point, the Musicians underscore Yeats’ feminization of Longes Mac n-Uislenn by inviting direct comparison with the opening of the medieval narrative. Longes Mac n-Uislenn begins in the home of Feidlimid mac Daill, the official “story-teller of Conchobor” (trans. Hull 60/“scelaigi Conchobuir” [Longes Mac n-Uislenn 43]), the King of Ulster. To be a scelaigi was, quite usually, to number amongst the filid (“poets”) (Nagy, “Orality in Medieval Irish Narrative: An Overview” 272), the importance of which lies in the fact that such individuals served as functionaries of a king, producing versified encomia and narratives of historical record intended to emphasize the quality

293 Bettina Knapp implicitly affirms this idea in referring to the filid “[a]s transmitters of oral prose narratives. . .” (181).
of the ruler’s lineage (Buckley 748), and that the main responsibility of the king “was to lead his warriors into battle. . . ” (Knapp 181). That is, by virtue of his profession, a fili was connected to war, and as I have argued in the previous chapter, the apparently domestic scene at the beginning of Longes Mac n-Uislenn is in fact simultaneously and implicitly one of conflict.

The Musicians in Deirdre initially seem to reflect this paradox. The First Musician herself opens the play by addressing her fellow musicians as “wanderers” (Yeats, Deirdre 113) in announcing that she “[has] a story right. . . /[t]hat has so mixed with fable in our songs/[t]hat all seemed fabulous” (Yeats, Deirdre 113). Insofar as songs and poetry were once synonymous with one another—and certainly during the medieval period—The First Musician’s “songs” identify her with Feidlimid mac Daill. What she sings underscores this association despite the fact that it “all [seems] fabulous”: to the extent that it incorporates her “story,” it, like the histories that Feidlimid mac Daill might recite, speaks to the occurrence of actual events. And because the “story” in her “song” identifies her with Feidlimid mac Daill, it also superficially strengthens her association with [military] hostilities. In addition, although Yeats does not specify which instruments the First and Second Musicians play, the Third plays “a stringed instrument” which defines her as a cruitt (“harper” [“cruitt,” def. ]), the type of performer whose music typically complemented the reacaire’s (“reciter” [“reccaire,” def. ]) presentation of the fili’s verse at court (Buckley 748). Like the filid, then, the cruitt is complicit in war by virtue of his profession. That, as the First Musician tells Fergus, she, the Second Musician and the Third Musician “have no country but the roads of the world” (Yeats, Deirdre 115) underscores their identification with the cruitt who by law “was free to travel about as he wished” (Buckley 748) and therefore also with aggression.

At the same time, the Musicians themselves undermine their own linkage to warfare. A few sources indicate that during the medieval period, there were Irish women whose vocation was the performance of

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294 Bart Jaski makes a similar point in asserting that the king was obligated to take initiative on behalf of his fiefdom with respect to matters of diplomacy and warfare (48).
music (Buckley 756). These texts allude to women playing the *timpán* (Buckley 756); and although this instrument, like the *crott* (“harp, lute,” def.) played by the *cruit(t)*, bore strings (Buckley 749), there is no evidence that these women ever played the *crott* (Buckley 756). Furthermore, in verbally establishing the setting of the play for the benefit of the audience, the First Musician simultaneously situates herself and her two companions within socio-political bounds and therefore cultural ones: “We are come, by chance, into King Conchubar’s country, and this house is an old guest-house built for travellers from the seashore to Conchubar’s royal house...” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 113-14). More importantly, by announcing the function of the “guest-house,” the First Musician thereby defines herself, the Second Musician and the Third Musician in terms of the social structure that encompasses them, and ironically so: that she later identifies herself and her fellow artists as stateless in asserting that they “have no country but the roads of the world” notwithstanding, the first Musician’s implicit conception of herself and the other musicians as “travellers” paradoxically pinpoint their relationship to Conchubar from his perspective. In fact, the First Musician’s revelation that she has visited “Conchubar’s house” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 115) indirectly indicates that she has confirmed her status as a “traveller” through her own, apparently uncoerced performance as such, while her recollection of the goings-on at the king’s residence arguably reflects an interest in them and thus emphasizes her connection to the domestic: “A crowd of servants going out and in with loads upon their heads: embroideries to hang upon their walls, or new-mown rushes to strew upon the floors, and came at length to a great room” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 115).

In any case, the First Musician introduces the play’s title character, if only in reference, in alluding to Deirdre’s childhood: “And there are certain hills among these woods and there Queen Deirdre grew” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 114). Significantly, the positioning of this reference to Deirdre in relation to the First Musician’s declaration of where she and the other musicians have found themselves—the former directly follows the latter—identifies the title character with nature, in binary opposition to society, as someone who has come to maturity outside of civilization. Yet the First Musician’s subsequent allusion to Deirdre as
“Queen Deirdre” attributes to her a status that locates her within society’s ranks, even though the Second Musician, responding to the First Musician, re-establishes the title character as a stateless personage despite referring to her as a “queen”: “That famous queen/[w]ho has been wandering with her lover Naoise, /[s]omewhere beyond the edges of the world?” (Yeats, Deirdre 114). More to the point, the play’s romantic image of the couple “wandering”—apparently in no other company but their own—domesticates that which in Longes Mac n-Uislenn more or less consists of a military band insofar as Noisiu and his brothers “set out . . . with their hundred and fifty warriors, women, dogs and servants; and among them was Derdriu mingled in with everybody [else]” (trans. Hull 64). In addition, the medieval narrative’s casual reference to Derdriu’s inclusion in this group, almost as if she were an afterthought, emphasizes the disparity between the play’s depiction of her travels with Naoise and Longes Mac n-Uislenn’s. If, at this point in the play, the idea of Deirdre “wandering with her lover Naoise, /[s]omewhere beyond the edges of the world” conjures up in the audience’s mind an image of the couple strolling along an uninhabited shore, Longes Mac n-Uislenn leaves no doubt as to the nature of how Derdriu and Noisiu spend their time after leaving Ulster: the Ulstermen, on Conchobar’s behalf, pursue them throughout Ireland with the intent of killing them. That is, the threat of conflict pervades and impels Derdriu and Noisiu’s movements, which it does even after the couple manages to escape to Scotland (as I shall discuss later in this chapter).

The First Musician’s rejoinder to this query increases the complexity of the contradiction that Deirdre embodies such that, relative to Longes Mac n-Uislenn, the 1907 drama distances its protagonist from war. The initial setting of Longes Mac n-Uislenn, as mentioned earlier, is the home of Feidlimid mac Daill, Conchobar’s official “story-teller” (trans. Hull 60/“scelaigi Conchoibeur” [Longes Mac n-Uislenn 43]) where the king’s host is currently lodging. That evening, when the household is retiring for the evening, Feidlimid’s as yet unborn child screeches so loudly from the depths of her mother’s womb that the king’s

295 “Batar eat a comairli. Ro­’imthigsetar in n­-aidchi sin.i.tri coicait láech dóib ocus tri coicait ban ocus tri coicait con ocus tri coicait gillamocus Derdriu I cumusc cáich co­’mbai etarru” (Longes Mac n-Uislenn 46).
men raise themselves from their beds. In their midst, and in that of Feidlimid and his wife at her bequest, Cathbad, who as a “seer” (trans. Hull 61/“...Cathbath, ar ba fissid side” [Longes Mac n-Uislenn 43]) can foretell the future, informs the pregnant woman that the daughter she is carrying (whose physical features and coloring he describes) “‘will be [called] Derdriu’” and that “‘concerning her there will be evil’” (trans. Hull 61),296 upon which he then elaborates following her birth. The reactions of Conchobor’s men to Derdriu’s pre-natal screech, the similarity of her coloring to that of the ideal king—one of whose other ideal qualities is his fortitude in battle (MacManus 58)—and her predestined role in the deaths of Gerrce mac Illadain, Eogan mac Durthacht and Fiachna mac Conchobuir posit her as war’s catalyst in Longes Mac n-Uislenn.

In Deirdre, the First Musician recounts Deirdre’s origins—the protagonist is long past childhood when Yeats’ narrative begins—as follows:

First Musician [going nearer to the brazier]. Some dozen years ago, King Conchubar found

A house upon a hillside in this wood,

And there a child with an old witch to nurse her,

And nobody to say if she were human,

Or of the gods, or anything at all

Of who she was or why she was hidden there,

But that she’d too much beauty for good luck. (Yeats, Deirdre 114)

To the extent that realistically, Deirdre’s prenatal screech in Longes Mac nUislenn is an impossibility, the play maintains from the original tale a certain lack of reality with respect to Deirdre’s birth in that she embodies “the frontier between reality and the supernatural” (Genet 132) while the fact that Deirdre’s wet nurse is a “witch” suggests, according to Knapp, that “she had been born to a suprapersonal figure associated with negative qualities” (192). Yet the First Musician’s physical movement in the direction of “the brazier,”

296 “Fir,‘ ar-se, ‘ingen fil and ocus bid Derdriu a hainm ocus biaid olc impe’” (Longes Mac n-Uislenn 44).
which by virtue of its denotative meaning\(^{297}\) is a domestic accessory, underscores the deviation of her narrative from *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*'s version of Derdriu's beginning: “A second cluster of images is associated with the brazier of fire around which the musicians gather. They concentrate on magical and creative or life-giving forces as opposed to the chessboard and its associations with war, fate and death” (Taylor 56). Indeed, the very fact that Conchubar discovers Deirdre living in “[a] house upon a hillside in this wood” problematizes and in fact undermines Deirdre’s status as a complete outsider to society: she literally dwells in “[a] house” which arguably is a metonym for domesticity. More to the point, whatever Deirdre’s biological make-up, there is no question that the witch’s treatment of her is metonymically and performatively maternal which thereby normalizes the conditions of her childhood in terms of social convention. Fosterage was a widespread practice in medieval Irish society. At the same time, the witch’s ministrations identify her with late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Irish models of womanhood insofar as she acts in a maternal manner towards Deirdre, thereby positioning the latter in relation to those standards.

Furthermore, the First Musician’s description of Deirdre’s childhood domesticates and romanticizes *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*'s depiction of it in the same way that the Second Musician domesticates and romanticizes Derdriu and Noisiu’s flight from Ulster. Technically speaking, the young Derdriu does grow up within societal bounds in that she lives at “a court” (trans. Hull 62/ “llis” [*Longes Mac n-Uislenn* 45]) with her foster parents. But because no one, beyond her foster parents and Leborcham, “a female satirist” (trans. Hull 62/ “ban-châinte” [*Longes Mac n-Uislenn* 45]), is to lay eyes on Derdriu until Conchobar takes her as his spouse, her existence at this “court” is one of isolation from, rather than immersion within, society. Masculinity is a decided presence in the life of the young Derdriu: because the conditions of the girl’s childhood reflect Conchobar’s specification of them, the medieval narrative credits him with raising her, and even though it alludes to “her foster mother” (trans. Hull 62/ “a mumme” [*Longes Mac n-Uislenn* 45]),

\(^{297}\) “A large flat pan or tray for holding burning charcoal, etc.” (“brazier,” n.2).
45), she does not appear as a character in it while “her foster father” (trans. Hull 62/ “a haite-si” [Longes Mac n-Uislen 45]) does. And although Leborcham provides Derdriu with the means to stage her encounter with Noisiu and thus sets in motion the events that constitute the rest of Longes Mac n-Uislenn by naming him as the one who by virtue of his own physical attributes can fulfill the girl’s wish for a man with “‘hair like the raven, and a cheek like blood, and a body like snow’” (trans. Hull 63), it is Derdriu’s “foster father” who by virtue of his actions unwittingly catalyzes her desire through violence. One particular day, this man happens to be “skinning a weaned (?) calf on snow outside in the winter to cook it for her” when she spies “a raven drinking the blood on the snow” (trans. Hull 62). Quite obviously, the sight of the bird, its actions, and the contrast of its color with those of “the blood” and “the snow” inspire Derdriu’s conception of her ideal lover. Significantly, this vision would not have been possible but for her “foster father’s” own effort to provide food for her, a domestic action that is inextricable from violence in that he had to have killed the “calf” before starting to “[skin]” it. In short, then, while Derdriu’s childhood as Longes Mac n-Uislenn depicts it exposes her to bloodshed perpetrated by a man and distances her from the rest of Ulster society, the First Musician’s allusion to “certain hills among these woods” where “Queen Deirdre grew” conjures up an idyllic image of the heroine as a young girl roaming amidst trees and flowers.

And what happened subsequent to Deirdre’s maturation accentuates her affiliation with the domestic. Having discovered Deirdre, Conchubar

...went up thither daily, till at last

She put on womanhood, and he lost peace,

And Deirdre’s tale began. The King was old.

A month or so before the marriage day,

298 . . .in folt amal in fiach ocus in grúad amal in fuil ocus in corp amal in snechta” (Longes Mac n-Uislen 45).

299 “Fecht n-and didiu bai a haite na ingine oc fennad loíg frothlai for snechtu i-mmaig issin gaimriuth dia funi di-si. Co-nacca-si ní, in fiach oc ól inna folly forsín t-snechtu” (Longes Mac n-Uislen 45).
A young man, in the laughing scorn of his youth,
Naoise, the son of Usna, climbed up there,
And having wooed, or, as some say, been wooed,
Carried her off. (Yeats, Deirdre 114).

Ironically, and in marked contrast to Cathbad’s prophecy, the First Musician’s narrative links not war but emotional turmoil to Deirdre’s maturation, and to the extent that unlike her bellow, her physical development from girl to woman is not an act of will, the play not only disassociates its protagonist from war but eradicates her status as its agent. Indeed, the First Musician’s description of Deirdre’s first encounter with Naoise reinforces her position. According to the First Musician, Naoise seduces Deirdre and elopes with her; that Deirdre may have seduced Naoise is merely hearsay. Her passivity contrasts with the aggression that her medieval counterpart demonstrates: in Longes Mac n-Uislenn, Derdriu’s pulling of Noisiu’s ears catalyzes their flight and, consequently, that which ultimately leads to massacre and Emain’s destruction by fire.

When Fergus announces to the musicians that Deirdre and Naoise have returned to Ireland and will be arriving shortly at the very house to which the trio before them has come, he affirms Deirdre’s connection to society in referring to Naoise and to her as “the son of Usna and his queen” (Yeats, Deirdre 115). But the import of his words has less to do with emphasizing the social nature of Deirdre’s status as a queen and more to do with that which it, in conjunction with the First Musician’s summation of Deirdre’s girlhood which reveals her immersion in a domestic space, implies thus far about the narrative and thematic relationship between Deirdre and Longes Mac n-Uislenn. Deirdre encompasses “one bare hour of life” (Daruwala 251), a brevity of time that is not unrelated to Yeats’ own intentions in modeling his drama upon Greek

According to Virginia Rohan, “Yeats chose from the outset to limit the scope of the action to the last hour before the deaths of Deirdre and the sons of Usna” (Rohan, “Yeats and Deirdre: From Story to Fable” 35). Fackler points out that “Yeats severely limited the play’s length and staging for an intensified effect”
tragedy (Rajan 60). But with respect to *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*, Yeats’ abridgement of the medieval tale acquires its meaning not only from what it omits from the older work but also from where it narratively corresponds to the same. Fergus’ entrance in *Deirdre* is Yeats’ equivalent to the moment in *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* when Deirdre, Naoise and his brothers return to Ireland from an island that the story’s narrator does not identify. Unlike the First Musician’s romanticized and vague reference to Deirdre “wandering . . ./somewhere beyond the edges of the world” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 114) after Naoise “[carries] her off” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 114)---an image that once again associates Deirdre with statelessness---*Longes Mac n-Uislenn* is comparatively specific as to what ensues after Derdriu forces Noisiu to elope with her, and those events are notable insofar as they reinforce the woman’s status as a catalyst of war, as I shall explain later in this section. More significant is the contrast between the return of the “fugitives” as *Deirdre* and *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* respectively depict it. In the play, Fergus’ remark to the musicians that they “have but the time/[t]o weigh a happy music with a sad,/ [t]o find out what is most pleasing to a lover/[b]efore the son of Usna and his queen/ have passed this threshold” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 115) indicates that Deirdre and Naoise’s destination is the “[g]uest-house”; and their imminent appearance on-stage makes it clear that they, like the musicians, affirm their identification with domesticity through their performance as “travellers”: the couple is coming to the “[g]uest-house” with the expectation of attaining an audience with Conchubar. In *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*, however, the homecomers’ destination is not the king’s “[g]uest-house” but “the green of Emain” (trans. Hull 65/ “faithchí na Emna” [*Longes Mac n-Uislenn* 47]), and the precision of the tale’s wording, in conjunction with the apparent spatial relationship between “the green” and “Emain” as a whole accentuates . . .

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101 For more details concerning the “Greekness” of *Deirdre*, see, for example, Ronald Schuchard’s “The Chanting of Yeats’s *Deirdre*” (2006-07); Maneck H. Daruwala’s “Yeats and the Mask of *Deirdre*: ‘That Love is All We Need’” (2001); David Richman’s *Passionate Action: Yeats’s Mastery of Drama* (2000); Bettina Liebowitz Knapp’s *Women, Myth and the Feminine Principle* (1998); Fiona Macintosh’s *Dying Acts: Death in Ancient Greek and Modern Irish Tragic Drama* (1994); and Richard Taylor’s *Reader’s Guide to the Plays of W. B. Yeats* (1984). Herbert Fackler argues that “Yeats uses the Musicians in almost the same way the Chorus is used in Sophocles’ *Oedipus*. . .except that they are actually involved in the action in a minor way” (106-07).
the difference between the medieval and twentieth century versions of Deirdre’s homecoming. Unlike
Deirdre, in which Fergus clearly refers to the imminent crossing of Deirdre and Naoise—“the son of Usna
and his queen” (Yeats, Deirdre 115)—over “this threshold” (Yeats, Deirdre 115), Longes Mac n-Uislienn
specifies that “[t]he Sons of Uisliu”—Noisiu and his two brothers—“[c]ome until they [are] on the green of
Emain” (trans. Hull 65). First, this sentence omits any explicit reference to Derdriu—only the story’s
later remark that “she [is] brought over to Conchobar so that she [is] beside him, and her hands [are] bound
behind her back” (trans. Hull 65) conveys (implicitly) that Derdriu has in fact stepped onto Irish soil.
Second, in echoing its own title, Longes Mac n-Uislienn’s allusion to “[t]he Sons of Uisliu” emphasizes
masculinity and patriarchal descent by grouping Noisiu with his brothers Arddan and Aindle. By contrast,
Deirdre emphasizes the unity of its protagonist and Naoise as a couple, and neither of his two brothers even
appears as a character in the play. Third, Longes Mac n-Uislienn situates Noisiu and his brothers standing in the
midst of “the green” while the “women [are] in their seats on the rampart of Emain” (trans. Hull 65). The
word “rampart,” meaning “[a] defensive wall or mound of earth, with a broad top and usually a stone
parapet; a walkway along the top of such a structure” (“rampart,” def. 1a), clearly contextualizes “the green”
as a place of warfare which in fact it swiftly proves to be when, on Conchobar’s behalf, Eogan mac
Durthach, accompanied by “his body of troops (?)” (trans. Hull 65 / “thur” [Longes Mac n-Uislienn 47],
skewers Noisiu whose brothers subsequently die in the skirmish that erupts in the wake of that first slaying.

What is more, the play specifically displaces war’s agency onto Conchubar. When the First
Musician voices her suspicions as to whether the monarch welcomes Deirdre and Naoise back to Ireland
with sincere forgiveness, Fergus insists that one of the reasons that he can vouch for the integrity of
Conchubar’s intentions toward Deirdre and Naoise is his “need of some young, famous, popular man/[t]o

302 . . .ocus do-illotar maic Uislienn co-imbátar for faithchi na Emna” (Longes Mac n-Uislienn 47).
301 . . .ocus rucad-si in-nunn co Conchobor co-imbáí fora láim ocus ro cumrigthe a llama iarna cúl” (Longes
Mac n-Uislienn 48).
304 . . .ocus batar inna mna inna suidib for dou na h-Emna” (Longes Mac n-Uislienn 47).
lead the troops . . . ” (Yeats, Deirdre 116). And when Deirdre and Naoise walk into the “[g]uest-house,” the musical trio, having begun to sing of the mythical Edain (about whom I will say more later), query as to whether she is “worth a song/[n]ow the hunt begins anew?” (Yeats, Deirdre 119). The “hunt” to which the musicians refer is Conchubar’s: he, they insinuate, is the hunter; Deirdre and Naoise, his prey. The point of a hunt is, of course, to capture and then to kill the object of one’s chase which makes it inherently violent. Yet even as it re-attributes the violence for which Derdriu is culpable in Longes Mac n-Uislenn to Conchubar, the play domesticates it in that a hunt is socially ritualized insofar as it proceeds in accordance with elaborate rules and traditionally has been associated with the upper classes. Indeed, to the extent that the First Musician associates “Conchubar’s house” (Yeats, Deirdre 115)—where, as I mentioned earlier, she has witnessed “[a] crowd of servants going out and in/[w]ith loads [of furnishings] upon their heads” (Yeats 115)—with premeditated violence in the form of the mercenaries who swarm about the “[g]uest-house,” the king’s residence inextricably emblematizes both violence and domesticity:

First Musician. Look there—there at the window, those dark men

With murderous and outlandish-looking arms—

They’ve been about the [g]uest-[h]ouse all day.

Fergus. [looking after them]. What are you?

Where do you come from, who is it sent you here?

First Musician. They will not answer you.

Fergus. They do not hear.

First Musician. Forgive my own speech, but to these eyes

That have seen many lands they are such men

As kings will gather for a murderous task

That neither bribes, commands, nor promises

Can bring their people to.
Fergus. And that is why

You harped upon an old man’s jealousy.

A trifle sets you quaking. Conchubar’s fame
Brings merchandise on every wind that blows.
They may have brought him Libyan dragon-skin,
Or the ivory of the fierce unicorn.

First Musician. If these be merchants, I have seen the goods
They have brought to Conchubar, and understood
His murderous purpose.

Fergus. Murderous, you say?

Why, what new gossip of the roads is this?
But I’ll not hear.

First Musician. It may be life or death.

There is a room in Conchubar’s house, and there—

Fergus. Be silent, or I’ll drive you from the door.

There’s many a one that would do more than that,
And make it prison, or death, or banishment

To slander the High King. (Yeats, Deirdre 117-18)

Longes Mac n-Uislenn depicts the return of Naoise and his brothers in such a way that no time seems
to elapse between their arrival on Ireland’s shore and their deaths on Emain’s “green”; Deirdre mostly takes
place within the chronological space between that initial landing and Naoise’s death, and Fergus’ role in
both versions of return highlights the play’s thematic deviation from that of the medieval narrative. Longes
Mac n-Uislenn relates that the Ulstermen, having learned that Noisiu and his brothers had fled Scotland for
an unidentified island, request that Conchobar allow the siblings to return to Ireland; Conchobar assents,
with the provision that “‘sureties go for them’” (trans. Hull 65/“...ocus tiaigat commairgi friu” [Longes Mac n-Uislenn 47]); and Uisliu’s offspring, upon receiving notification of this apparent amnesty, agree that Fergus should “‘come for [them] as surety’” along with “Dubthach and Cormac mac Conchobuir” (trans. Hull 65). 305 Fergus, Conchobor’s son and Dubthach do indeed “[give Noisiu, Arrdan, Aindle and Derdriu] accompaniment from the sea” (trans. Hull 65). 306 But Fergus, through Conchobor’s [underhanded] machinations, ends up abandoning his charges when he is obligated, by virtue of his implicit geis, 307 to accept an invitation to a feast: because of their own vow that Conchobor’s provisions shall be the first they shall eat after stepping back onto Irish soil, the sons of Uisliu are obliged to travel towards Emain without their “surety” (and also without Dubthach who accompanies Fergus). In light of the fact that Noisiu and his siblings abandoned Scotland because its men intended to slay Noisiu and his brothers so that Scotland’s ruler could seize Derdriu as his queen, and given that sorrow and shame motivate the Ulstermen’s request to Conchobor—that “‘the sons of Uisliu [could fall] in hostile lands through the crime of a bad woman’” (trans. Hull 65) 308—it is through Fergus, who is clearly pivotal to the functioning of the plot at this juncture of Longes mac n-Uislenn, that the narrative associates Derdriu, in reaffirming its attribution of conflict and the destruction that ensues from it to her, with a subverted form of domesticity. The feast that Fergus attends is the apparent winner of a “contention” (trans. Hull 65/“imchosnam” [Longes mac n-Uislenn 47]) amongst “ale-banquets” (trans. Hull 65/“chormannaib” [Longes mac n-Uislenn 47]) that have vied for his presence; and its true purpose is not to fête Fergus but to lure him away from the sons of Uisliu, leaving them without his protection and therefore vulnerable to attack.

305 “Regthair ocus tæt Fergus frinn i commairi ocus Dubthach ocus Cormac mac Conchobuir’” (Longes Mac nUislenn 47).
306 “Tiaigait side co’ngabsat a llama di muir” (Longes Mac nUislenn 47).
307 The Dictionary of the Irish Language (DIL) defines a “geis” as “a tabu, a prohibition” (“geis,” def. (a)), among other things. Fergus’ geis is that he may not refuse an invitation to a feast (MacKillop 191).
308 “‘Is tróg, a Chonchobuir,’ ol Ulaid, ‘maic Uislenn do thuitim i tírib námat tre chin droch-mná’” (Longes Mac nUislenn 47).
In *Longes Mac nUislenn*, Fergus’ actions upon learning of murders of Noisiu, Arrdan and Aindle at Conchobor’s instigation arguably reflect a perception of himself as the brothers’ protector who, having failed to perform his duty, has become their avenger, his narrative and thematic functions notwithstanding: Fergus kills “Traigthren, son of Traiglethan and his brother” (trans. Hull 66/ “Thraithreoin maic Trailethain ocus a brathar. . .” [*Longes Mac nUislenn* 48]), the logic of which seems to lie in the fact that the act causes “Conchobor’s honor [to be] outraged” (trans. Hull 66/ “ocus sarugud Conchubuir impu. . .” [*Longes Mac nUislenn* 48]), and destroys Emain by setting it aflame. In *Deirdre*, however, Fergus constantly defends what he perceives as Conchubar’s sincerity in granting amnesty to Naoise and Deirdre against her skepticism—and the First Musician’s—of his intentions in doing so. Fergus’ stance underlies Elin Ap Hywel’s assertion that “[t]hroughout the play our attention [is] focused on [Deirdre] and her conception of love, and the whole of conventional, male-dominated courtly society is largely merely a foil and a contrast to this” (33), commentary that is significant for its implicit indication as to how the “*old man*” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 113) highlights Yeats’ feminization of *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*. That Fergus is a “foil” for Deirdre emphasizes, by way of contrast, her centrality in the play to an episode in whose medieval counterpart she does not explicitly figure: *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* fails to disclose Derdriu’s particular whereabouts or activities in the time that elapses between the moment of her literal homecoming and the murder of Naoise and his brothers. More significantly, Ap Hywel’s reference to the “conventional, male-dominated courtly society [my italics]” hints at the extent to which Yeats’ work retains and intensifies *Longes Mac nUislenn*’s concern with the relationship between gender and cultural tradition while diminishing and ironizing its focus upon the theme of war (as will be demonstrated later in this chapter) to which, in the tenth century narrative, it is inextricably bound. As a whole, *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* implies that the devastation of warfare is the inevitable result of female identification with conflict and, in keeping with the intrinsic nature of conflict, narratively drives itself through actual events that saliently or covertly embody violence. By contrast, *Deirdre* provides “a rejection of the equation of femininity with inferiority, as well as a critique of the legitimacy of the social scripting of
gender. . .” (Suess 120), less through action than through dialogue that reveals the disjunction between Deirdre’s attention to Conchubar’s lack of adherence to cultural norms, which gives her reason to fear and to doubt his intentions, and Fergus and Naoise’s dismissal of her apprehensions and suspicions as those of a savage. Yet as the play ironically and simultaneously reveals, “their [Fergus and Naoise’s] awareness of social convention is merely an espousal of the same. . .” (Suess 120). In short, Yeats, by endowing his protagonist with a keen understanding of how social etiquette operates, associates Deirdre with civilization rather than maintaining Longes Mac nUislenn’s identification of her with conflict—not only in its conventional form but also in its guise as hospitality.

III. “That famous queen”

From the moment of her entrance, Deirdre affirms the “story” in the First Musician’s “fable” by calling attention to her own exquisiteness, thereby corroborating the latter’s earlier description of her as having “too much beauty for good luck.” After demanding that the musicians “[s]ilence [their] music” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 120) while expressing her gratitude for it, she remarks that “the wind’s blown upon [her] hair, and [she]/[m]ust set the jewels on [her] neck and head/[f]or one that’s coming” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 120). That is, gusts have disordered Deirdre’s tresses which, following their implicit rearrangement, she will adorn with gems just as she will also, by wearing at least one necklace, adorn her neck with the same. But this superficially innocuous reference to a prosaic occurrence—the need to re-comb one’s hair back into place and to accessorize one’s appearance—also identifies her with society in two ways. Insofar as air currents are natural phenomena, Deirdre’s intention to re-set her hair and bedeck it with stones represents a willful rejection of nature in favor of social custom: styling one’s hair and embellishing it with gems is obviously a learned ritual rather than an expression of instinct; and her motive for doing so—in order to present herself appropriately to “one that’s coming”—reflects her willingness to act in accordance with social norms. Just as significantly, Deirdre’s desire to ornament herself indicates a desire to appear in
accordance with the conventions of her class and gender, their anachronism notwithstanding. Deirdre’s comment that “[she]/[m]ust set the jewels on [her] neck and head” constitutes a little more than one line in a passage that Yeats revised for Deirdre as it would be performed with Mrs. Patrick Campbell in its title role. 309 Campbell had announced in the fall of 1907 that she would do so (Foster 374); earlier that year, in the spring, Yeats had toured Italy with Augusta Gregory where, in Ravenna, he started to cultivate “his interest in Byzantine art” (Foster 368). It therefore comes as no surprise that his writing should reflect this new focus. Deirdre’s adornment recalls the numismatic image of the fourth-century Byzantine empress Helena, mother of Constantine I, whose “diadem appears as part of [her] coiffure” (Angelova 3). More pertinently, Deirdre’s jewels liken her to the sixth-century Byzantine empress Theodora whom Ravenna’s Basilica di San Vitale depicts on one of its walls. The diadems upon the heads of Theodora and her husband, Justinian, in the Basilica di San Vitale murals distinguish the rulers from the members of their retinues who respectively surround them. 310 But unlike Justinian, whose fibula distinguishes him from his attendants in that their fibulae “are simpler, metal examples” while his “[is] gold and encrusted with gemstones” (Ball 123), Theodora wears “a jeweled collar” reflecting her “imperial status” that “encircles her neck and drapes over her shoulders” (Ball 123).

Naoise responds to Deirdre’s comments by observing that her “colour has all gone/[a]s ’twere with fear, and there’s no cause for that” (Yeats, Deirdre 120). Her reply is that

These women have the raddle that they use

To make them brave and confident, although

Dread, toil, or cold may chill the blood o’ their cheeks.

310 “Perhaps the most famous images of any Byzantine imperial couple are the mosaics of Emperor Justinian and Empress Theodora, with their entourage symbolically bringing gifts to the altar, in the apse at San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy, from around 547. Both Theodora and Justinian wear the marks of the Byzantine imperial office: elaborate, jeweled crowns and the full-length purple cloak known as a chlamys” (Ball 122).
You'll help me, women, It is my husband's will
I show my trust in one that may be here
Before the mind can call the colour up.
My husband took these rubies from a king
Of Surracha that was so murderous
He seemed all glittering dragon. Now wearing them
Myself wars on myself, for I myself—
That do my husband’s will, yet fear to do it—
Grow dragonish to myself.

[The women have gathered about her. Naoise has stood looking at her, but Fergus brings him to the chess-table. (Yeats, Deirdre 120)]

Deirdre’s reference to “these musicians” and their “raddle,” in conjunction with her imperative to them, implicitly conveys that they shall aid her in applying their own rouge to her face for the purpose of concealing any pallor she may still display when her expected guest happens to arrive. The import of Deirdre’s comments lie in their reinforcement of her identification with femininity as women performed it both in medieval Ireland and, more particularly, in Yeats’ own era. P.W. Joyce notes that “the blush of the cheeks was sometimes heightened by a colouring matter obtained from a plant named ruam” (177); and although his sources—namely, Cormac’s Glossary (c. late 9th c.) and The Book of Ballymote (c. 1391) — “leave a sort of presumption that the practice was common to men and women” (Joyce 177), his next statement, that “[i]n connexion with all this, it is proper to remark that among Greek and Roman ladies the practice was very general of painting the cheeks, eyebrows, and other parts of the face” (Joyce 177), seems to suggest itself as a sort of precedent that contradicts the impression given by the aforementioned texts, thereby reestablishing the use of rouge as an exclusively feminine practice in pre-Renaissance Ireland. In any case, wearing makeup was certainly the province of women in late nineteenth- and early twentieth century.
Ireland, and Deirdre’s need to avail herself of the musicians’ stores speaks to the fact that the only women who routinely wore heavy makeup during much of the nineteenth century were performers (and prostitutes [Ribeiro 249]) but that in the last decade before the twentieth century, “society women, completely accepting the fact of cosmetics, [were copying] the way in which actresses applied them. . .emphasizing bone structure by rouge on the cheekbones” (Ribeiro 281). Yet Deirdre’s allusion to her intention to color her cheeks is not an isolated gesture of conformity in and of itself but rather is the consequence of her motive for doing so: because “[i]t is h[er] husband’s will/ [she] show [her] trust” (Yeats, Deirdre 120) in her expected visitor. That is, the catalyst for Deirdre’s bodily performance as a woman is her willingness to perform her role as a wife, a desire that identifies her with late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century conceptions of Irish womanhood (Innes 39).

Furthermore, in carrying out Naoise’s wishes, Deirdre shall literally embody war’s inversion. As Deirdre informs us, the previous owner of the particular rubies in her possession is someone so violent that his actions fostered the illusion that he is “all glittering dragon” (Yeats, Deirdre 120); by association, then, her jewels are synonymous with conflict that, she herself perpetuates, as she asserts. Yet the rubies with which she will adorn herself were considered to be “a charm against discord” during the medieval period (Johnston 399). And Deirdre’s aggression is an ironic reversal of that waged by the King of Surracha: in “[warring] on [herself],” Deirdre “wars” inwardly and intangibly rather than outwardly and physically, and her violence, unlike the King of Surracha’s, is not literal but psychological and emotional, a contrast that the play’s immediately subsequent stage directions accentuate in spatially segregating Deirdre and the musicians from Fergus and Naoise.

Indeed, the play emphasizes Deirdre’s position relative to Naoise and Fergus, which given their allegiance to Conchubar simultaneously identifies them with war, thereby situating Deirdre in opposition to it, even as it depicts a Naoise who, in comparison with his medieval counterpart, more closely identifies with domesticity than with conflict. Fergus having led “him to the chess table,” Naoise observes that “there
is none to welcome us” (Yeats, Deirdre 120), an omission he finds odd. Fergus’ reply, that “King Conchubar has sent no messenger/that he may come himself” (Yeats, Deirdre 120), elicits a response that not only reflects Naoise’s confidence in Conchubar’s integrity as an individual and as a monarch but also his expectation of how the king should act insofar as he, Naoise, possesses an informed understanding of Conchubar’s role within and corresponding duties to Ulster: “And. . .[b]eing High King, he cannot break his faith./I have his word and I must take that word. . .” (Yeats, Deirdre 121). More to the point, Naoise perceives any expression of doubt on his part with respect to Conchubar’s intentions as a sign that he is “unworthy of [his] nurture/under [Conchubar’s] roof” (Yeats, Deirdre 121). That is, the filial nature of his relationship to the king underpins Naoise’s loyalty to Conchubar. Interestingly, Naoise’s remarks ironically identify Conchubar himself with domesticity in associating him with both his actual residence and to his engagement in the metonymically-related practice of childrearing.

Indeed, slightly later exchanges emphasize Naoise and Fergus’ bias towards Conchubar while further tempering the play’s identification of him with war by positing him as an agent of hospitality: when, a little while later, Deirdre echoes Naoise’s perception, namely that “[t]here’s none to welcome [her and Naoise]” (Yeats, Deirdre 122), her spouse chastises her in commenting that “[b]eing [Conchubar’s] guest,/words that would wrong him can but wrong ourselves” while Fergus claims that the king “is but making ready/[a] welcome in his house, arranging where/[t]he moorhen and the mallard go, and where/[t]he speckled heathcock on a golden dish” (Yeats, Deirdre 122). But beyond what these remarks imply about those who respectively utter them, they simultaneously highlight the extent to which their sentiments contrast with the substance of Deirdre’s interspersed contributions to the conversation—and, more importantly, the extent to which her own comments, Naoise’s final words on his own behalf and Fergus’ to the heroine during this dialogue, reinforce the drama’s identification of its protagonist with

311 Barbara A. Suess notes that “the strongest reason Naoise and Fergus find to trust Conchubar—which also, ironically, is the one that makes it so easy for him to deceive them—emanates from their filial respect for his patriarchal authority” (122).
domesticity and with traditional gender roles even though, as Barbara A. Suess points out, “[i]n Naoise’s and Fergus’s faith in the steadfastness of the male/male social bond, we find a strong indictment of the Victorian bourgeois phenomenon Showalter terms “Clubland,” a literal and metaphorical network of male social clubs that helped separate men from domestic life. . .and the “illogical” women who ruled that sphere” (122-23). 312 Deirdre’s observation that “[t]here’s none to welcome us”—i.e. nobody whom Conchubar has officially dispatched to meet her and Naoise-- is as much a statement of fact as it is an implied critique; her exclamation at the conditions that greet them upon arrival—“[a]n empty house upon the journey’s end!” and her subsequent query as to whether such is “the way a king that means no mischief/[h]onours a guest” (Yeats, Deirdre 122), which explains the subtle reproach in her initial remark concerning the lack of reception that she and Naoise receive, demonstrate her recognition of the fact that Conchubar has not followed convention in welcoming his guests. And to Deirdre’s further query as to whether or not the king has a “messenger.” (Yeats, Deirdre 122), after Fergus details Conchubar’s preparations for the feast with which he will regale her and Naoise, the latter answers that “[s]uch words and fears/[w]rong this old man who’s pledged his word to us” and so he and Fergus ought “not speak or think as women do,/[t]hat when the house is all a-bed sit up/[m]arking among the ashes with a stick/[t]ill they are terrified” (Yeats, Deirdre 122). Naoise’s advice is reflective of his and Fergus’ mutual admiration for each other’s possession of “the sense allotted only to men” (Suess 122). At the same time, the image of women that Naoise conjures up is, arguably, a subversion and a feminization of Longes Mac n-Uislenn. The image of “the house. . .all a-bed” recalls the moment in the medieval narrative when everyone in Feidlimid’s household is retiring for the evening. But unlike the women in Yeats’ play, who according to Fergus, and among whom he groups

312 Similarly, C.L. Innes describes Deirdre as an individual “who is led reluctantly to her fate by the insistence of Naoise and Fergus on the primacy of male trust and comradeship over womanly intuition and experience” (56), while Maneck H. Daruwala states that Yeats “goes out of his way to gender and develop the opposition between female wisdom and the male arrogance that dismisses it” (249) and that Fergus and Naoise “take words at face value, dismiss the world of woman’s lore or old wives’ tales, while the women are more sophisticated interpreters and critics of the complicated relationship between the real and the ideal world, language and reality, art and history” (250).
Deirdre, keep themselves—and no one else--awake with their own anxieties over the future, in Longes Mac n-Uislenn Derdriu screams, causing the Ulstermen to jump to attention at precisely the moment when they have gone to sleep which thereby associates her with war despite the fact that as an infant who is still in the womb, she intrinsically defines her mother’s impending status as such and therefore is simultaneously emblematic of family life. Like Deirdre’s “warring” upon herself, the women’s act of “[m]arking among the ashes” is an expression of their respective states of mind, and if the latter activity also takes physical form, it arguably, as Naoise depicts it, occurs in solitude. Although his use of the plural “women” emphasizes the stereotyped nature of that which he describes, the image he conjures up is nevertheless that of a single woman awake, anxious and alert in the midst of a sleeping household--and therefore, unlike war, affects no one but she who engages in it.

Indeed, Naoise’s and Fergus’ remarks before leaving the stage serve as anticipatory antagonisms for Deirdre’s subsequent exchanges with the First Musician, affirming the play’s identification with its title character even as these conversations accentuate Yeats’ domestication of the Irish myth. After suggesting that he and Fergus leave the house to discern whether the king’s courier has arrived, Naoise comments that “[i]t is but kind that when the lips we love/[s]peak words that are unfitting for kings’ ears/[o]ur ears be deaf” (Yeats, Deirdre 123) to which the old man replies that he “had to threaten/[t]hese wanderers because they would have weighed/[s]ome crazy phantasy of their own brain /[o]r gossip of the road with Conchubar’s word” (Yeats, Deirdre 123). Fergus associates the musicians’ apparently “stateless” condition—one that defines them as outsiders to society—with the illogical imaginary and an inability to judge rationally when it comes to discerning the integrity of others’ language. The conversation that ensues between Deirdre and the musicians after Fergus and Naoise’s departure undermines the connections that the old man forges. Deirdre informs the First Musician that

[t]here was a man that loved [her]. He was old;

[She] could not love him. Now [she] can but fear.
He has made promises, and brought [her] home;
But though [she turns] it over in [her] thoughts,
[she] cannot tell if they are sound and wholesome,
Or hackles on the hook. (Yeats, Deirdre 123-24)

On the one hand, Deirdre’s remarks reflect her uncertainty concerning the soundness of her interpretation of Conchubar’s sureties. On the other, inherent in this insecurity is her awareness of the sophistication and complexity with which language may be employed, an understanding that implicitly affirms Deirdre’s affiliation with society insofar as language may be defined as an example of “cultural phenomena” (Chater and Christiansen 1141). The First Musician then responds that she “has heard he loved [Deirdre]/[as some old miser loves the dragon-stone]/[he hides among the cobwebs near the roof” (Yeats, Deirdre 124). To begin with, this comment implicitly indicates that the First Musician’s knowledge of Conchubar’s feelings toward Deirdre is at least second-hand which initially corroborates Fergus’ contention that she and the other musicians pay attention to “gossip of the road” even as their inclusion in this conversational “grapevine” demonstrates their connection to Ulster, thereby contradicting Fergus’ disavowal of this association. But more to the point, the First Musician’s words testify to her own interpretive abilities. The First Musician begins her conversation with Deirdre following Naoise and Fergus’ departure by inviting the young woman to “speak freely” of whatever may “[lie] heavy on [her] heart”; Deirdre asks the First Musician if she has ever “been in love”; and the latter encourages the queen to “[speak freely]” as “[t]here is nothing in the world/[t]hat has been friendly to [the musicians] but the kisses/[t]hat were upon [their] lips, and when [they] are old/[t]heir memory will be all the life [they] have” (Yeats, Deirdre 123). It is at this point that Deirdre voices her apprehensions about her analytical conclusions, which is to say that neither her previous remarks nor those of the First Musician within this particular dialogue contextualize the “man that loved [Deirdre]” as Conchubar. From her own knowledge of Deirdre’s history with Conchubar; Fergus’ announcement of Naoise and Deirdre’s return to Ireland; the “debate” over the king’s motives that ensues
between herself and Fergus and subsequently between him, Naoise and Deirdre; and her own description of
the king as “old,” the First Musician readily discerns that the unnamed man to whom Deirdre refers is
Conchubar. That the First Musician’s reply pointedly refers to him, albeit obliquely, therefore speaks to her
capacity to discern meaning in terms of its broader framework. Furthermore, the First Musician’s
comparison of the monarch to a “miser” who conceals his “dragon-stone. . .among the cobwebs near the
roof” (Yeats, Deirdre 124) implicitly reinforces the extent to which she is part of society in that to refer to
someone as such is to invoke a characterization that social values wholly define. At the same, this likening
affiliates the king with an image that, given the presence of the cobwebs, is representative of neglected
domesticity.

In any case, the next three exchanges testify to the rapidly developed accuracy of Deirdre’s
interpretative powers. Initially, she comprehends the First Musician’s simile to indicate that Conchubar
intends to kill both her and Naoise. When the First Musician says that Deirdre has “not [her] thought” and
says that when she herself “lost one [she] loved distractedly,/ [she] blamed [her] crafty rival and not
him, / [a]nd fancied, till [her] passion had run out, / [t]hat [she] could carry him away with [her], / [a]nd tell
him all [her] love, [she’d] keep him yet” (Yeats, Deirdre 124), the younger woman correctly revises her
understanding: Conchubar “[w]ill murder Naoise, and keep [her] alive” (Yeats, Deirdre 124). And what
follows both undercuts Fergus’ association of the musicians’ status with the imaginary and illogicality and
tightens the link between Deirdre and culture. Although the First Musician tells Deirdre that she “[puts] that
meaning upon words/[s]poken at random” (Yeats, Deirdre 124), the latter states that “[w]anderers like [the
First Musician], / [w]ho have their wit alone to keep their lives,/ [s]peak nothing that is bitter to the ear/[a]t
random. . .” (Yeats, Deirdre 124). According to Deirdre, the musicians’ survival is inherent in their very
intellect and reason, and, she implies, these qualities underlie the purpose and deliberation with which they
express that which is distasteful. When the First Musician counters with the comment that she and her
fellow travelers “have little that is certain” (Yeats, Deirdre 125), Deirdre entreats her to disclose what else
she knows about Conchubar’s plans, adding that she “never [has] met any of [the First Musician’s] kind/[b]ut that [she] gave them money, food, and fire” (Yeats, Deirdre 125). The Old Irish Brehon Law, which became writ at some point after 600 A.D. and before 700 A.D., testifies to the cultural significance of providing hospitality 311 in medieval Ireland (O’Sullivan 18). That “according to Heptad 15, ‘the woman who refuses hospitality to every law abiding person (ben asteoing each recht)’ loses her honour-price” while the “Bretha Crólige maintains that ‘the man who refuses hospitality to every law abiding person (fer asteoing each recht)’ relinquishes his right to nursing and fines” (O’Sullivan 63) underscores the fact that both men and women performed this office.

And it is through its identification of Conchubar with both violence and domestication that the play at this point most explicitly identifies Deirdre with the latter. The First Musician asserts that in existence “are strange, miracle-working, wicked stones,/m]en tear out of the heart and the hot brain/[o]f Libyan dragons” (Yeats, Deirdre 125). Deirdre further identifies these entities as examples of “[t]he hot Istain stone,/a]nd the cold stone of Fanes, that have power/[t]o stir even those at enmity to love,” ones that according to the First Musician “have so great an influence, if but sewn/[i]n the embroideries that curtain in/[t]he bridal bed” (Yeats, Deirdre 125). That is, these gems, which are the yield of violence, simultaneously evince incredible power when, through labor that in both medieval and late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ireland was typically female,114 they literally become part of “[t]he bridal bed’s” apparatus—the very piece of furniture that emblematizes what traditionally has been one of the main units of

311 The practice of hospitality in medieval Ireland included the bestowal of presents—which would include “money,” albeit in forms other than coinage (O’Sullivan 242-43).
114 Lisa Bitel emphasizes the gendered nature of this work in medieval Irish society in asserting that “[i]f cloth making was women’s work, then its ultimate product was the fine embroidery of a few highly skilled workers” (Land of Women 128). During the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early ones of the twentieth, the emergence of the Arts and Crafts Movement, in conjunction with the Celtic Revival, resulted in (among other things), the creation of a “home industries movement” (James 51) that “reinforced a set of ideals surrounding rural women: it affirmed their place in the home, where they served the family and nation as mothers and wives, and identified them as the custodians of indigenous craft traditions” (James 51), one of which was embroidery.
social structure: the married couple. Deirdre’s response to this information is to implore the “[m]aster of the stars /[t]hat made this delicate house of ivory /[a]nd made [her] soul its mistress” to “keep it safe!” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 125). That is, in Yeats’ drama, Deirdre identifies herself with the “[g]uest-house” which is synonymous with hospitality insofar as its function defines it and which positions her as a subversion of her medieval self whom *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*, as I argued in the previous chapter, identifies with the figure of the warrior king. But “the bridal bed” to which the First Musician refers is “[s]o decked for miracle in Conchubar’s house” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 125) which, Deirdre realizes with horror, awaits her as his spouse. Inherent in Conchubar’s identification with the metonymic centre of civilization is his identification with war insofar as his marriage to Deirdre is contingent upon the death of Naoise at his request.

    Fergus and Naoise reenter the “[g]uest-house” upon Deirdre’s summoning: she has “heard terrible mysterious things, /[m]agical horrors and the spell of wizards” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 126). Fergus’ reply to this announcement, that she has “been listening/[t]o singers of the roads that gather up/[t]he stories of the world” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 126), resurrects his and Naoise’s argument with Deirdre and the First Musician over Conchubar’s intentions, with the result that Naoise feels compelled to seek Fergus’ “pardon for [Deirdre]” on account of the fact that she, so he claims, “has the heart of the wild birds that fear/[t]he net of the fowler or the wicked cage” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 126). And when Deirdre queries whether she is “to see the fowler and the cage/[a]nd speak no word at all,” Naoise retorts that she “would have known,/ [h]ad they not bred [her] in that mountainous place,/[t]hat when we give a word and take a word/[s]orrow is put away, past wrong forgotten” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 126). The significance of Naoise’s remarks lies in part within its intensification of the contrast that he and Fergus posit between themselves on the one hand and the musicians and Deirdre on the other. If Fergus links the musicians’ “statelessness” to ill-judgment based upon the irrationality of their imaginings—which he earlier in the play claims is “[f]ed on extravagant poetry, and lit /[b]y such a dazzle of old fabulous tales/[t]hat common things are lost” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 118)—and to their faith in rumours, he also acknowledges them as “comely women” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 115) and, contrary to his explicit
categorization of them as outsiders, nevertheless implicitly defines them in cultural terms insofar as he observes that they “are musicians by [their] instruments” (Yeats, Deirdre 115). Naoise, however, echoes Fergus not only in attributing Deirdre’s supposed ignorance of custom concerning the relationship between language, transgression and pardon to her upbringing beyond the literal bounds of society, but also in defining her as an animal in explaining away her apprehensions as the expression of mere instinct.

This heightening of contrast is not, however, an end unto itself: Naoise’s categorization of Deirdre as a non-human creature accentuates his function within the play as an antithesis to her when Deirdre undermines his notion of her a few exchanges later after he once again entreats her to “[l]isten to [Fergus], for many think/[h]e has a golden tongue” (Yeats, Deirdre 127):

\begin{quote}
Deirdre. Then I will say
\begin{quote}
What it were best to carry to the grave.
Look at my face where the leaf raddled it
And at these rubies on my hair and breast.
It was for him, to stir him to desire,
I put on beauty; yes, for Conchubar.
\end{quote}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Naoise. What frenzy put these words into your mouth?
\begin{quote}
Deirdre. No frenzy, for what need is there for frenzy
To change what shifts with every change of the wind,
Or else there is no truth in men’s old sayings?
Was I not born a woman?
\end{quote}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Naoise. You’re mocking me.
\end{quote}

\footnote{Earlier in the play, after Deirdre first expresses her apprehensions about Conchubar’s intentions, Fergus says of her that “[i]t is but natural /[t]hat she should doubt [the king], for her house has been /[t]he hole of the badger and the den of the fox” (Yeats, Deirdre 121).}

\footnote{Kathleen O’Gorman makes a similar point in asserting that “Naoise attributes [Deirdre’s] suspicions to her animal nature and to her upbringing far from the world of men” (91).}
Deirdre. And is there mockery in this face and eyes,
Or in this body, in these limbs that brought
So many mischiefs? Look at me and say
If that that shakes my limbs be mockery.

Naoise. What woman is there that a man can trust
But at the moment when he kisses her
At the first midnight?

Deirdre. Were it not most strange
That women should put evil in men’s hearts
And lack it in themselves? And yet I think
That being half good I might change round again
Were we aboard our ship and on the sea.

Naoise. We’ll to the horses and take ship again.

Fergus. Fool, she but seeks to rouse your jealousy
With crafty words. (Yeats, Deirdre 127-28)

That even Fergus recognizes the intent behind Deirdre’s words here (and pointedly calls Naoise a “fool”) highlights the extent to which the play begins to reverse the binary that the two men establish between themselves and the women on-stage with them:317 it is not Deirdre here who evinces a lack of intelligence through her failure to comprehend semantic meaning but Naoise; and how the exchanges quoted above

317 Suess writes, anticipating her own discussion of the dialogue quoted above, that “Deirdre and the musicians go beyond merely recognizing the existence of the socially constructed gender codes with which they are labeled. They co-opt these codes, using their knowledge against those less enlightened in an attempt to save Deirdre and Naoise from the death that Fergus, Naoise, and Conchubar bring closer. Whereas Naoise and Fergus accept at face value woman’s nature as depicted in stereotypes, because Deirdre and the musicians are more astute “readers,” they recognize the possibility of revising the codes for use in their favor. In Showalter’s terms, rather than fall back on the safety of old “borders,” Deirdre and the other women reestablish them” (124).
subvert Naoise and Fergus’ assertions directly contradicts the former’s identification of the title character with “wild birds” in light of this chapter’s overall argument. Deirdre asserts that she has had makeup applied to her cheeks and has draped her tresses and chest with gems in order to attract Conchubar’s notice. That this motive has no basis in fact notwithstanding, the point is that it belies Naoise’s categorization of Deirdre as an animal in that it contextualizes her actions as deliberate and purposeful rather than instinctual.

Similarly, when Naoise queries as to “[w]hat frenzy” has inspired Deirdre’s announcement, she defines herself in terms of some early Christian perceptions concerning the nature of women that have filtered down to the twenty-first century, 318 and her later remark that “being half good [she] might change round again/[w]ere [she and Naoise] aboard [their] ship and on the sea” performatively affirms these ideas while accentuating the apparently rhetorical nature of her immediately preceding question in which she appears to confirm her lover’s own stereotypes of women. Again, Deirdre’s words demonstrate her familiarity with long-held ideas about women, and if she voices them only to “rouse [Naoise’s] jealousy,” the fact remains that whether she is sincere in her actions or not, Deirdre in these moments deliberately and self-consciously performs as a woman—a role that the play subtly links to its distancing of her from war. When Naoise remarks that Deirdre is ridiculing him, and she in turn asks whether she physically expresses any such scorn, she refers to her “limbs that brought/[s]o many mischiefs” (Yeats, Deirdre 127). That is, it is Deirdre’s physical attractiveness that has caused such “mischiefs,” an attribution that absolves her of any agency with respect to the situation in which she and Naoise find themselves in that whatever she may do, or have the musicians do, to enhance the beauty of her face, hair and breasts, the sexual appeal of her arms and legs is owing to no efforts of her own. More intriguingly, after Fergus calls Naoise a “fool” and announces that

318 John Chrysostom (c. 349-407 A.D.), in his exegesis of Paul’s commentary on women in the second chapter of his first letter to Timothy, characterizes women as “weak and fickle” (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers). Vita Daphna Arbel states that in the Greek Life of Adam and Eve (c. 100-300 A.D.), “Eve is implicitly conflated with the evil instigator of the primeval transgression, who is depicted correspondingly as the serpent, Satan, and a fallen angel” and that “Eve’s sin of disobedience gains specific sexual connotations, becoming associated with the satanic fallen angel’s illicit lust and with the sins of the flesh” (19).
Deirdre is just trying to “rouse [his] jealousy,” she responds in a way that undermines some of the earlier paradoxes of the play that already have mitigated her association, as well as that of the musicians, with conflict. Deirdre states that her

jewels have been reaped by the innocent sword

Upon a mountain, and a mountain bred [her];

But who can tell what change can come to love

Among the valleys? [She speaks] no falsehood now.

Away to windy summits, and there mock

The night-jar and the valley-keeping bird! (Yeats, Deirdre 128)

Deirdre’s gems, we recall, Naoise had seized “from a king/[a]f Surracha that was so murderous/[h]e seemed all glittering dragon,” ones that she, having bejeweled herself with them, have caused her to “[war] upon herself” in that by “[doing her] husband’s will, yet [fearing] to do it,” she “[g]row[s] dragonish to [herself].” That is, the rubies that have implicated her and Naoise in war by virtue of their prior ownership have prompted her to struggle internally with her own mindset rather than externally with others, thereby defusing that connotation. But the passage above strips the rubies of their earlier ties to violence. For one thing, Deirdre’s description of the “sword” as “innocent” indicates that it has had no part in any bloodshed. More to the point, her employment of the verb “reaped” contextualizes the acquisition of the rubies as the culmination of an agricultural process which is to say of a cycle that is synonymous with the rise of civilization.  

That Deirdre’s question as to whether she and Naoise “[w]ere. . .not born to wander” (Yeats, Deirdre 128) immediately precedes this later reference to the provenance of her rubies disassociates

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319 “The origins of plant cultivation and cattle breeding helped to secure the food procurement system and contributed greatly to the creation of a rather settled mode of life. It was grounded on a relatively stable quantity of product, which could be obtained during a long period of time from the same territory using different sources or/and different ways of their exploitation, combining traits of hunter-gatherers with a productive economy” (Smyntyna, “Agricultural Revolution” 34).
carnage from statelessness and, implicitly through her query, from herself and Naoise. Given the status of
the musicians as “wanderers,” however, the juxtaposition of Deirdre’s question and her subsequent
reference to the origin of her rubies informs their identity as well. That Deirdre has linked wandering to an
erasure (of sorts) with respect to carnage also indirectly diminishes the ambiguity of the musicians’ relation
to war by redefining them in terms of “the innocent sword.”

The play paradoxically affirms this logic when Fergus, addressing Deirdre, points out that “[m]en blamed [her] that [she] stirred a quarrel up/[t]hat has brought death to many” (Yeats, Deirdre 128). First, Fergus does not assert that Deirdre “stirred a quarrel up” but rather that “men blamed [her] that [she] stirred a quarrel up” which transforms her culpability into possibility, from actual fact to mere hearsay. Second, Fergus’ next sentence implies that if Deirdre should flee again, it is Conchubar’s reaction that will result in further violence which his language links specifically to the destruction of domesticity, thereby creating a division between warfare and civilian life even as he explicitly asks where, “[i]f Conchubar were the treacherous man [s]he thinks,” she would “find safety now that [she has] come/[i]nto the very middle of his power,/u]nder his very eyes?” (Yeats, Deirdre 128): “I have made peace,/poured water on the fire, but if you fly/King Conchubar may think that he is mocked/[a]nd the house blaze again. . . .” (Yeats, Deirdre 128). Third, Deirdre’s reply underscores the culpability of her beauty rather than that of her will as the catalyst of the struggles that have ensued in wake of her flight from Ireland, and she relates safety to domestication with the musicians themselves as its agent:

Then there is but one way to make all safe,
I’ll spoil this beauty that brought misery
And houseless wandering on the man I loved.
These wanderers will show me how to do it;
To clip this hair to baldness, blacken my skin
With walnut juice, and tear my face with briars. (Yeats, Deirdre 128)
Fourth, and perhaps most significantly, Deirdre’s solution to fixing the situation calls for self-inflicted aggression on her part, not outwardly-directed conflict, and no more than a few words from Naoise—as well as the arrival of Conchubar’s messenger—is enough to forestall her plan despite her assertion that “there’s not any way but this to bring all trouble to an end” (Yeats, Deirdre 129): “Leave the gods’ handiwork unblotted, and wait for their decision, our decision is past” (Yeats, Deirdre 129).

Indeed, the play affirms this dichotomy when Conchubar’s messenger arrives with the news that “Deirdre and Fergus, son of Roigh, are summoned; but not the traitor that bore off the Queen” (Yeats, Deirdre 129): not only does the messenger contextualize Deirdre as the passive object of Naoise’s actions, but in branding him a “traitor” while seeking her presence at the king’s “table and his bed” (Yeats, Deirdre 130), he defines the lovers in opposition to one another: Naoise, as Ulster’s enemy; Deirdre, as part of Ulster’s community. And Deirdre deepens this divide through its depiction of Naoise’s, Fergus’ and Deirdre’s respective reactions to Conchubar’s betrayal of them. Naoise’s immediate response is to announce his intentions to “challenge [the monarch] before his court to match [him] there, or match [him] in some other place where none can come between [them] but [their] swords” (Yeats, Deirdre 130); Fergus, after initially thinking that “[s]ome rogue, some enemy, has bribed [the messenger] to embroil [them] with the King” before Deirdre corrects him in pointing out that he had “thought the best, and the worst came of it” (Yeats, Deirdre 130), then changes his tactic: he will go before the king and to him “[s]end such words. . .that he may know how great peril he lays hands upon [Deirdre]” (Yeats, Deirdre 130-131), declaring that he “will protect, or, if that is impossible, revenge” (Yeats, Deirdre 131). Deirdre’s impulse, by contrast, is to flee: when she exhorts Fergus to “ride and bring [his] friends” (Yeats, Deirdre 130), she does so with the idea that the old man’s allies might help Naoise and her to “escape” (Yeats, Deirdre 130); and when Naoise points out the impossibility of this plan owing to the fact that Conchubar’s minions have surrounded the “[g]uest-house,” her suggestion to Naoise is that they should “out and die or break away, if the chance favour [them]” (Yeats, Deirdre 131). In short, whether immediate or delayed, the
impetus of both men is, ultimately, to engage in conflict, while Deirdre’s is not, a contrast that the play intensifies more specifically and explicitly in terms of social prescription. Naoise vetoes Deirdre’s first option, that of facing their would-be assassins outside the “[g]uest-house” not only because they would enforce the lovers’ separation from each other, “stained with blood,” and “[t]heir barbarous weapons would but mar that beauty,” but because he “would have [her] die as a queen should—/[i]n a death-chamber” and she is “in [his] charge” (Yeats, Deirdre 131). If Naoise’s perception of Deirdre as their adversaries’ future victim to some extent reflects the likely realities of the situation in which the couple finds itself, he also defines her, by virtue of her social position, as someone he needs to shield from harm rather than as someone capable of defending herself—an attitude that reflects late nineteenth- and early twentieth century Irish notions of womanhood, during which interval “Irish cartoonists [shared] with English ones the convention of depicting Ireland as a maiden in need of protection and comfort” who “symbolized not only the nation in the abstract, but also an ideal of Irish womanhood” (Innes 17), and to the extent that a “death-chamber” is a room, domesticity, not the battlefield, is the appropriate context for her demise.  

Moreover, Deirdre herself apparently adopts Naoise’s stance when in reply she states that she shall remain in the “[g]uest-house” but that he should “go out and fight” (Yeats, Deirdre 131). Indeed, it is Naoise who seems to reconsider his position when he asks “[w]hat need [has he], that gave up all for love,/[t]o die like an old king out of a fable,/[f]ighting and passionate” (Yeats, Deirdre 132).

IV. “Begin, begin, of some old king and queen, [o]f Lugaid Redstripe or another”

120 Daruwala’s comment that “Conchubar’s values are those Yeats associates with the British Empire...” (255) underscores interpretations of Deirdre as an allegory of the relationship between Britain and Ireland in the writer’s own time.

121 With respect to these three lines and the two immediately previous, Balachandra Rajan observes that “Naoise, whose first impulse is to a fighting finish, chooses on reflection to die more impassively...” (62).
From its title, and certainly from its opening line as spoken by the First Musician, *Deirdre* implicitly invites comparison between itself and *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*. Recognition of the way in which the play engages the medieval narrative, however, relies upon the audience’s or reader’s familiarity with the latter. By contrast, the play explicitly invokes three characters from Irish myth: Lugaid Redstripe and his wife, Derbforgaill, to whom it never refers by name but instead calls “the seamew,” from the *Aided Derbforgaill* (*The Violent Death of Derbforgaill*); and Étain from the *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (*The Destruction of Dá Derga’s Hostel*) and the *Tochmarc Étain* (*The Wooing of Étain*). Although some scholars have alluded briefly to the play’s own references to these figures, noting in particular how these characters and the narratives in which they respectively appear parallel Naoise, Deirdre and the situation in which they find themselves, none has thoroughly analysed Étain and, more significantly, Derbforgaill, as the *Aided Derbforgaill*, the *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* and the *Tochmarc Étain* respectively depict them in relation to Yeats’ portrayal of Deirdre. As my examination of these myths here will demonstrate, the drama’s allusions to Étain and, more pertinently, to “the seamew,” accentuate the extent to which it conventionalizes *Longes Mac n-Uislenn’s* Derdriu.

When Naoise, having apparently resolved for himself and Deirdre to emulate Lugaid Redstripe and his wife who, using the very same board and game pieces that are now on the table in the “[g]uest-house,” “[p]layed at the chess upon the night they died” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 121), he brings us back almost to the beginning of the play, when Fergus hears him and Deirdre approaching the “guest-house” and bids the Musicians to welcome the couple with their art: “[c]ome now, a verse/[o]f some old time not worth remembering,/a]nd all the lovelier because a bubble” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 118). Fergus suggests that the Musicians “[b]egin, begin, of some old king and queen,/o]f Lugaid Redstripe or another” before retracting this idea for the reason that “[h]e and his lady perished wretchedly” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 118). In lieu of a song about Lugaid Redstripe and his consort, the Musicians elect to perform a song whose first speaker, the mythical Queen Edain, queries why, when she

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322 See Note 288.
‘[climbs] the stair
To the tower overhead,
When the winds are calling there
Or the gannets calling out
In waste places of the sky,
There’s so much to think about
That [she cries], that [she cries]? (Yeats, Deirdre 119)

and whose second speaker, “her goodman,” replies that

‘Love would be a thing of naught
Had not all his limbs a stir
Born out of immoderate thought;
Were he anything by half,
Were his measure running dry.
Lovers, if they may not laugh,
Have to cry, have to cry.’ (Yeats, Deirdre 119)

Given that these lyrics and their melody are meant to herald the return of two lovers who ran off together and are now returning to their native land, this song, which concerns itself with the nature of love and defines the experience of being in love as a state of emotional extremes and whose speakers are a married couple, is appropriate and fitting. But the Musicians’ song, as Deirdre frames it, is not a preference in and of itself but an improvement upon Fergus’ initial idea of that which the women should sing, a fact that comparison of the Musicians’ ditty with the Irish mythology that features Queen Edain accentuates. The Destruction of Dá Derga’s Hostel contains elements that parallel those of Longes Mac n-Uislenn: Étaín, like Derdriu, is the most beautiful woman in Ireland; indeed, the description of her that The Destruction of Dá Derga’s Hostel provides is very similar to Longes Mac n-Uislenn’s description of Derdriu. Like Derdriu, Étaín is
the object of men’s desires, and her granddaughter, who like her grandmother and Derdriu possesses incomparable beauty, grows up in circumstances that seem to be a amalgam of those in which Derdriu grows up and those in which she lives while in Scottish exile: foster parents raise her in an abode that, having “no door, only a window and a skylight” (trans. Gantz 64), is clearly intended to conceal her from the world. When one particular individual spies her through the “skylight” and informs the king of the realm in which she resides of her existence, much as the Scottish king’s “steward” (trans. Hull 64; “rechtaire” [Longes Mac n-Uislen 46]) spies Derdriu sleeping with Noisiu one night and informs his liege about her, that ruler then schemes to attain her in a way that causes destruction, as the king of Scotland would have done had Derdriu, Naoise and his brothers not escaped. More pertinently, Étain marries a king, Echu Feidlech, who like Noisiu is one of three brothers and whom she has pursued as Derdriu pursues Noisiu: when the latter happens one day to be “alone on the rampart of the earthwork (that is, of Emain)” (trans. Hull 63), 323 Derdriu makes a point of strolling by him, seemingly oblivious of his presence, thereby capturing his attention; The Destruction of Dá Derga’s Hostel begins with Echu Feidlech glimpsing Étain and then catching up with her, but when he speaks with her, it retrospectively seems that his spotting of her by a “well” (trans. Gantz 62) is no accident since, as she tells him, “‘. . .men of the Síde, both kings and nobles, have sought [her], but none obtained [her], and that is because [she has] loved [him] with the love of a child since [she was] able to speak, both for [his] splendour and for the noble tales about [him]’ ” (trans. Gantz 63). And the culmination of these parallels makes the contrast that distinguishes Étain’s union with Echu Feidlech from Derdriu’s elopement with Noisiu all the more conspicuous. Insofar as Conchobar is Ulster’s ruler and therefore, metonymically speaking, synonymous with that territory, Derdriu transgresses against society in running off with Noisiu. Étain, however, insists that her marriage to Echu Feidlech be conducted in

323 “Fecht n-and didiu bai-seom int-i Noisi a óenor for dóc inna rrátha i. Emna. . .” (Longes Mac n-Uislen 45).
accordance with society’s own regulations when she demands receipt of her “proper bridal gift” of “seven cumals” (trans. Gantz 63) before sleeping with her new spouse.

The Destruction of Dá Derga’s Hostel does not mention that Echu Feidlech is one of three brothers; that information comes from The Wooing of Étain which like The Destruction of Dá Derga’s Hostel depicts Étain as the loveliest woman in Ireland, one whom men desire. More significantly, The Wooing of Étain, like Longes Mac n-Uislenn, contains a prediction that pursuit of its female protagonist will lead to war and destruction, and like Derdriu, Étain is caught in a triangular relationship between an older man and a younger one—who in this case is not Echu Feidlech but his brother, Echu Airem. But unlike Derdriu, who, fate notwithstanding, through physical force compels Noisiú to run off with her and who clearly despises Conchobar, Étain is a passive party with respect to her first and second marriages—her first union with Mider results from the Macc Óc’s negotiations with her father, Aílill in Mag nInis, while her second, which takes place after she is reincarnated as the daughter of Étar, is the outcome of Echu Airem’s search for “the fairest woman in the land” (trans. Gantz 49) who is also a virgin. Nor is it her own desire but the sorcery of Midir’s first wife, Fúamnach, that separates Étain from her first husband, of whom we might infer that she is rather fond: transformed by Fúamnach into water that then metamorphoses into “a worm” that in turn becomes “a scarlet fly” (trans. Gantz 45), Étain “[accompanies] Mider as he [travels] through his land” and after he “[falls asleep to [her] buzzing . . . would awaken him when anyone approached who did not love him” (trans. Gantz 45) until Fúamnach conjures up a “wind” so fierce that it blows Étain around Ireland for over half a dozen years before she lands in a cup, is inadvertently drunk by Étar’s spouse and then reborn as his daughter.

324 “Though the amount must have varied greatly amongst the wealthy, the Irish laws . . . upheld a legal standard payment. This was set at half the bride’s father’s honor-price, which was the same as her own honor price” (Patterson 297). Given that the honor price for a king was seven cumals (Jaski 47), Étain’s request for an equal sum likely reflects her status as the daughter of a fairy king. In any case, whatever the value of Étain’s “proper bridal gift,” the point is that she insists upon her legal due according to the statutes governing marriage in early medieval Ireland.
When Mider appears to Étain in the guise of Echu Airem’s brother, Ailill, and reveals both his true identity to her and the nature of their relationship to one another during her past existence, she agrees to return to her first husband if Echu Airem “‘bids’ ”her to do so (trans. Gantz 51) or “‘sells’ ”her to the former (trans. Gantz 57), or if Mider himself “‘[obtains her from her] husband’ ” (trans. Gantz 56). This last he does (some extenuating machinations aside) by defeating Echu Airem at fidchell and taking Étain as his winnings—and the very fact that he wins back his wife through the medieval equivalent of chess underscores the ways in which both The Destruction of Dá Derga’s Hostel and The Wooing of Étain make the Musicians’ choice of song a better option than Fergus’ initial suggestion: “Begin, begin, of some old king and queen,/[o]f Lugaid Redstripe or another; no, not him,/[$\text{h}e$] and his lady perished wretchedly” (Yeats, Deirdre 118). If the trajectory of Étain’s marital history in The Wooing of Étain is less romantic than it is in The Destruction of Dá Derga’s Hostel, its conclusion, unlike the fate of Lugaid and his spouse, is neither tragic nor violent: according to Naoise, the couple played chess until slain, “hardly [winking] their eyes when the sword flashed” (Yeats, Deirdre 122). Yet if Fergus’ initial allusion to the fate of Lugaid and his consort is a foreshadowing of Naoise and Deirdre’s own as a couple, the play’s continued references to Redstripe and/or his wife ironically demonstrate the extent to which it (the drama itself) pacifies Longes Mac n-Uislenn and, in particular, Derdriu. To begin with, when Yeats’ Deirdre realizes that Conchubar intends to make her his bride after murdering Naoise, she declares that “[h]ere is worse treachery than the seamew suffered,/[$\text{f}or$] she but died and mixed into the dust/[o]f her dear comrade, but [she, Deirdre is] to live/[a]nd lie in the one bed with him [she hates]” (Yeats, Deirdre 125). Although the explicit distinction that appears beneath the surface: like Lugaidh Redstripe and his wife they are going to play [chess] and perish” (Genet 125). Similarly, Sister Margaret Patrice Slattery notes that in his allusion to Lugaid and his spouse, Fergus “senses a foreboding character in the situation and fears some tragic outcome. . .” (402). Relatedly, Richman asserts that “[t]he very presence of the [chess]board is ominous, charging the onstage atmosphere, even in the play’s opening moments, with a ritualistic sense of betrayal and noble death” (100).
Deirdre acknowledges between herself and Redstripe’s spouse emphasizes the obvious opposition
between death and life, her diction, in conjunction with her description of what her life will be after Naoise
dies, simultaneously if more subtly identifies “the seamew” with war while referring to the way in which she
herself will perform as a wife in what had long become the most private of domestic spaces in western
culture by the beginning of the twentieth-century: by alluding to Lugaid Redstripe as “the seamew’s” “dear
comrade,” Deirdre by logic implies that “the seamew” herself is a “comrade.”

Returning to the moment in which Naoise announces that he and Deirdre ought to emulate Lugaid
Redstripe and his “seamew,” the “young king” asks the Musicians if, had they been witness to Lugaid “and his
queen” when they “[p]layed at so high a game” they “could. . .have found/[a]n ancient poem for the praise of
it” and imagines what that song ought to have revealed:

It should have set out plainly that those two,
Because no man and woman have loved better,
Might sit on there contentedly, and weigh
The joy comes after. I have heard the seamew
Sat there, with all the colour in her cheeks,
As though she’d say: ‘There’s nothing happening
But that a king and queen are playing chess.’ (Yeats, Deirdre 132)

Naoise’s conception of how “the seamew” would have characterized her own situation—namely, that “
‘[there was] nothing happening’”—underscores the play’s domestication of the medieval narrative through
its staging. As I argued earlier, chess is a socialized form of war insofar as it is a game. But here, Naoise’s
notion of it as both a way to pass the time while awaiting the violence of his and Deirdre’s own demise at
the hands of others and, just as pertinently, the shared meditation of a couple whose mutual love was

Phillip L. Marcus observes similarly that Deirdre “contrasts her fate with [the seamew’s]” (Yeats and Artistic
Power 82).

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unsurpassed and who “[m]ight sit on there contentedly, and weigh/[t]he joy [that] comes after” undermines its essential nature insofar as it situates those who play it as adversaries and its objective is to capture the opposing player’s king. Given Deirdre’s agreement with her lover that she and he should, in the latter’s words, “[play] chess as [Lugaid Redstripe and the seamew] had any night /[f]or years and [wait] for the stroke of sword,” understanding “that there was nothing that could save them” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 132), her declaration that she shall “have as quiet fingers on the board” as “the seamew” is not unexpected, nor are her requests of the Musicians that they should “set it down in a book,/ [t]hat love is all we need. . .” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 132) and later that they should “[m]ake no sad music” for “[w]hat is it but a king and queen at chess?” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 133).

In fact, Deirdre’s own vow to “have as quiet fingers on the board” concludes a sentence in which she has otherwise contrasted herself with “the seamew” as one who has “not been born/[o]f the cold, haughty waves, [her] veins being hot” and who has “loved better than that queen. . .” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 132). Implicitly and explicitly, Deirdre distinguishes herself as possessing greater passion than “the seamew,” and if Yeats’ title character has affirmed Naoise’s characterization of chess through her intention to engage in it as a way to while away the time before Conchubar enacts his revenge, her subsequent actions and remarks reflect the extent to which, by virtue of her intensity, she goes beyond “the seamew” in distancing herself from violence. Towards the end of the song about love that she has bid the Musicians sing, Deirdre physically moves away from the chessboard “and, according to the play’s stage directions, “*kneels at Naoise’s feet*” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 133) which is to say that she literally puts distance between herself and the site of “battle” while putting herself in proximity to her lover. She then announces that which she imminently performs, as Naoise’s subsequent response makes clear: that unlike “the seamew,” she will not continue to play chess:

*Deirdre.* I cannot go on playing like that woman

That had but the cold blood of the sea in her veins.
Naoise. It is your move. Take up your man again.

Deirdre. Do you remember that first night in the woods

We lay all night on leaves, and looking up,

When the first grey of the dawn awoke the birds,

Saw leaves above us? You thought that I still slept,

And bending down to kiss me on the eyes,

Found they were open. Bend and kiss me now,

For it may be the last before our death. (Yeats, Deirdre 134)

And as Deirdre’s reply to Naoise makes clear, she not only ceases to play the game but entreats him to embrace her, thereby undermining their opposition to each other as chess players. But this moment, too, is one of irony insofar as it reinforces Deirdre’s separation from war. The romanticism of Deirdre’s reminisces aside, she recalls their first evening and sunrise as wanderers, an identity that locates them in nature. Earlier in the play, Fergus and Naoise attribute to Deirdre an ignorance of social custom that they associate with her upbringing beyond the bounds of society. But while love itself may be instinctual, our expressions of it are culturally influenced. What Deirdre recalls—and seeks to recreate—signals her recognition of an act—in the very environs that supposedly have left her unaware of society’s rituals—that in western culture has long epitomized war’s opposite.

More interestingly, Deirdre’s recollections, by invoking an image of nature that in turn calls to mind Fergus’ and Naoise’s conceptions of her, call attention to how the play conventionalizes her through its domestication of “the seamew.” Earlier in the play, Naoise states that Deirdre “has the heart of the wild birds that fear [t]he net of the Fowler or the wicker cage” (Yeats, Deirdre 126). That is, Naoise identifies Deirdre with birds, a likening that later accentuates the comparison that she invokes between herself and “the seamew” insofar as the latter was literally part-bird, having “a seamew’s body half the year. . .” (Yeats, Deirdre 121). But as with its reference to Étain, the play’s allusion to Lugaid Redstripe and “the seamew”
compels us to consider how the original narrative in which they appear—the *Aided Derbforgaill (The Violent Death of Derbforgaill)*—informs the dramatic work itself. To begin with, there are certain parallels between “the seamew,” who is the title character of the *Aided Derbforgaill*, and Étain and/or Derdriu. Like Étain, Derbforgaill is daughter to a king, and according to the *Aided Derbforgaill*, she, like Derdriu and Étain, takes initiative in seeking out her true love—for reasons that are similar to those of the latter: because she has “loved Cú Chulainn on account of the famous stories about him” (trans. Ingridsdotter 83).

It is “in the guise of two swans” (trans. Ingridsdotter 83/ “i rrich da géise” [*Aided Derbforgaill* 82]), not in that of two gulls, that Derbforgaill and her servant alight near Cú Chulainn and Lugaid, his foster son; and because Cú Chulainn, at Lugaid’s request, pelts the birds with a rock that he subsequently “[sucks] . . out of the side of [Derbforgaill]” (trans. Ingridsdotter 83/ “Ro shúgi íarum a tóeb na hingine in cloich . .” [*Aided Derbforgaill* 82]) and that possibly would make any relationship he were to have with her one of incest, he refuses her. Derbforgaill’s response, which is not unlike Étain’s to Mider when she learns of

*Carl Marstrander’s English translation of the *Aided Derbforgaill (The Violent Death of Derbforgaill)* appeared in the fifth volume of *Ériu* in 1911, by which time Yeats had not only composed *Deirdre* but had revised it twice. Given that Yeats’ 1906 drafts of the play include a scene featuring Lugaid Redstripe, however, it is clear that the playwright was familiar with the story of Derbforgaill long before Marstrander published his English edition of the tale, and it is perhaps not unreasonable to conjecture that Yeats, who had studied German at the High School (Foster 33), may have read Heinrich Friedrich Zimmer’s 1888 German translation of the *Aided Derbforgaill*. In any case, Yeats’ footnote in the essay “Private Thoughts” from *On the Boiler* (1938) confirms his acquaintance with the *Aided Derbforgaill*, if somewhat ironically in that he mixes up Derbforgaill with Emer, and *The Courting of Emer*, which contains a variation of the *Aided Derbforgaill*, does not describe the following events: “In a fragment from some early version of “The Courting of Emer.” Emer is chosen for the strength and volume of her bladder. This strength and volume were certainly considered signs of vigour. A woman of divine origin was murdered by jealous rivals because she made the deepest hole in the snow with her urine” (Yeats, *On the Boiler* 24). Gordon Wickstrom also refers to Yeats’ footnote in *On the Boiler*, considering “it as evidence that [the poet] freely manipulated the ancient lore to suit the specific requirements of his Deirdre,” and reminds us that the “[great-bladdered Emer” appears in “Crazy Jane on the Mountain” (472).

“Derb Fhorgaill ingen rig Lochlainne ro charastar Coin Culaind ara urscélaib” (*Aided Derbforgaill* 82).

“Cú Chulainn’s refusal to mate with Derbforgaill has been seen as a reflection of a taboo against incest, which may well be a valid interpretation. However, it is difficult to interpret from the text as no reason apart from the aforementioned quotation in the voice of Cú Chulainn is given. In the corresponding episode of TE *Tochmarc Emire (The Wooing of Emer)*, it is specified that it is due to the fact that Cú Chulainn has drunk Derbforgaill’s blood that he is unable to mate with her (see 1.3.7.1). As the reason for Cú Chulainn’s
their past together in that both women are relatively indifferent as to whom they end up married, is that Cú Chulainn may match her with whomever he wishes. His choice for her is “the noblest man in Ireland, that is, Lugaid of the Red Stripes” (trans. Ingridsdotter 83) which she happily accepts with the proviso that she “may always see [Cú Chulainn]” (trans. Ingridsdotter 83/ “‘acht con-dot-accur do grés’” [Aided Derbforgaill 82]).

The Aided Derbforgaill anticipates Deirdre in depicting Derbforgaill and Lugaid’s love for one another; before dying, Derbforgaill refers to her husband as both he “to whom [she] gave a love which he did not take away from [her]” (trans. Ingridsdotter 83) and her “noble, joyous companion” (trans. Ingridsdotter 85/ “‘Bá-thium céile soér subaid. . . ’” [Aided Derbforgaill 84]) while Lugaid himself expires upon seeing his wife’s corpse. But it is the full context of Derbforgaill’s death that accentuates the 1907 play’s revision of her and of Deirdre:

One day then, at the end of winter, there was heavy snow. The men make a big pillar from the snow. The women went on the pillars. This was their device.

“Let us make our urine into the pillar to ascertain who will make it go into it the furthest. The woman from whom it will reach through, it is she that is the best match of us.”

It did not reach through from them, however. Derbforgaill is summoned by them. She did not desire it, because she was not foolish. Nevertheless she goes on the pillar. It slashed from her to the ground.

unwillingness to mate with a woman whose tóéb he has sucked is not obvious from the text, it must be inferred” (Ingridsdotter 23).

310 “‘...mac as söiriu fil in hÉrind .i. Lugaid Riab nDerg’” (Aided Derbforgaill 82).
311 “‘7 Lugaid. . .dia tartus seirc nácham thiúil’” (Aided Derbforgaill 82).
“If the men discover this then, no (one) will be loved in comparison with this woman. May her eyes be snatched out of her head, and her nostrils, and her two ears, and her locks. She will not be desireable then.”

Her torture is done thus and she is brought to her house afterwards. The men were in an assembly on a hillock above Emain Macha.

“(It seems) strange to me, O Lugaid”, said Cú Chulainn, “(that there is) snow on Derbforgaill’s house.”

“She is dying then,” said Lugaid. (trans. Ingridsdotter 83)

Narratively speaking, the motive behind Derbforgaill’s mutilation and murder in the Aided Derbforgaill obviously has no parallel with the situation that in Deirdre inspires Conchubar’s revenge, nor with the play’s reconception of how Lugaid and “the seamew” meet their deaths. The etymology of the Aided Derbforgaill does, however, identify Derbforgaill with conflict. As the passage quoted above implies, the Aided Derbforgaill depicts a “urination-contest [that] is clearly used as a means of determining the status of the women” (Ingridsdotter 24) and defines its winner as “‘[t]he woman from whom it will reach through, it is she that is the best match of us’” (trans. Ingridsdotter 83). The Old Irish sentence to which this sentence corresponds reads as follows in the Book of Leinster which comprises, among other things, the oldest of the three surviving manuscripts of the Aided Derbforgaill (Ingridsdotter 47): “INben oría tríit ísí ashfier congait uán” (Ingridsdotter 72). As Kicki Ingridsdotter points out, the Dictionary of the Irish Language quotes this

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“‘Tabram ar mún isin coirthe dús cia as sia regas ind. In ben ó rí a triit is i as fhierergaire Uainn.’


“‘Dia fessatar trá ind fhír so nícon grádaigfider i fail na hoínmná. Gatair a síúle assa cind 7 a sróna 7 a da n-ó 7 a trilis. Níba so-accobraite ón.’

“Do-gnither a pianad amlaid sin 7 berair iar tain dia tig. Bátar ind fhír is tilaig i ndáil ós Emain.


“‘Is i n-écaib atá-si didiu,’ ar Lugaid.” (Aided Derbforgaill 82).
line from the *Aided Derbforgaill* for the noun “congab” “with a question mark and the remark ‘in sensu obsceno’ (s.v. congab 438: 43), under the heading ‘equipment, weapons, trappings’ ” (94); she also observes that Charles Bowen, in his discussion of Medb, similarly “takes this rather to have the meaning of ‘gathering, host’ or ‘equipment’ ” and “refers to congaib as having a sexual meaning, concluding that the meaning of the sentence would rather be ‘she has the best sexual equipment of us all,’ and that the sexual connotations of copious urination is thus established” (94). Significantly, the denotative meanings associated with “congab” implicitly define women—and therefore Derbforgaill whose “equipment” proves to be superior to that of the other women—as literal embodiments of war. And although, as Ingridsdotter notes, the other women’s reactions to Derbforgaill’s “ability” express a “[j]ealousy between women” that is “frequently found in early Irish literature” (28), the graphic and gruesome nature of those responses parallels that of Derdriu’s suicide in *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*—which I discuss below—as the passage quoted above clearly illustrates.

In sum, then, if *Deirdre* retains Lugaid and Derbforgaill’s devotion to each other, it not only substitutes the former for the latter’s female rivals but (ironically given the home as the traditionally female realm) domesticates the competition between them insofar as the women’s competition is physical and takes place outdoors as war traditionally has done while chess rewards mental acuity, and the couple plays it in the “[gluest-house.” More to the point, because the play’s subversive depiction of Derbforgaill eradicates the *Aided Derbforgaill* ‘s identification of her with conflict and sanitizes the circumstances of her death, its emphasis upon her as an allusive parallel to Deirdre accentuates the extent to which it divorces the latter from war and its savagery.

V. “Eagles...gone into their cloudy bed”

Naoise’s resolve to maintain a stance of non-resistance does not last very long; when the First Musician notices Conchubar outside the “[gluest-house,” Naoise—“[laughing]”—states that the king has
“taken up [his] challenge” and after grabbing his “spear and shield” runs out of the “[g]uest-house” in search of the ruler despite the First Musician’s claim that Conchubar’s intention is “to spy. . .not to fight” (Yeats, Deirdre 134). Narratively speaking, Naoise’s actions embody the play’s final turning point, catalyzing the direct chain of events that lead, ultimately, to Deirdre’s suicide.

In any case, once again, Naoise’s actions contextualize Deirdre’s in such a way that they emphasize, by way of contrast, her comparative lack of aggression—in this case, even within a brief moment in which her overt intent is to engage in physical battle. Deirdre seizes the First Musician’s dagger after the latter refuses to hand it over for the reason that Conchubar’s minions would be able to trace the weapon back to her in the event that “harm should come to [Deirdre]” (Yeats, Deirdre 135). The situation notwithstanding, notable is the First Musician’s assumption that, even armed, Deirdre will be the victim of violence rather than its perpetrator.

Having taken the First Musician’s blade, Deirdre “[g]oes to the door and looks out” and then “goes from door to window” (Yeats, Deirdre 135), her purpose, as she informs the First Musician, “[t]o strike a blow for Naoise,/[i]f Conchubar call the Libyans to his aid” (Yeats, Deirdre 135). For the first time in Deirdre, the title character’s aim is to participate in conflict, to direct her aggression outwardly towards others instead of towards herself. Yet that purpose is both conditional upon a particular circumstance, and the nature of that context in turn arguably diminishes her status as an agent of war in that her involvement in it would serve as a defensive measure to offset, effectively or not, the lack of parity between Naoise’s military resources and Conchubar’s. And in contrast to Naoise, Deirdre not only fails to leave the “[g]uest-house” but apparently abandons her plan, persuaded by the First Musician that her combative attempts would be futile, but more importantly that, should Conchubar defeat Naoise, the cunning she possesses that is particular to her condition as a woman will, unlike her fighting skills, be effective: “Listen. I am called wise. If Conchubar win,/ [y]ou have a woman’s wile that can do much,/ [e]ven with men in pride of victory./ He is in love and old. What were one knife/[a]mong a hundred?” (Yeats, Deirdre 135). As the proximity of the First
Musician’s query to her references to “woman’s wile” might imply, Deirdre’s lack of follow-through—her failure, at this juncture, to bear arms—is inherent in her usage of a trait that the older woman defines in terms of womanhood, not as a social construct but rather as an intrinsically gendered phenomenon.

In fact, what ensues reinforces the discrepancy between Deirdre’s inertia and Naoise’s initiative, militarily-speaking. Following another exchange between Deirdre and the First Musician, “Conchubar enters [the stage and the “[g]uest-house”] with dark-faced men” (Yeats, Deirdre 136), the latter of whom then, at the king’s command, “drag in Naoise entangled in a net” (Yeats, Deirdre 136). According to the dramatis personae, the cast includes but two individuals, the “[d]ark-faced [m]essenger” and the “[d]ark-faced [e]xecutioner” (Yeats, Deirdre 113), who fit the description of the “dark-faced men” who accompany Conchubar into the “[g]uest-house.” Leaving aside Naoise, whose entrapment renders him incapacitated, there are three men (Conchubar and the two “dark-faced men”) and four women (Deirdre and the three musicians) onstage.

There is no evidence that Conchubar, whom the dramatis personae describes as “still strong and vigorous” but “old,” carries any weapons upon his person, while Deirdre has upon her the First Musician’s dagger, although the “dark-faced men” are likely --and later prove to be—fitted with blades. That is, presented with a situation in which Naoise clearly needs someone to come to his aid and in which, the enemy does not grossly outnumber her as it would have had she followed Naoise out of the “[g]uest-house,” Deirdre not only fails to attack but lamely asks Conchubar if he has “forgiven” Naoise (Yeats, Deirdre 136) even after the latter has declared that he has “been taken like a bird or a fish” (Yeats, Deirdre 136).

Longes mac n-Uislenn provides no timeline with respect to how long Derdriu and the sons of Uisliu are in exile, but Deirdre, through Naoise, indicates exactly how long he and the title character have been away: “[Conchubar] is but mocking us. What’s left to say/[n]ow that the seven years’ hunt is at an end?” (Yeats, Deirdre 136), Naoise asks, to which Deirdre, addressing Conchubar, replies that the son of Uisliu “never doubted [the king] until [she] made him,/ [a]nd therefore all the blame for what he says/[s]hould fall on [her]” (Yeats, Deirdre 136). On the surface, there is nothing complicated about Deirdre’s words: she is
simply informing Conchubar that only her own influence undermined Naoise’s faith in him, and so the king
should fault her rather than him for his words. But the biblical significance of the number seven—one that
would have resonated with audiences in early twentieth-century Ireland as the number of days in which God
“creates the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1.1), thereby calling to mind the narrative of Adam and Eve—
informs Deirdre’s lines in such a way that, allegorically speaking, she identifies herself with this latter figure
who, more than any other since the spread of Christianity, has served as the archetype of womankind
throughout western civilization. At first, the apparent misogyny of this moment seems at odds with the
play’s overall stance: Deirdre’s identification with Eve superficially affirms patriarchal notions of the latter
as the epitome of sin while the drama demonstrates the wisdom and accuracy of Deirdre’s perceptions in
light of Naoise and Fergus’ disdainful critiques of them as the imagined terrors of silly women or the
instinctual fears of a woman they consider to be half-bred and ignorant of social mores. Yet the extremity of
the comparison ultimately accentuates the extent to which the play distances Deirdre from war by way of
juxtaposed contrast while simultaneously undermining the link between womanhood and culpability. When
Conchubar addresses Naoise after initially responding to Deirdre, he says,

Although her marriage-day had all but come,
You carried her away; but I’ll show mercy.
Because you had the insolent strength of youth
You carried her away; but I’ve had time
To think it out through all these seven years. (Yeats, Deirdre 137)

Here, Conchubar’s repetition of the clause “[y]ou carried her away” makes clear that he does in fact
perceive Naoise as the offending agent; and to the extent that the king’s syntax grammatically positions
Deirdre as the passive object of her lover’s actions, the ruler eradicates her responsibility for what has
elapsed in the past “seven years.” Indeed, Conchubar emphasizes Deirdre’s status as an object when he states
that he seeks no more than “[w]hat is already [his]” (Yeats, Deirdre 137), one that arguably reflects the legal
position of women in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ireland. Ireland became subject to England’s Common Law in 1603 (Hederman 55, 59) which defined women “for all practical purposes” as “the property of her husband” insofar as, among other things, “he was entitled to avail himself freely of her body, whether she was willing or not, with relative impunity, for at law he was . . . incapable of her rape” and “[i]f he was unfaithful and she wished to divorce him she could not unless she could prove another matrimonial offense other than his adultery; he could divorce her for one single act of infidelity” (Hederman 55). By the turn-of-the-century, this situation had not changed.

Furthermore, it is significant that Yeats’ Conchubar conditions Naoise’s liberty upon the heroine “[walking] into [his, the king’s] house/[b]efore the people’s eyes, that they may know,/[w]hen [he] has put the crown upon her head,/ [he has] not taken her by force and guile” (Yeats, Deirdre 137) into a place where

*that* the doors are open, and the floors are strewed
And in the bridal chamber curtains sewn
With all enchantments that give happiness
By races that are germane to the sun,
And nearest him, and have no blood in their veins—
For when they’re wounded the wound drips with wine—
Nor speech but singing. At the bridal door
Two fair king’s daughters carry in their hands
The crown and robe. (Yeats, Deirdre 137)

For one thing, Conchubar’s stipulations complete the contrast that the play establishes at this point between Naoise and Deirdre. Naoise is physically captive and, according to Conchubar’s earlier branding of him as a “traitor,” a political and military enemy. Taken together, Deirdre’s willingness to take responsibility for her lover’s comments; Conchubar’s allotment of blame to Naoise for her absence from Ireland; and his *quid pro quo* somewhat paradoxically define her in terms of symbolic womanhood as Eve defines it but strips it of
its traditional association with trespass and culpability and links it to her physical freedom and the psychological exercise of her free will. But for another, these connections, particularly in light of *Longes Mac n-Uislen*, are reflective of the extent to which *Deirdre* conventionalizes its title character. In *Longes Mac n-Uislen*, Derdriu “is brought over to Conchobor so that she [is] beside him, and her hands [are] bound behind her back” (trans. Hull 65) following Eogan mac Durthacht’s slaughter of Naoise and his brothers. That she is restrained implicitly reinforces the medieval narrative’s depiction of her as the catalyst of the Ulstermen’s destruction in that the need to restrain her is indicative of her ambulatory potential. Her ability to flee is, of course, what resulted in Conchobar’s forces hounding her and the sons of Uisliu throughout, and finally out of, Ireland. The need for bonds also indicates her potential to bear arms—and signals her status as a prisoner of war. In *Deirdre*, Conchubar’s offer makes Naoise’s life dependent upon whether or not the play’s female protagonist freely elects to enter a physical space whose implications for her define her in terms of domesticity insofar as they contextualize her in social terms and the area itself is literally devoid of bloodshed.

Deirdre does not accept Conchubar’s terms of proposal initially, beseeching him to allow her and Naoise to “go away/into some country at the ends of the earth” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 138); but when the king refuses this request, she attempts to persuade Naoise that it would be better if she and he were to part, divided by her marriage to the monarch. Significantly, it is within this context that Naoise rues the fact that he had not “lost life/among those Scottish kings that sought it of [him]/because [Deirdre was his] wife, or

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333 “...ocus rucad-si in-nunn co Conchobor co-mbaí fora láim ocus ro' cumrigthethe a llama iarna cúl” (*Longes Mac n-Uislen* 48).
334 Eogan mac Durthacht himself kills Noisiu. *Longes Mac n-Uislen* does not specify who technically slays Aindle and Arddan, although whoever does so is part of Eogan mac Durthacht’s army.
335 That Conchobar captures Derdriu identifies her with war but does not masculinize her in terms of it: the fourth entry for 688 A.D. in the *Annals of Ulster*, which refers to the slaying of Dub da Inber at the hands of Niall son of Cernach and to the latter’s seizure of the dead king’s “hounds,” “hunting dogs” and “women” (trans. Seán Mac Airt & Gearóid Mac Niocaill, *The Annals of Ulster*, <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/T100001A/index.html>) testifies to the fact that in conflicts between early medieval Irish kings, women were taken prisoner.
that the worst [h]ad taken [her] before this bargaining!” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 139). In *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*, Noisiu and his brothers labor as mercenaries for the king of Scotland whose discovery of Derdriu’s existence, via his “steward,” results first in their being “enjoined to go into dangers, battles and hazards in order that they might be killed” (trans. Hull 64) and later to a plan on the part of the Scots to assassinate Noisiu, a scheme that they have discussed and devised with Derdriu and that she, in turn, reveals to her lover with the advice that if he does not flee Scotland that evening, he shall die the following day. That is, *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* implicates Derdriu in war by positioning her as a double agent. But in the 1907 drama, Naoise’s recollection of their time in Scotland posits Deirdre as an object of desire on the part of several Scottish rulers, one who bears no responsibility for their intents or actions.

Indeed, Deirdre’s final pleas to Conchubar for “pardon” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 139) affirm her distance from violence by way of comparison with her medieval counterpart. Deirdre informs the king that what has occurred is her “fault” and that she “only should be punished” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 139) which is to say that she insists upon her allegorical identification with Eve; she then recalls the details of her transgression:

> The very moment these eyes fell on him,
> I told him; I held out my hand to him;
> How could he refuse? At first he would not—
> I am not lying—he remembered you.
> What do I say? My hands?—No, no, my lips—
> For I had pressed my lips upon his lips—
> I swear it is not false—my breast to his;
> . . .Until I woke the passion that’s in all,

> And how could he resist? I had my beauty. (Yeats, *Deirdre* 139-140)

336 “. . .no’erálta for maccaib Uislenn dul i ngabthib ocus i cathaib ocus i ndrobelai b ar dáig coro’immarbtais” (*Longes Mac n-Uislenn* 47).
As in *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*, Deirdre’s first encounter with Naoise in the play begins with her initiative—in the story from the Ulster cycle, she deliberately walks past him in order to attract his notice—and, whether verbally, as in the prose account, or gesturally, as the above passage indicates, she conveys her interest only to be met with initial resistance—which in the play is owing to his loyalty to Conchubar, and in the earlier narrative, to his desire to avoid setting Cathbad’s prophecy into motion. In *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*, Derdriu’s response to Noisiu’s rejection of her is to “[make] a leap to him and [grasp] both ears on his head,” afterwards informing him that “‘[t]hese are] two ears of shame and derision. . .unless [he] take [Derdriu] away with [him]’” (trans. Hull 63). That is, in the medieval text, Derdriu herself begins the devastating conflict that unfolds in *Longes mac n-Uislenn*. Her violence obligates Noisiu as an act of *geis* to do as she wishes which catalyzes the following chain of events: Noisiu and his brothers’ departure from Ulster; Conchobor’s pursuit of them; their military service in Scotland; their deaths, followed by those of “three hundred of the Ulstermen” and “the maidens of Ulster”; and the fiery destruction of Emain. By contrast, it is not through physical coercion, but rather through both her deliberate seduction of him and the appeal of her own attractiveness, that Deirdre in the drama that bears her name persuades Naoise to run off with her, and so once again, the play disassociates womanhood from war. And once again, *Deirdre* emphasizes the division between femininity and conflict by contrasting its title character with Naoise for whose life she argues mostly on the basis that he is “a brave, strong man” and that Conchubar “may have need of him, for [he] has none/[w]ho is so good a sword. . ./[a]nd what king knows when the hour of need may come?” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 140).

The stage directions indicate that, at Conchubar’s gesture, the two “dark-faced men” bring Naoise “behind the curtain” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 140) while Deirdre, oblivious to this action, reminisces about her first encounter with him; and it is in keeping with the play’s overall mitigation of violence, not to mention the

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337 “La sodain fo·ceird-si bedg cui·cor·ro·gab a dá n-ó for a chin.
   “‘Dá n-ó mele ocus cui·tbiuda in·so,’ ol·si, ‘manim·bera·su latt’” (*Longes mac n-Uislenn* 46).
limitations and conventions of early twentieth-century Irish Revivalist stage representations, that, in contrast with Longes Mac n-Uislenn's graphic depiction of Naoise’s death, which I will later discuss, the stage production indicates it metonymically, with “[t]he Executioner [coming] out [from behind the curtain] with a sword on which there is blood” to which “Conchubar points” (Yeats, Deirdre 140) in response to Deirdre’s query as to Naoise’s whereabouts. But Deirdre simultaneously feminizes an event that masculine warfare dominates in Longes Mac n-Uislenn. Although the Ulsterwomen are witnesses to Eogan mac Durthacht’s slaying of Noisiu in the medieval narrative, it (logically and understandably) focuses upon Noisiu and his brothers’ confrontation by Eogan mac Durthacht and his reinforcements. In Deirdre, Naoise’s death takes the form of a revelation to the play’s character who before and after it is implicitly the center of audience focus. It is Deirdre herself who calls attention to Naoise’s absence when, in the midst of her rhapsody about his military qualities, she suddenly notices it and, after a pause, abruptly shifts her focus to inquire anxiously after him, as her repetition of the question “where is he?” indicates:

You will cry out for him some day and say,

‘If Naoise were but living’—[she misses Naoise].

Where is he?

338 Irish mythology, as Irish Revival writers reconceived it, sanitized particular moments, including “Deirdre’s death scenes,” so as to render them “more palatable in order to appeal to Victorian mores. . .” (Stelmach 159). Suess anticipates Stelmach here in alluding to Yeats’ depiction of Deirdre’s suicide as an example of how his dramatic works “concede, in part, to Victorian conventions of masculinity and femininity” by “leaving out some of the brutally violent aspects of [Irish myth] that would show the heroes to be more savage and uncontrolled than Victorian and Edwardian audiences would generally like” (96). At the same time, some of these restraints and standards had less to do with the censoriousness of a morally judgmental public than with both the logistical, thematic and narrative demands of a given work and traditions peculiar to the values of Irish literature. As Macintosh notes, “a totally plausible motivation for Deirdre’s suicide to take place off-stage, behind the curtain” is that “[s]he must escape the literal (and metaphorical) clutches of Conchubar who remains on-stage throughout the last part of the play; and she must, according to the dictates of the legend in particular, and romance in general, die in the arms of her deceased husband, who was furtively abducted and then executed behind the curtain” (143-44). At the same time, those whose work contributed to the Irish Revival echoed their medieval predecessors in looking to ancient Greece as a source of inspiration (Macintosh 1, 10); of Deirdre’s suicide in Yeats’ play, Macintosh states that “it is tempting to postulate that the suicides of Greek tragic women lie behind the dénouement because the normal sequence of a Greek tragic death is reproduced almost step by step” (143).
Where have you sent him? Where is the son of Usna?

Where is he, O, where is he? (Yeats, *Deirdre* 140)

At this point, the stage directions direct Deirdre to “[stagger] over to the Musicians” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 140).

Physically and visually (from the perspective of audience members and other figures on-stage), Deirdre is in the midst of other women when the Executioner steps out from behind the curtain, his blade wet with Naoise’s blood, at which point “[r]he Musicians give a wail” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 140). Before, during and after the moment when the Executioner reveals his deed, Deirdre’s psychological and emotional state, embodied not only by her but by the Musicians in association with her, overshadows Naoise’s actual death.

According to *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*, Derdriu lives with Conchobor for the year following Noisiu’s death, a span in which, among other things, she refuses both sustenance and rest for the most part and thus “[w]henever, therefore, they [bring] the musicians to her” (trans. Hull 66), she performs a particular song which overall is an encomium to Noisiu. The narrative’s explanation of Deirdre’s behavior is overtly uncomplicated: her grief over Noisiu’s loss, which so overpowers her that she barely eats or slumbers, is such that, at every opportunity afforded her, she outwardly commemorates him and laments his death.

More subtly, however, Deirdre’s song reinforces its affiliation of her with war. For one thing, much of her explicit praise of him concerns his status as a “warrior” (trans. Hull 67/ “óclach” [*Longes Mac n-Uislenn* 49]), while she recollects other qualities, namely his coloring and his singing, that the narrative has earlier linked to battle or that she now associates with conflict. For another, she acknowledges her own

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339 “In tan didiu do·mbertis na hairfiti di. . .” (*Longes Mac n-Uislenn* 48). It should be noted that the musicians in the medieval text are complicit in Derdriu’s estrangement from the comforts of home and that they retrospectively amplify the contrast between Derdriu and her twentieth-century counterpart insofar as a side-by-side comparison of Yeats’ work with the older manuscript means that we meet Yeats’ musicians before we meet those in the medieval story.

340 “Beloved [is] the [little] crop of hair (?) with yellow (?) beauty;/[c]omely [is] the man, even. . ./[s]orrowful it is [indeed] that I do not expect today/[t]o await the son of Uisliu (“ ‘Inmain berthán áilli blai./[t]uchtach duine cid dind-blai. Ba dirsan nad-[f]resco in-diui/[m]ac Uislienn do idnaidiu’ ” [*Longes Mac n-Uislenn* 49]).
catalyzing complicity in Noisiu’s slaying: “‘For him I have poured out—host over a height (?)—/the deadly draught of which he has died’” (trans. Hull 67). But Derdriu’s dirge also reveals the extent to which she has become estranged from those social practices that distinguish civilian life—and more specifically, the conventions of womanhood—from militaristic struggle. In the second stanza of her song, Derdriu recalls bathing Noisiu, an act associated with women’s responsibilities in medieval Ireland in that women of the period would convene by stream or a spring in order to clean both themselves and their household’s apparel (Bitel 153); now, living with Conchobor, she “‘[does] not redden [her] fingernails’” (trans. Hull 67/“‘Ocus ni∙corcu m’ingne’” [Longes Mac n-Uislenn 49]), nor has she “‘a big house’” or “‘fair adornment’” (trans. Hull 68/“‘Na tech már na cu muntach cain’” [Longes Mac n-Uislenn 50]).

Having learned that she is to live with Eogan mac Durthacht during the following year, Derdriu, while travelling with him and Conchobar in a “chariot” to “the assembly of Macha,” notices “a great stone boulder in front of her” against which she subsequently “[dashes] her head. . . until she [has] made a mass of fragments of her head so that she [dies]” (trans. Hull 69).

Suicide is, literally speaking, an expression of violence towards oneself rather than towards another. However, medieval Irish statutes defined suicide as a form of “kinslaying” (Murray 67). Therefore, when Derdriu kills herself, from a legal standpoint, she kills a kinsmen, an act that clearly embodies war as an expression of aggression towards someone else and thus identifies her with war. Furthermore, the manner in which Derdriu chooses to kill herself maximizes its

“‘Beloved [is] the desire, steadfast [and] just;/[b]eloved [is] the warrior, noble [and] very modest./After a journey beyond the forest’s fence,/ [b]eloved [is] the . . in the early morning (“‘Inmain menma cobsaid cáir; /[i]nmain óclach ard imnair. Iar n-imthecht dar feda fál,/ [i]nmain costal i tuignár’” [Longes Mac n-Uislenn 49]).

“‘Beloved [is] the gray eye that women used to love;/[f]ierce it used to be against foes. After a circuit of the forest—a noble union—/[b]eloved [is] the tenor (?) song through a dark great wood” ([trans. Hull 67] “‘Inmain súil glass carddais mná; /[b]a hamnas fri ecrata. Iar cúairt chaille—comul sær—/[i]naming andord tria dub-ræd” [Longes Mac n-Uislenn 49]). It should be noted that Derdriu sings a second song in response to Conchobar’s attempts to calm her, and that that song also implicitly and explicitly links Noisiu to war in describing his physical appearance and equipment. 

341 “‘Do ro˙dalius—dron tria alt—/[i]n dig tonnaid dia n-erbalt’” (Longes Mac n-Uislenn 49).

342 “Lotar iarna bárach do oenuch Macha. Bui-si iar cúl Eogain i carput. . . .Ro∙baí ail chloiche mór ara cinn. Do∙lleici a cenn immon cloich co·nderna brúrig dia cinn co·mbro marb” (Longes Mac n-Uislenn 51).
gruesomeness to an extent that its horrors are comparable to those that characterize the falls of warriors and soldiers on the battlefield, including Noisiu’s.  

Just as Derdriu’s suicide is the ultimate expression of a paradigm that she has established over the course of a year, that of her twentieth-century counterpart is also the culmination of an enduring pattern; and if her suicide cannot be denied as an act of violence, it remains nevertheless true that by comparison with Longes Mac n-Uislenn’s account of it, Deirdre’s rendering of its heroine’s demise, as the production both frames and presents it, is as non-violent as it can possibly be and affirms, rather than undermines, her identification with the conventions of womanhood even if her recognition and acceptance of those standards constitute the performance of a sham meant to deceive a particular audience—in this case, Conchubar. Conchubar announces that “[t]he traitor who has carried off [his] wife/[n]o longer lives” and commands Deirdre to “[c]ome to [his] house now” (Yeats, Deirdre 140), a declaration and imperative that reiterates his conception of Naoise as the political and military enemy, and Deirdre as the object of the younger man’s agency whose proper place is in Conchubar’s residence. At first, Deirdre “resists” but then, after a moment, “acquiesces”:

King Conchubar is right. My husband’s dead.

A single woman is of no account,

Lacking array of servants, linen cupboards,

The bacon hanging—and King Conchubar’s house

All ready, too—I’ll to King Conchubar’s house.

It is but wisdom to do willingly

What has to be. (Yeats, Deirdre 141)

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343 As I have mentioned before, I will discuss the actual details of Noisiu’s death later in this chapter.

344 Suess makes this point with respect to Deirdre’s later exchanges with Conchubar “when [the heroine] attempts to convince him to allow her to ‘lay out’ the dead Naoise. . . , which is really just a ploy to be near him so that she may, Romeo-like, commit suicide at his side” (124-25).
Unlike the medieval Derdriu whose grief and depression following Noisius’s death synonymously expresses itself as a detachment from social rites, the early twentieth-century Deirdre’s response to the fact of Naoise’s slaying is, if not sincere, then at least on the surface, not only logical and pragmatic—which flies in the face of both Fergus’ and Naoise’s earlier associations of women with illogical emotion—but indicative of an interest in maintaining a particular social status that reflects itself in some of the trappings of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century domesticity. The Anglo-Irish gentry maintained large country estates (“big houses”), the running of which depended upon the employment of a multitude of servants (Dooley 151). One of the duties of the “big house” housekeeper was to “[supervise] the household linen” (Dooley 152). In addition, the owners of the “big houses” typically opened their residences to guests, particularly “during the hunting and shooting seasons” (Dooley 151), which meant that “the level of food production and catering activity in these houses was equal to that of a small business” (O’Riordan 90). The Inchiquin estate was a case in point: at Dromoland Castle, meeting the demands of hospitality might entail the preparation of “over four hundred servings of meat” in “busy weeks” (O’Riordan 90).

At any rate, when Conchubar queries as to why she is “so calm,” having expected that she “would curse [him] and cry out, / and fall upon the ground and tear [her] hair” (Yeats, Deirdre 141), Deirdre “[laughing]” says that he

[knows] too much of women to think so;

Though, if [she] were less worthy of desire,

[She] would pretend as much; but, being [herself],

It is enough that [he is] master here. (Yeats, Deirdre 141)

To begin with, Deirdre defines women in terms of some as yet unspecified essential quality; what that turns out to be is not one characteristic but three, and together, they form a conception of womankind that, like the play’s early depiction of the musicians, is paradoxical: women are physically fragile, being “so delicately made” (Yeats, Deirdre 141), but at the same time, “[t]here’s something brutal in [them]” (Yeats, Deirdre
More to the point, Deirdre claims that women “are won/[b]ly those who can shed blood” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 141) which demonstrates simultaneously their connection to and distance from conflict: on the one hand, a man’s military prowess attracts the admiration of women, but on the other, the statement itself deductively reinforces the idea of women as passive figures who themselves do not “shed blood.” And her assurance that “[she] shall do all [he bids her], but not yet, [b]ecause [she has] to do what’s customary” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 141) further affirms the idea that womanhood, as she is to perform it, involves fulfilling the ritual responsibilities that society has deemed necessary, such as the rites involving the treatment of the newly deceased:

We lay the dead out, folding up the hands,
Closing the eyes, and stretching out the feet,
And push a pillow underneath the head,
Till all’s in order; and all this [she’ll] do
For Naoise, son of Usna. (Yeats, *Deirdre* 141)

Conchubar objects to Deirdre’s proposal on the basis that her intended treatment of Naoise’s body “is not fitting” as she is “not now a wanderer but a queen” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 141), a remark that anchors its speaker to domesticity as an illustration of his awareness of social conventions and how they influence the relationship between one’s status and duties; and it comes as no surprise, given the play’s overall feminization of Longes Mac n-Uislenn, that the subsequent exchanges between Conchubar and Deirdre should reinforce the latter’s identification with an essentialized idea of femininity. After Deirdre insists that she is unable to take up her role as as Conchubar’s consort “[t]ill the past’s finished, and its debt are paid” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 142), he accuses her of simply wanting to gaze once more at Naoise. She reasons, however, that viewing Naoise’s corpse will enable her to envision his “soiled body” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 142) when Conchubar is “beside [her] in [his] strength” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 142) and entreats the Musicians to inform the king “[h]ow changeable all
women are; how soon /[e]ven the best of lovers is forgot /[w]hen his day’s finished” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 142). Epitomized by his condition in death, Naoise will compare poorly in Deirdre’s eyes with the living man lying next to her. Faced with Conchubar’s vigor and virility, she will embrace him rather than remain faithful to her former lover.

Conchubar still doubts Deirdre’s intentions, asking how he would be able to discern whether or not she possesses “some knife” and intends “to die upon [Naoise’s] body” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 143); and it is significant that he bids her to attend to her “farewells” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 143) after she challenges him to “[h]ave [her] searched,/ [i]f [he] would make so little of [his] queen” and encourages him to have “one of these dark slaves. . . search [her] for [the dagger]” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 143) that she may or may not have concealed in her attire: that is, rather than break with propriety in order to ensure her lack of weaponry as she suggests, Conchubar gives her leave to attend to Naoise’s corpse. For just as Derdriu’s references to her own detachment from social rites anticipates the grisly violence of her suicide in *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*, so too does Conchubar’s unwillingness to commit a social breach anticipate the staging of Deirdre’s suicide in Yeats’ drama. Deirdre “goes behind the curtain” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 143); when, moments later, “[t]he curtain is drawn back” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 144), Deirdre has already killed herself, as Conchubar’s cries reveal: “No, no; I’ll not believe it. She is not dead--/[s]he cannot have escaped a second time!” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 144).

Like Naoise’s murder, Deirdre’s suicide in the 1907 work occurs out of the audience’s sight, the stage production having sanitized that which in *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* is graphic and gruesome. Yet in light of earlier moments within the production, the play’s staging of Deirdre’s suicide demonstrates the extent to which this event maintains her performance of conventional womanhood. In *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*, Eogan

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345 Suess refers to these lines in asserting that “Deirdre once again manipulates the stereotype of women’s inconstancy, this time with the help of the women musicians. . . ” (125). Likewise, Innes more generally points out (without reference to specific lines from the play) that Deirdre “plays the role of a young and wanton girl in order to deceive Conchubar. . . ” (56).

346 Taylor, reflecting upon these circumstances, states that Deirdre “outmanoeuvres Conchubar by appealing to the sense of decorum and honour which he has already abandoned” (54).
man Durthacht kills Noisiu by first stabbing him with his “great spear” such that “his back [breaks] through it” (trans. Hull 65) and then, after Fiachu mac Fergusu shields him from Eogan man Durthacht with his own body, by “[striking Noisiu] from above through the son of Fergus” (trans. Hull 65). The importance of these details lies in their consistency with the play’s rendering of the same event: in both the medieval and the twentieth-century works, whether by “spear” or by sword, Naoise dies from the sharpness of a piercing metal point.

*Deirdre*, however, completely revises the methodology of the medieval Derdriu’s suicide: instead of bashing her head to smithereens on a rock, she too expires upon a blade. Yet the parallel methodology of Naoise’s murder and Deirdre’s suicide in the play calls attention to the differences that attend these incidents beyond the obvious fact that the young man dies at the hands of someone else while Deirdre’s expiration is self-inflicted. I mentioned earlier that the Executioner’s bloody sword, which he shows to the audience, serves as a metonym for Naoise’s slaying. This image, in addition to Deirdre’s reference to her lover’s “soiled body” and her description of him in death as “blood-bedabbled” with “beauty gone” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 142), hints without bluntness at the Executioner’s disfigurement of Naoise.

When Conchubar asks Deirdre if she has “not some knife” in order “to die upon [Naoise’s] body,” the play anticipates her manner of suicide. Yet the stage directions that reveal the completion of this act refer not to that which Deirdre should have done in killing herself and how she should now appear in death but to that which the Musicians should be doing who, once “[t]he curtain is drawn back” to reveal the deceased lovers, signal Deirdre’s demise when they “begin to keen with low voices” (Yeats, *Deirdre* 144), after which Conchubar’s consequent indignation that Deirdre has “escaped a second time” confirms her death. That is, in contrast to the play’s visual, if metonymic, references to the method of Naoise’s execution—namely, the

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347 “Feraid Eogan failti fru la bêim forgama do gai mór i n-Noisin co´rhoimid a drium triit” (*Longes Mac n-Uislenn* 47).
348 “Fo∙cerid la sodain mac Fergusu co∙tuc a dí láim dar Noisin co∙tuc foi ocus co∙tarlaic fair anúas ocus is samldaid ro∙bith Noisiu tre mac Fergusu anuas” (*Longes Mac n-Uislenn* 47).
Executioner’s appearance with his bloody blade and Conchubar’s gesture towards it—neither the dialogue of any of the surviving characters still onstage (Fergus, Conchubar, the three Musicians and the two “dark-faced men”) nor the stage directions refer specifically and explicitly to the manner of Deirdre’s suicide after it occurs. The obvious, pragmatic reason for this apparent lack of direct allusion is that the play does in fact show Deirdre (and Naoise) to the audience following her suicide. Yet from a contextual standpoint, this omission underlies and accentuates the extent to which the play distances Deirdre from war and associates her with the domestic. Earlier in the production, Deirdre suggests that wrecking the source of Conchubar’s desire for her—namely her own physical attractiveness—is how “to make all safe.” Significantly, one of the ways of doing so would involve doing harm to herself—“[tearing her] face with briars” (Yeats, Deirdre 128), an intention to which Naoise puts a stop, ordering her to “[l]eave the gods’ handiwork unblotched . . .” (Yeats, Deirdre 129). A bit later, when Deirdre and Naoise discover that they cannot escape the “[g]uest-house” owing to the fact that Conchubar’s mercenaries have surrounded it, Naoise asserts that she is “in [his] charge” and that when he cannot prevent the king’s minions from storming the “[g]uest-house,” he will “[g]ive [her] a cleanly death with this grey edge” (Yeats, Deirdre 131). Taken together, Naoise’s commentaries make clear that Deirdre ought not to injure herself and that even in the face of their adversaries, it is he who should effect her expiration. More significantly, the way in which Naoise would kill Deirdre is indistinguishable from the manner in which she ultimately kills herself, and while the fact that she commits suicide after he dies is in keeping with the medieval narrative, her decision to end her life with the same implement that Naoise would have used to extinguish the same suggests that she is not destroying herself so much as carrying out that which Naoise would have done himself were he still alive. In addition, Naoise’s conception of the sort of death he would afford Deirdre—namely, his description of it as “cleanly”—suggests that his dispatchment of her would be as bloodless and as non-disfiguring as possible.

And the more immediate context of Deirdre’s suicide further undermines her connection to conflict by feminizing and domesticating it. As I mentioned earlier, Derdriu in the medieval text kills
herself by bashing her head into a large rock while riding in a chariot “to the assembly of Macha” with Conchobar and Eogan mac Durthacht, which is to say that her suicide takes place outside a domestic space, witnessed only by the two men whose relationship to her might be termed that of captors and captive. In short, Derdriu’s suicide in _Longes Mac n-Uislenn_ is an embodiment of war.

By contrast, Deirdre’s suicide in the 1907 drama takes place within the “[g]uest-house,” although it technically takes place out of sight beyond the curtain. More important, though, is how Deirdre takes her leave of those on-stage with the following speech:

Now strike the wire, and sing to it a while,

Knowing that all is happy, and that you know

Within what bride-bed I shall lie this night,

And by what man, and lie close up to him,

For the bed’s narrow, and there outsleep the cockcrow. (Yeats, _Deirdre_ 143)

To begin with, Deirdre describes her imminent death in terms of a ritual celebrating what traditionally has been considered to be one of the foundational characteristics of civilization: the marital relationship. But Deirdre’s first words in the passage above constitute an imperative, one that she directs towards the three Musicians who respond as follows:

*First Musician.* They are gone, they are gone. The proud may lie by the proud.

*Second Musician.* Though we were bid to sing, cry nothing loud.

*First Musician.* They are gone, they are gone.

*Second Musician.* Whispering were enough.

*First Musician.* Into the secret wilderness of their love.

*Second Musician.* A high, grey cairn. What more is to be said?

*First Musician.* Eagles have gone into their cloudy bed. (Yeats, _Deirdre_ 143-44)
By virtue of their literal presence, the Musicians feminize that which in *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* occurs only in the presence of two men: on stage (and still alive) while Deirdre kills herself are, in addition to the three Musicians, Conchobar and his two “dark-faced” followers. The Musicians’ song serves as a final instance in which the play undermines Fergus’ arrogant dismissal of them as “wanderers” incapable of properly judging the worth of another’s meaning: it is they, not the witless Conchobar, nor his two minions, who recognize the import of Deirdre’s final words. 349 But the very fact that they, and they alone of anyone on stage, comprehend Deirdre’s final speech as a conveyance of her intent means that from one perspective, they are the only witnesses to her death.

Furthermore, the Musicians’ role in this moment calls attention to the ways in which they diverge from their medieval counterparts. In *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*, before Derdriu sets out for Macha with Conchobar and Eogan mac Dubthacht, the musicians facilitate her ability to commemorate Noisius with an elegiac song that affirms her association with war and her lack thereof with the perfunctory rituals of society. Her lyrics recall with obvious nostalgia “[t]he three very heroic sons of Uisliu” (trans. Hull 66) and assert how “[b]eloved [is] [sic] the warrior, noble [and] [sic] very modest” (trans. Hull 67) while revealing that she has abandoned one of her grooming rituals (she no longer paints her nails). Here in the play, however, they not only anticipate that which is arguably the climax of both the medieval narrative and the twentieth-century drama but also, through their appropriation of Naoise’s own language, metaphorically extend the latter’s conception of her suicide as a marital union. Earlier in the play, Naoise addresses

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349 According to Fackler, Conchobar comprehends Deirdre’s last speech “as a promise” to him (111). Likewise, O’Gorman argues that Deirdre’s “lack of specificity of reference deliberately deceives Conchobar into assuming that the referent is himself, when the musicians and audience know otherwise” (91), while Suess maintains that Conchobar “misconstrues as another instance of flattery what essentially is Deirdre’s farewell to the musicians” (125). Notably, Deirdre’s language here affirms her connection to civilization in that her “duplicitous assertions ratify the illocutionary force of utterance by demonstrating the extent to which society confers on language its power to bind” (O’Gorman 98).
Deirdre as “Eagle” when he rejects her plan to save his life by leaving him for Conchubar. Now, towards the play’s end, the First and Second Musicians conceptualize the pair as eagles who, having departed for “[a] high, grey cairn,” no less than “the secret wilderness of their love . . . have gone into their cloudy bed.”

In conclusion, Yeat’s paradoxical reduction and expansion upon Longes Mac n-Uislenn conventionalizes a protagonist whose affiliation with warfare is, if condemned, neither denied nor sanitized while defining her in terms of an essentialized concept of womanhood that stresses its connection to domesticity and mitigates its association with outwardly-directed aggression. And yet, insofar as a conscious and deliberate sham sometimes underlies its protagonist’s performance of such femininity, particularly in light of the play’s ultimate vindication of her interpretative abilities, Deirdre interrogates the notion of womanhood as an archetypal, monolithic entity even as it seems to reinforce it. Right before the end of the play, Conchubar, having discovered Deirdre’s suicide, is incredulous that she should “have escaped a second time” (Yeats, Deirdre 144), an idea bolstered by the First Musician’s image of her and Naoise as “[e]agles [who] have gone into their cloudy bed.” That image is one of transcendence. And it is especially fitting for a heroine who, in moments of truth, insists upon her own particularity. “Whatever were to happen to my face,” she tells Naoise, “I’d be myself, and there’s not any way / [b]ut this to bring all trouble to an end” (Yeats, Deirdre 129).

150 “And do you think / [t]hat, were I given life at such a price, / I would not cast it from me? O my eagle! / Why do you beat vain wings upon the rock / [w]hen hollow night’s above?” (Yeats, Deirdre 138). The substance of these lines emphasizes the play’s domestication of Derdriu’s suicide in that it turns that which is literal—the bashing of Derdriu’s skull into a “stone” (trans. Hull 69/ “cloich” [Longes Mac n-Uislenn 51])—into metaphorical violence.

151 I refer here, once again, to the fact that Yeats reduces the narrative focus of the original story to that which elapses between Noisiu’s return to Ireland and his death yet revises and develops that which occurs in that narrative space.
EPILOGUE

In my introduction, I defined several goals that I intended to accomplish by demonstrating that Naomi Mitchison’s *The Land the Ravens Found* and William Butler Yeats’ *Deirdre* respectively conventionalize Landnámabók’s *Audr in djúpúðga* and Longes Mac *nUislenn’s Derdriu*, diminishing or denying a relationship between women and war that the medieval texts acknowledge, in order to interrogate the binary opposition that underlies widespread connotations of the terms “medieval” and “modern.” Those objectives include re-establishing unity among faculty within the humanities by raising awareness of the connections between medieval and twentieth-century literature among medievalists and modernists and calling attention to the legalities that affect the lives of women in the U.S. for the purpose of galvanizing public opposition to those measures, enacted and proposed, that do and would undermine women’s autonomy. These aims are not unrelated. Prudent application of the humanities based upon a deep understanding of them is integral to the perpetuity of the U.S. as a progressive democracy, and it is as a collective entity that faculty in the humanities can best defend the study of subjects such as literature and music and expose the weakness of claims that assert the uselessness of the same. By emphasizing that the humanities are the philosophical foundation of our nation, my dissertation also seeks to reinvest academics with the role of public intellectual in an endeavor to resurrect a relationship between academia and the American public that is grounded in mutual appreciation and support.

In light of these aims, it is my intention to build upon the argument that I have established here by considering two other pairings of texts: the Middle Welsh tale “Math vab Mathonwy” (“Math Son of Mathonwy”) from *The Mabinogion* with Saunders Lewis’ 1948 modern Welsh drama, *Blodeuwedd (The Woman Made of Flowers)*; and the Anglo-Saxon poem “Judith” with English writer Arnold Bennett’s 1919 play of the same name. My reason for this expansion is twofold. The prospectus for this dissertation, which I now consider to be the blueprint for the scholarship I intend to produce during the next stage of my career, comprises four chapters. Owing to both the unexpected depth (and concomitant length) of my analyses
here and limitations of time and energy, this dissertation constitutes approximately half of what would have been my second chapter according to my prospectus. Examinations of the aforementioned pairings of Welsh and English texts represent, therefore, what is missing from that section as I initially devised it. But the more significant justification for exploring these four other works is that they will further substantiate my argument by mitigating its primary weakness which is that it asserts itself on the basis of few sources rather than upon a plethora of the same. Interpretations of two medieval texts and two twentieth-century analogues uphold the thesis that I have put forth here. One of these pairings is Irish, while the other, because Scotland once was a Viking domain, offers a comparison of two works that both the Icelandic and the Scottish literary traditions arguably comprise. By encompassing a Welsh and an English pairing, my argument will bolster itself not only on the basis that eight texts rather than four exemplify its logic, but also on the basis that it applies to medieval and twentieth-century works that collectively represent the literary traditions of five distinct nations.
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