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All the Mountains Shake

Seismic and Volcanic Imagery in the Old Norse Literature of Þórr

DECLAN TAGGART

Introduction¹

Viking Age and early medieval characterisations of Þórr (Modern English *Thor*) announce the Old Norse god as a master of thunder and lightning much less loudly than modern scholarly and popular depictions of the deity.² An association with those elements is likely to have been only one

¹ I owe a great debt to the scholars who have read and commented on the arguments of this article, including Stefan Brink, Olof Sundqvist, Lisa Collinson, Irene García Losquiño and Tarrin Wills, to whom I am further grateful for his help in translating and interpreting *Hallmundarkviða*. Thank you to Alaric Hall for many observations but especially regarding the curious contrast in Iceland in the survival rates of imagery of thunder and other motifs, like snakes and wolves. I also extend my gratitude to the anonymous reviewers of *Scripta Islandica* for their helpful critiques. Any errors that remain are my own. Quotations from *Haustlög*, along with *Bragi inn gamli* Boddason's Þórr's fishing and Eilífr Goðrúnarson's *Þórdrápa*, are taken from the third volume of *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*, and I am grateful to the editors of those poems, Edith Marold, Kari Ellen Gade and Margaret Clunies Ross, for allowing me use them while the edition was still forthcoming.

² For examples of scholarly interpretations of Þórr as a god of thunder, see Simek 1993, s.v. *Thor*; Ellis Davidson 1988, 1, 135; de Vries 1970, II, § 413, 415, 416; Clements 2008, 18; Jessen 2013, 325–327; Arnold 2011, xi, 11; Turville-Petre 1964, 81; Raudvere 2008, 237; Schjødt 2008, 219–222; and further instances could be adduced. Regarding the continuing debate over the problem of defining as *religion* what the sources themselves only refer to as *forn siðr* ('ancient custom'), see Nordberg 2012, 119–151; Lindberg 2009, 85–119. Following the arguments set out by those authors and given its convenience, the term *religion* will continue to be used in this article.

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facet among many of the god's import in the north of Viking Age Europe, and perhaps one with little significance at all in many places, particularly Iceland. I have studied this situation in more depth elsewhere, taking into account a variety of sources of evidence, including the name *Þórr* ('thunder') itself, Icelandic and Scandinavian literature, and the works of Christian ethnographers and historians like Adam of Bremen and Saxo Grammaticus (Taggart 2015). It has also been acknowledged by scholars like Lotte Motz (1996, 48, 55–57) and John Lindow, who labels the idea of Þórr as thunder god as an "assumption" (Lindow 2001, s.v. *Thrymskviða* [The poem of *Thrym*]).³ Nevertheless, in one poem, *Haustlöng*, conventional motifs of cosmological disturbance, of fire and quaking scenery, are utilised to portray Þórr inadvertently creating thunder and lightning. In this article, I would like to investigate the possibility that some poets and audiences may have associated these motifs of disturbance with Þórr causing other natural, hazardous phenomena, specifically earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. My second aim is to demonstrate the purposes of this sort of cosmological imagery. As will be noted below, descriptions of natural calamities are surprisingly rare in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, and particularly so in contexts that depict them for their own sake. Rather, such imagery is almost uniformly employed to fulfil specific narrative, representational or thematic functions, and the environmental turmoil associated with Þórr is no different.

Four poems will bear the weight of much of this discussion. Two, *Lokasenna* and *Prymskviða*, are normally categorised by scholars of Old Norse-Icelandic literature as eddic poetry (and included within a compilation known as the Poetic Edda), while the others, *Hallmundarkviða* and *Haustlöng*, are described as skaldic, a distinction that is made based on historical, manuscriptal, metrical, stylistic and thematic criteria (among others).⁴ The former three poems are usually believed to have been composed in Iceland, whereas *Haustlöng* is associated with a Norwegian poet called Þjóðólfr ór Hvini, and this distribution will become noteworthy in the course of this article (Gunnell 2005, 93–95;

³ Terry Gunnell has conducted a brief survey of the functions and skills of Þórr, which concludes that he is an all-purpose god with importance in many realms other than that of the weather (2015, 62–63, 64–66). The most circumspect textbooks limit themselves to giving an overview of the sources, rather than naming Þórr as a particular kind of god: Lindow's entry on Þórr focuses on his giant-slaying on this basis, without any mention of thunder or lightning (2001, s.v. *Thor*; see also, for example, Roesdahl 1998, 150).

⁴ For further discussion of points of similarity and difference between eddic and skaldic poetry, see Clunies Ross 2005, 6–28.

Whaley 2012, 3; Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991, ccv–ccxi). In all likelihood, the poems span not only an impressive expanse geographically but also chronologically. Hallmundarkviða and Haustlöng are normally dated, respectively, to the thirteenth century and to the ninth or early tenth centuries, and the complex rules governing the composition of skaldic poems may have made them resistant to alteration, even in oral transmission (North 1997, 10; Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991, ccxi).⁵ The eddic poems are less easily dated. Our single surety is that they reflect forms (though not perhaps the only forms) of these poems that were current in the late-thirteenth-century when they were written into the *Codex Regius* (a.k.a. GKS 2365 4to), the oldest manuscript in which we find them (Gunnell 2005, 93). A poem like *Prymskviða* might have been fashioned at any point between the ninth and thirteenth centuries and have altered significantly from its first shapes by the time of the *Codex Regius*.⁶

As a study of the intersection between geology and mythology, this work is indebted to the recent eco-critical focus on medieval Icelandic literature, which has encouraged a more flexible understanding of medieval literary constructions of interaction between natural, cultural and social eco-systems and the potential these constructions held as a means of re-shaping and recording history and identity.⁷ By looking at prospective instances of geo-mythology related to Þórr, I would like to contribute to the growing body of eco-critical commentary, elucidating the competing demands in these texts of genre, characterisation and environment and the extent to which these images mediate responses to the terrains of Iceland and Norway.

⁵ While the authenticity of skaldic poems is considered more likely than that of eddic poetry, it is not guaranteed, and the ascription of some poems may have even been intentionally falsified in the prose contexts in which we find them (Turville-Petre 1976, lxvii–lxviii).

⁶ On the problems of dating eddic poetry, see Fidjestøl 1999, and, on *Lokasenna* and *Prymskviða* more specifically, Harris 2005, 97–101.

⁷ Eco-criticism is itself a youthful critical orientation, though one with growing importance to studies of medieval literature generally. For an overview of the field, which offers many methodological insights and elaborations of use to scholars of Germanic and medieval literature, see Price 2013, 17–32. See Phelpstead 2014, 1–4, a subtle and well-written eco-critical investigation into *Eyrbyggja* saga, for a synopsis of inquiries adopting this approach within the field of Old Norse studies.

Lokasenna: An Almighty Rumbling

Arguably, the phenomenon of thunder does not appear in even incidental ways in eddic poetry centred on Þórr, though a case can be made for it underlying descriptions of the god travelling in Lokasenna and Prymskviða; rather, much of the burden of propelling plot and characterisation in those poems is borne by the concept of Þórr's superhuman strength (Taggart 2015, 65–69; Schjødt 2009, 20). That does not mean that the god is never portrayed having an impact on the landscape of his mythology's audience. Þórr and characters related to Þórr are repeatedly implicated in aetiological, geological and meteorological acts, whether instigating tempests and the tides or, as shall be reasoned below, creating earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, and this is of a piece with Old Norse-Icelandic literature more generally.⁸ *Valkyrjur*, for instance, are announced by an array of lightning in two eddic poems, which are the only sure references to the element in the Poetic Edda (Helgakviða Hundingsbana I, 15:3–4; Helgakviða Hundingsbana II, prose after 18);⁹ many supernatural deities are accorded some measure of control over the weather;¹⁰ and even in one of the poems at the centre of this discussion, Lokasenna, Loki, another of the Old Norse gods, is pictured causing earthquakes: according to the poem's prose framework, when his tortured body writhed in pain, *scalf iorð oll; þat ero nú kallaðir landsciálpstar* “all the earth shook; these are now called earthquakes” (Lokasenna, prose epilogue). In this last case, the phrasing conceivably implies that Loki is the (sole) instigator of earthquakes, though this seems likely to be accidental and unreflective of wider opinions – while some of the prose that accompanies eddic poems appears to be integral to its understanding, the non-metrical material in

⁸ Þórr's involvement in the creation of storms and the tides is showcased in, for example, Sigurgeir Steingrímsson & al. 1968, II, 9, and Snorri Sturluson 2005, 43.

⁹ References to these and the other eddic poems are taken from Neckel and Kuhn 1983. On the *valkyrjur* (sing. *valkyrja*), a group of female psychopomps often linked to Óðinn, see Simek 1993, s.v. valkyries.

¹⁰ Regarding Óðinn, for instance, Hyndluljóð, 3, and Guðni Jónsson 1954, 7 (cf. Saxo Grammaticus 2015, vol. I, book VI, 5,7); for Frø (Freyr), Saxo Grammaticus 2015, vol. I, book I, 8,12; on Heimdallr, see de Vries 1977, s.v. Vindhlér, and Rígsþula, 43–44; and for examples related to *jötnar*, see Vafþrúðnismál, 37, and Bragi inn gamli Boddason 2017, 6. The *jötnar* (sg. *jötunn*) are the giants of Old Norse cosmology (though without necessarily being bigger in size than other cosmological groups).

Lokasenna seems as confused by the poetry as a modern interpreter might be (van Hamel 1929, 204–214; Harris 1997, 133).¹¹

In Lokasenna, a poem in which an angry Loki engages in a flyting with the other gods at a feast, Þórr's arrival is prefaced by three lines describing his journey: *Fiðll qll sciálfa, / hygg ec á for vera / heiman Hlórriða* “all the mountains shake, I think Hlórriði is on his way home” (Lokasenna, 55:1–3). That thunder is not mentioned by name here suggests either that the link was assumed by Lokasenna's author(s) to be self-evident – and therefore that it was alive for a contemporary Icelandic audience – or that some other phenomenon is being signified here by the shaking of the landscape. Underlying both possibilities is the certainty that Viking Age and early medieval witnesses to the poem, embedded in the culture of the poem's poet(s) or one more similar to it than ours, would have been quicker to comprehend the imagery than a modern audience – notwithstanding that not everyone in these periods would have understood the images in the same way and that eddic poetry may have changed over time. Certainly, today, the anatomy of the shaking is ambiguous.

The idea that it is thunder is tempting, particularly with the precedent of *Haustlöng*, in which *vegr mána dundøi* “the way of the moon [sky] rang” (Þjóðólfr ór Hvini 2017, 14) from the passing of Þórr's chariot and *upphiminn brann* “heaven above burned” (Þjóðólfr ór Hvini 2017, 16). Adding to this is a natural correspondence between thunder and the sound of wagon wheels rumbling across the ground, attested to in surviving terms for *thunder* in the North Germanic languages, like the Icelandic *reið* (‘thunder’, ‘wagon’) and Swedish *åska*, which is formed from *ås* (Old Norse *áss*, the title for members of Þórr's faction of deities) and Old Swedish *ækia* (Old Norse *ekja* [‘driving’]) and is likely very old, being evidenced in Old Swedish as *asikkia*.¹² Moreover, lightning is powerful enough that it could perhaps be visualised shaking a mountain, and regardless of the reality of the situation, hills rolling from the impact of thunder is, at least today, an effective poetic device, should a poet be attempting to demonstrate his protagonist's might.¹³

¹¹ For a comparative perspective on this human tendency to allocate responsibility for mysterious natural events to a supernatural source (with a focus on volcanoes), see Nordvig 2015, 77.

¹² On the pertinence of these terms for connections between thunder and Þórr's chariot, see Taggart 2015, 72–79.

¹³ Lightning strikes normally carry currents of between 10,000 and 20,000 amps but can range up to hundreds of thousands of amps (for comparison, a common household circuit

We should not, however, be so quick to ignore other types of natural calamity that may have inspired the shaking imagery in Lokasenna, particularly when *Haustlög* itself offers a number of alternative possibilities. According to the *Haustlög* poet Þjóðólfr ór Hvini, with the passing of Þórr's chariot, hail rained from the sky, *gekk Svólnis ekkja / sundr* "Svólnir's widow [earth] became rent asunder" (Þjóðólfr ór Hvini 2017, 15), and *berg ... / hristusk ok björg brustu* "mountains were shaken and rocks burst" (Þjóðólfr ór Hvini 2017, 16). The description of the mountains shaking is of special interest here for its obvious consonance with that of Lokasenna, and it may be a repetition of the earlier declaration that *mána vegr dundði* (i.e. thunder) or a separate but homologous phenomenon. The intuitive similarity between the rumble of thunder and the noise of a chariot and/or hooved animals, mentioned above, might have been extended to the shaking of an earthquake or a landslide, both of which are more logically connected with the rocks and mountains of Þjóðólfr's imagined landscape.

The former is an uncontroversial suggestion: landslides and avalanches are among the most common geohazards of Norway, with some involving the crumbling of large parts of a mountain and subsequent decimation of the surrounding area (Jaedicke & al. 2008, 893–894). The idea that Þjóðólfr is alluding to an earthquake, on the other hand, may surprise some individuals with experience of the Norwegian landscape. Nevertheless, the country is among the most seismically active in northern Europe.¹⁴ Norwegian earthquakes may not compare in size or consequence to those of Iceland, but several each year are large enough to be perceived by humans without scientific equipment and occasionally to damage buildings – in reality, the catalyst for some of the country's major landslides and avalanches are likely to have been large earthquakes (Muir Wood and Woo 1987, 7–8; Blikra & al. 2006, 492–495).

Because Þjóðólfr's account of a chasm opening in the earth is so precise in its violence, appearing to go beyond the traits normally ascribed to a landslide, and because shaking is seldom associated with avalanches or landslides in Old Norse literature – and that these are very infrequently mentioned, and never in mythology – it seems most likely that the effects

carries up to fifteen amps). In exceptional circumstances, they can destroy houses and blow trees apart (Uman 1986, 38, 43, 45–46).

¹⁴ For Scandinavian and especially Norwegian seismicity in a long-term perspective, see Muir Wood and Woo 1987, 6–19.

of an earthquake are being portrayed here in *Haustlög*.¹⁵ Of course, Þjóðólfr himself may be unaware of the seismic origins of his imagery if so, though his sketching of Þórr's movement could be a response to the poet having witnessed or having been informed about a specific, unusually cataclysmic event.

The possibility that the shaking mountains of *Lokasenna* – based in a fairly conventional mythological topos, as shall be seen below – were understood by some audiences as connected with seismic activity is further corroborated by *Hallmundarkviða*, *Prymskviða* and *Snorri Sturluson's Edda*. In all three of these texts, Þórr is in the vicinity of earthquake-causing supernatural beings and all, like *Lokasenna*, probably originated in their current form in the very seismically active country of Iceland. In *Hallmundarkviða*, which will be examined in depth below, the movements of a fantastical creature through the landscape cause rocks to burst, cliffs to shake and a volcano to erupt, though more of this is laid at the feet of roaming *jötnar* than at Þórr's (*Þórhallur Vilmundarson* and *Bjarni Vilhjálms* 1991, 3–6). In the other two texts, the relationship between Þórr and a shaking earth is more nuanced, embedded in both cases in a mocking characterisation of the god that confirms the association even as it denies the god's potency. *Prymskviða*, in which Þórr loses his social and military authority when his hammer is taken, begins with *Freyja* depicted as a paragon of beneficence and grace.¹⁶ Yet she moves into the vacuum created by Þórr's loss of power, a development the poem signals by endowing her with Þórr's masculine qualities, sometimes mirroring almost exactly the male god's previous actions.¹⁷ When she reacts to an

¹⁵ Investigating the scarcity of natural calamities in *Íslendinga sögur*, Oren Falk finds only four landslides (2007, 6). Of these, none are associated with the motif of shaking; instead the verb *hlaupa* ('to leap', 'to run') is used in three and *fella* ('to let fall') in the other, giving a very different impression of the movement involved (*Björn Karel Þórólfsson* and *Guðni Jónsson* 1943, 18; *Einar Ólafur Sveinsson* 1939, 36; *Einar Ólafur Sveinsson* and *Matthías Þórðarson* 1935, 2; *Jón Jóhannesson* 1950, 1 [cf. *Jakob Benediktsson* 1968, II, S283 (H244), which discusses this incident in similar terms]). *Jakob Benediktsson* (1968, II, S289 [H250]) does describe a landslide occurring with a *gnýr mikill* "great roar", a noun that often expresses the sound of the wind or waves but which can communicate the kind of loud crashing found in *Haustlög*, though all these texts are from a very different time and place than that skaldic poem.

¹⁶ *Freyja's* merit is evident, for example, from the support she offers Þórr. She promises that she would have given away a valuable possession even if it was made from gold or silver (*Prymskviða*, 4). The indications of Þórr's loss of status have been summarized by *John McKinnell* (2000, 4).

¹⁷ Further to the quaking examined in the main text, *Freyja's* annexation of Þórr's qualities

order from Þórr by snorting angrily, so that *allr ása salr / undir bifðiz* “all the hall of the *ásir* shook beneath” (Prymskviða, 13:3–4), the quaking demonstrates Freyja’s might, marking the hierarchical shift and Þórr’s own feminisation and enfeeblement.¹⁸ Similarly, in the section of Snorri’s Edda known as Gylfaginning, Þórr encounters a *jötunn* called Skrímir whose snoring triggers a *landskjálpti mikill* “great earthquake” which awakens Þórr from his own sleep, causes the earth to move *skykkjum* “in shakes”, and makes the god’s shelter *skjálfa* “shake” (Snorri Sturluson 2005, 37). Again, the shaking earth is a means of mocking Þórr by demonstrating the superior muscle of the *jötunn*. In both narratives, therefore, the choice of a shaking earth as the marker of power implies that the motif is ordinarily closely tied to Þórr: the mockery of Þórr is so effective and immediately intelligible to an audience because it elevates others above Þórr using a traditional flag of his own strength and masculinity.

The quaking in Lokasenna may be rooted in a similar understanding of Þórr’s interaction with the environment as the same image in these other texts, perhaps as an origin for Iceland’s earthquakes. In the two texts in which the motif implicitly responds to Þórr’s own characterisation, Prymskviða and Gylfaginning, it is a shaking of the scenery rather than the sky, as it is in Lokasenna; indeed, in the case of Skrímir’s snoring, the resulting trembling is explicitly a *landskjálpti* (‘earthquake’). The

is demonstrated by the intentionally comedic contrast between an idealized description of her as *fagra / Freyio* “fair Freyja” (Prymskviða, 12:1–2), which recalls her portrayal in the poem’s early stanzas, and the almost animalistic way in which she then repudiates Þórr (Prymskviða, 13). The representation of this anger is the clearest barometer of the transference of power away from Þórr: Freyja’s rejection of Þórr’s demands is delineated with words that mirror almost exactly those that described Þórr at the start of the poem, emphasizing the exchange that has occurred between their positions and characteristics – cf. *reiðr var þá Vingþórr* “Vingþórr was angry” (Prymskviða, 1:1–2) with *reið varð þá Freyia* “then Freyja became angry” (Prymskviða, 13:1–2). Several motifs and phrases are repeated and recontextualized in this way across the poem to trace the fall of Þórr from his previous station and the ascendancy of others like Freyja: for example, compare Þórr’s ordering Freyja to tie on her bridal wear and prepare to drive to the home of the *jötunnar* (12:5–6, 12:7–8) with the stanzas in which Þórr is forced to carry out the actions himself (19:1–2, 20:3–6).

¹⁸ Cf. the opening stanza of Prymskviða, in which Þórr’s *scegg nam at hrista* “beard took to shake” (1:5). The verb *bifaz* is used to a similar end in Eilífr Goðrúnarson’s Þórsdrápa (2017, 17), which declares *Purnis holl bifðisk* “Þurnir’s hall shook.” There, although the exact circumstances are uncertain, the quake must mark the final blow of the fight between Geirröðr and Þórr; probably, as Snorri also has it, Þórr shows his brawn by throwing a weapon through a pillar to kill his opponent (Snorri Sturluson 1998, 25). In both poems, the shaking is another way of revealing the power of the being causing it.

language used does vary across these texts (though *bifaz*, *hrista* and *skjálfa* are as synonymous as Modern English ‘quake,’ ‘tremble,’ and ‘shake’ [de Vries 1977, s.vv. bifa, hrista, skjalfa]), suggesting that no direct link exists between, for instance, Lokasenna and Haustlöng, but *skjálfa*, the verb that is used in Lokasenna, is widely found in descriptions of earthquake-like movements in Old Norse-Icelandic poetry and prose (see, e.g., Völuspá, 47:1–2; Lilja 2007, 59; Þorvaldur Bjarnarson 1878, 88; Gustav Indrebø 1931, 139; Magnus Rindal 1981, 45), including in the example from Gylfaginning, and it is one of the elements in the word *landskjálpti*. It is never, to the best of my knowledge, used in connection with thunder. In summary, the imagery of these poems – and the parody of Freyja and Skrímir in particular – is similar enough to advocate thinking of both Lokasenna and Haustlöng as lying within a wider literary tradition of Þórr causing earthquake-like shaking. At the very least, there is more reason to relate Lokasenna’s rumbling to an earthquake than thunder.

It may be that from very ancient times the common mythological motif of a shaking environment was especially utilised as a prop by poets composing about Þórr; Haustlöng preserves the connection in one of the oldest of extant skaldic poems, and while there is little to prove or disprove this, such a situation would have been natural, given the mythological semantics of shaking detailed just below. In some literary contexts, this was understood as a sort of natural phenomenon – formerly thunder (cf. Taggart, 2015, 70, 200–203) and then, in the much more seismically active Icelandic environment (Decriem & al. 2010, 1128–1129), earthquakes, as is clear from Hallmundarkviða and to varying extents from the other eddic and skaldic texts examined above.

As important as identifying the origins that contemporary audiences and poets would have ascribed to the upheaval in Lokasenna is the meaning that the image has in this poem. Again, this can be uncovered through consideration of representations of shaking elsewhere in Old Norse poetry and of the function of the motif in these comparable cases, as well as by examining the context of the image in Lokasenna. The movements of powerful beings in Old Norse mythology are often indicated by quaking of one kind or another, and Lokasenna incorporates Þórr’s coming into this symbolism. Because of Skírnir’s horse, for instance, *iqrð bifaz, / enn allir fyrir / sciálfa garðar Gymis* “the earth quakes, and all the courts of Gymir shook from this” (Skírnismál, 14:4–6); in Grottasöngur, from the rolling of an almighty boulder, the *fold ... / fór sciálfandi* “earth ... starts shaking” (Grottasöngur, 12:3–4. Cf., similarly, Grottasöngur, 23:5–6);

at Baldr's funeral, when Hyrrokkin pushes Baldr's ship out into the water, *eldr hraut ór hlunnunum ok lönd öll skulfu* "fire was flung from the rollers and all the lands shook" (Snorri Sturluson 2005, 46); when Hermóðr rides to search out his dead brother Baldr in Snorri's Edda, according to the Codex Regius manuscript of that text (a.k.a. GkS 2367 4to) his mount Sleipnir *dynr* "resounds" on the bridge into Hel as much as *fimm fylki dauðra manna* "five divisions of dead men" (Snorri Sturluson 2005, 47; similarly Snorri Sturluson 2012, 76).¹⁹ In each of these examples, the quaking is confirmed as a symbol of power and authority by its context in the text: the potency of Skírnir's horse is already signalled at this point in Skírnismál by the value he and Freyr have put on it (Skírnismál, 8–9); in Grottasöngur, the shaking is only one of the ways in which the stone's heaviness is explained and the stone itself only one of many means by which the strength of those rolling it are displayed;²⁰ Hyrrokkin is specifically called for as she alone is capable of moving Baldr's ship Hringhorni, which was *allra skipa mestr* "the biggest of all ships" (Snorri Sturluson 2005, 46); and, in the final case, Hermóðr's power is highlighted by the elevation of his noise-making above that of such a great number of explicitly powerful men.

In these instances, the shaking of the land is connected to the movement of mighty figures or things, but in others locomotion is not necessary. It is enough that the character causing the rumbling is strong. As seen above, this is the circumstance depicted in Prymskviða, in which the quaking hall floor favourably contrasts Freyja's figurative and literal strength with that of the weakened Þórr, and regarding the *jötunn* Skrímir in Gylfaginning; Skrímir's massive size is plainly related to the disruption his snoring causes – Þórr realises the source of the earthquake after catching sight of Skrímir, who *var ... eigi lítill ... ok hraut sterkliga* "was not small ... and

¹⁹ A comparable image is presented in Eiríksmál (2012, 3). Eiríkr blóðøx's arrival in Valhöll is anticipated by a *þrymr ... sem þúsund bifisk eða mengi til mikit* "din ... like a thousand or a great crowd were moving", which the poem compares to the clamour Baldr would make if he was coming. The noise conveys on Eiríkr a power and authority equivalent to a god or a great number of people. The verb used here, *bifask* is the same used of Freyja's snorting, discussed above, though in that case it describes the shaking itself. (Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1874, s.v. bifast, reserves the sense 'move' for *bifask* to modern contexts, which would alter the translation above to 'shaking' and move the rendering in Eiríksmál closer still in type to the shaking considered in the main text).

²⁰ The stone is referred to in Grottasöngur as a *hofgahalli* "heavy boulder" (12:7) and a *setberg* "seat-shaped mountain or rock" (11:8), establishing its weight. The strength of the females pushing it is otherwise denoted through allusion to famously tough kin (9) and to their feats and fame in battle (13–15).

snored mightily” (Snorri Sturluson 2005, 38).²¹ From these comparisons, it is clear that the narrative cause of the tremors in Lokasenna may be Þórr’s movement, but its role as symbolism is to advertise his might, and the trope was probably widely recognised as performing this function (von See & al. 1997, 491).

The context of the shaking in Lokasenna supports this analysis. Here, Þórr’s coming is greeted with the triumphant assurance that *hann ræðr ró* “he provokes peace” (Lokasenna, 55:4) but framed counterintuitively as a violent act by the previous action of the poem. A heated and often derogatory argument between Loki and other gods has already occurred by the time of Þórr’s arrival, the others failing to bring peace and being mocked for their lack of fight and the emptiness of their threats against Loki (for example, Lokasenna, 7, 15, 27, 41–42).²² Loki is himself warned that his words will bring him *ógott* “evil” (Lokasenna, 31. This evil turns out to be merely verbally, rather than physically, caustic). The shaking caused by Þórr’s movement acts as foreshadowing and contradistinguishes him from his less aggressive peers, contrasting his power with their passivity. The presence of *allr* (‘all’) in the description *fiöll öll scíðlfa* “all the mountains shake” (Lokasenna, 55:1) emphasises this sense further, conveying Þórr’s strength through the completeness of his impact on the landscape.²³

Few scenes are better known from 1990s cinema screens than a beaker of water rippling in close up on a 4x4’s dashboard, almost imperceptibly at first but then with greater and greater intensity. And in the same way that Steven Spielberg’s Jurassic Park heralded the coming of its Tyrannosaurus rex, giant, frequently monstrous, beings in film and literature are often pre-figured by tropes like coins quivering on desks and lamps shuddering off them, walls and hills vibrating. Shaking has evidently not lost its utility as an indicator of power in the intervening centuries since the composition of Lokasenna.

²¹ Snorri further underlines the impression of Skrímir’s strength in this passage by, for instance, portraying the character outpacing Þórr while they travel and his glove as large enough by itself to offer the god and his companions shelter for a night.

²² The first stanzas of the poem establish the criteria against which the gods will be measured by depicting the gods bragging about *vápn sín ... / oc um vígrisni sína* “their weapons and their prowess in battle” (Lokasenna, 2:1–2), boasts that are then measured against their inaction with Loki and which are fulfilled by the threat that Þórr does carry.

²³ The poem also stresses that a worthy opponent would beat Loki (e.g., Lokasenna, 27, 43), thus marking Þórr out as one through his victory.

Volcanic Imagery: Prymskviða and Hallmundarkviða

In Prymskviða, when Þórr's goats drove him to Prymr's home, *biörg brotnoðo, / brann iǰrð loga* "mountains cracked, the earth burned with flame" (21:5–6). A havoc-strewn, fiery landscape is sketched out within the poem, strongly evocative of Haustlöng's sheets of lightning – though the stipulation that the flames are *ǰrð*-bound adds another, intriguing component to this complex of imagery. Similarly, though the image lacks the element of shaking found in Lokasenna and Haustlöng, the earth ruptures in Prymskviða in a way that recalls the extreme seismic activity of the latter poem. Haustlöng stations its fires up above, produced by lightning, yet they still share a likeness with those of Prymskviða through the verb *brenna*, which is favoured by both poems for describing the action of the flames. On this basis, it could be understood that lightning, caused by Þórr's travels, has struck the earth in Prymskviða and set it alight. Yet it makes as much sense to consider this as a sign of volcanic activity, in the context of Prymskviða's complementary picture of the mountains cracking (earthquakes being a common symptom of an eruption) and especially as, unlike Norway, Iceland is exceptionally volcanically active (cf. Motz 1996, 57).²⁴

The sole obstacle to such an interpretation is that *brenna* never directly describes volcanic fires in Old Icelandic literature and neither does *logi*, despite their otherwise generic use as terms for burning in a highly varied range of contexts (cf. Kellogg 1988, s.vv. *brenna*, *logi*; Degnbol & al. 1989–, s.vv. *brenna*, *logi*; Finnur Jónsson and Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1933, s.vv. *brinna*, *logi*). *Eldr* is the preferred term in extant accounts of eruptions in Old Norse literature, though these are few enough that they may have been different from prevailing linguistic norms (e.g. Jakob Benediktsson 1968, I, S68 [H56] and II, S329; Sigurgeir Steingrímsson & al. 1968, II, 12. Cf. Falk 2007, 4, 5–7).²⁵ The choice of *brenna* in this case may have

²⁴ Iceland, situated on the mid-Atlantic ridge, is today among the most active volcanic regions in the world (Thorvaldur Thordarson and Guðrún Larsen 2007, 135–145). Falk's investigation of a great deal of evidence confirms that it was similarly active in the Middle Ages (2007, 1–2).

²⁵ For a more detailed discussion of the use of the term *eldr* in this context, see Torfing 2015, 92. In future discussions of *eldr*, a more precise account of the term's referent might be desired, particularly differentiating it from lava flow (if there is much to differentiate), which mainly seems to be designated by *ǰarðeldr*. Cf. Torfing 2015, 97.

been dictated by the demands of Prymskviða's meter, *fornyrðislag*, which requires a word like *brenna* that alliterates with *biörg* and *brotnoðo*. *Logi*'s appearance alongside *brenna* in other poetic contexts suggests the term naturally couples with *brenna* in the Old Icelandic tongue to give a sense of fires burning strongly, which may explain its use here (cf. Hávamál, 85:2; Grímnismál, 29:8; Hyndluljóð, 49:1–2; Ívarr Ingimundarson 2009, 25). This imagined burning landscape could, therefore, be the result of an eruption, even if this cause has been obscured by the nature of the poetry.

However, the semantic distinction between *brenna* and *eldr* may more precisely point to this blaze as the destruction wrought by an eruption rather than as a representation of lava itself flowing, which suits the use of the past tense in Prymskviða. In this respect, the records of eruptions in Lárentíus saga biskups, a *biskups saga* from the third quarter of the 1300s, are useful. In one instance, the saga's author uses *brenna* to report an eruption in Sicily that burned down two bishoprics (Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1998, A14 [B17]). In another, *eldr* came up out of Hekla, a highly active volcano in the south of Iceland, with such power that the verb *rifna* ('tear apart') is used to depict the splitting of the mountain, much like Prymskviða renders the mountains cracking apart (Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1998, A14 [B17]). *Brotna*, the verb used in Prymskviða, carries a comparable implication of destructive force to *rifna* [Hymiskviða, 12; Lokasenna, 61; Fáfnismál, 15; Atlamál in grœnlensku, 37]). With this eruption also came *víkr* "pumice stones" that, in one place, *brann þak af húsum* "burned the thatch off houses" (Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1998, A14 [B17]). In both cases, *brenna* is used to reveal the consequences of an eruption, rather than the explosion of lava itself. The same is true of volcanic activity in Landnámabók, wherein *brenna* is found again, portraying the action of a lava field being burnt into the landscape by an eruption (Jakob Benediktsson 1968, I, S68 [H56]), and in Kristni saga, in which *brann hraun* "the lava field burned" (Sigurgeir Steingrímsson & al. 1968, II, 12). The volcanic landscape of the *biskups saga* resembles strongly the cracked and burning earth Þórr leaves behind him in Prymskviða, with the almost tautological use of *logi* giving an impression of volcanic event's intensity. *Brann iqrð loga* could represent the aftermath of an eruption.

Again, this is consistent with imagery related to Þórr presented in Hallmundarkviða, which describes glaciers burning after an eruption using *brenna* (Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991, 5:4). Although the poem is impressionistic to the point of abstruseness, it nonetheless delivers one of medieval Icelandic literature's most transparent

depictions of volcanic activity. The text also gives further weight to the sense that Icelanders once conceived (even if only as a literary trope) of natural phenomena like volcanic activity being caused by powerful extra-sensory agents (cf. Falk 2007, 7–8). The poem survives embedded within the relatively late *Bergbúa þátrr*, a prose account of the peculiar adventure of an Icelander and his farmhand on their way to mass.²⁶ Assailed by a snowstorm, and finding shelter in a cave, they settle down to sleep, only to be awoken by obscure noises and two huge bright eyes in the darkness. A voice recites *Hallmundarkviða* to them three times over the night, a poem which depicts supernatural agents indirectly causing geothermal and seismic activity with their footsteps from hill to hill.²⁷ The poem's narrator, who identifies himself as *Hallmundr* in the first stanza, directly relates the movement to a destructive impact on the land with the opening lines *Hrynr af heiða fenri / höll taka björg at falla* “it resounds from the Fenrir of the heath [*jötunn*]; the tilting mountains begin to fall” (Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991, 1), as well as later declarations like *eimyrju læt ek áma / upp skjótliga hrjóta* “I made dark embers fly quickly up” (2).²⁸

It is clearest that a volcanic eruption is actually the main consequence of *Hallmundr*'s crashing steps in stanza six, which is given over almost entirely to this image:

Spretta kámir klettar;
knýr víðis þöl hríðir;
aurr tekr upp at færask
undarligr ór grundu.

Murky crags spurt;
bale of willow [fire] urges storms;
the extraordinary mud begins
to bring itself out of the ground.

(Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991, 6:1–4; my translation.)

The stanza goes on to describe further natural havoc ensuing from the volcanic eruption – torrential rains, the sky growing dark, the heavens being torn apart and perhaps the generation of *jötnar* out of the lava itself, which could represent rock formations in lava fields or the movement

²⁶ *Bergbúa þátrr*'s dating is uncertain but it seems to be accepted amongst scholars dealing with the poem that the *þátrr* may date to the fourteenth century, with the poetry embedded within it being from the thirteenth: see further Falk 2007, 7; Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991, ccxi.

²⁷ The poem has been given various names in the past, but by consensus is now known as *Hallmundarkviða* (Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991, cciv).

²⁸ Cf. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991, 10:4, in which a different supernatural creature *joklum eldir* “kindles glaciers.”

of rocks by the flow of lava or mud (6:5–9) – but it is the first four lines that provide the surest indication that it is an eruption.²⁹ The narrator wallows in a chiaroscuro vision of viscous lava spurting from Iceland’s grim mountainous backdrop, the *undarligr aurr* “extraordinary mud” probably referring to either, metaphorically, lava flow or to extremely destructive mudflows called lahars (*jökulhlaup* in modern Icelandic).³⁰ Even the notion that an eruption might involve stormy weather is not unknown from Iceland, where volcanic activity is often accompanied by downpours of rain (as is mentioned twice in the second part of the stanza) and can even see an outbreak of volcanic lightning (Anderson & al. 1965, 1179–1189; Brook & al. 1974, 472–475). It may be that the poet intended to imply the latter, though *hríð*, the noun chosen in this stanza, usually only referred to a tempest of rain, snow or sleet (de Vries 1977, s.v. *hríð*; Cleasby and Vigfusson 1874, s.v. *hríð*). The confusion of sensation to which *hríð* adds – the same impression of tumult found in *Haustlöng* – is maybe the most important aspect of its use here, though it also proposes that, if thunder and lightning are tied to Þórr in the Poetic Edda, it will be as an accompaniment to volcanic eruptions, given the scarcity of these meteorological elements in this body of poetry (as noted above, only *valkyrjur* are unambiguously connected with lightning in those poems). Stanza four, in which *springa björg ok bungur / bergs ... stinnar / stór* “great mountains and strong elevations of rock burst”, presents the scene most reminiscent of Prynckviða’s fractured mountains, though without overly reiterating its language and with much greater pageantry.

Þórr does take a role in *Hallmundarkviða*, though one that is somewhat cryptically reported and minor, especially regarding the disruptions the poem enumerates. The god is occupied mainly with his traditional activity of killing *jötnar*, and most of the volcanic disturbance is put at his enemies’ feet.³¹ However, within the final few stanzas’ melancholy vision of an Icelandic landscape from which the majority of the narrator’s kind have been extinguished, *Hallmundr* does state that *springr jorð, því at*

²⁹ For intertextual parallels for *Hallmundarkviða*’s imagery, strengthening the argument that these are volcanic motifs, see Nordvig 2013, 124, 133, 134, 158, 160. Further comparisons can be drawn with *Hyndluljóð*, 49:1–2, in which the *hauðr loga* “earth blazes”, and with the fiery vision of *Ragnarök* in *Völuspá*, 57, which has also been related to volcanicity. On the latter prospect, see Falk 2007, 7–9; Phillipotts 1905, 26.

³⁰ Due to the proximity of glacial ice, Iceland’s volcanic activity has historically been accompanied by some of the world’s largest lahars (Major and Newhall 1989, 1–27).

³¹ See stanza 10, the first to feature Þórr, which specifies that he *feldr* “killed” those who caused eruptions.

þangat / Þór einn kveðk svá fóru “the earth bursts, because, I say, that Þórr alone [still] travels thus there” (Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991, 11), which attributes some responsibility to Þórr as well. Hallmundarkviða is a later text but does corroborate the possibility that a causative link was drawn in medieval Icelandic culture between volcanic eruptions and supernatural agents, in much the same way that other natural calamities like earthquakes were sometimes ascribed to such sources.³² The poem is especially useful as a comparison to *Þrymskviða* as it seems to delineate Þórr, specifically, in this role.

Among this group of poems, Hallmundarkviða most resembles *Haustlög* in its structure and imagery: both focus extensively on the turmoil caused impersonally by the motion of supernatural creatures, a display of nature’s violence that is not limited to a single theme but rather adorns volcanic eruptions or thunder and lightning with other calamities. The poems have different priorities, however. The point of Hallmundarkviða lies in aetiology and the chaos of its imagery; these are prominent features of *Haustlög* too, yet there they primarily exist in service of Þjóðólfr ór Hvini’s depiction of Þórr’s strength and heroism. Þórr’s journey to a fight is given as much space as the fight itself (at least, in the extent of the material that survives) because the savagery of the storm it creates demonstrates this side of Þórr as well as his victory in battle does. This is just as true of *Þrymskviða*, in which the burning of the earth hints at the power of the god, made latent by the absence of his hammer.³³

Only in Hallmundarkviða is there a perspective on the menace of the mythic realm impinging on human society in this way. Only that poem gives an impression of human impotence next to these largely inscrutable geological and meteorological calamities (as well as the creatures who cause them), seemingly enacting the human struggle to comprehend these hazards through its own arcane diction.³⁴ In *Þrymskviða*, in *Haustlög* and, indeed, in *Lokasenna*, the poetic manipulations of the landscape are spectacle, empty of substance except as a means of emphasising the strength of one protector figure.

³² Falk’s analysis of Hallmundarkviða arrives at a similar conclusion (2007, 8. For further, though more modern, examples, see Guðrún Gísladóttir and Guðrún Jóhannesdóttir 2010, 413–415).

³³ See also *Þrymskviða*, 27:5–8, in which *ór augom / eldr of brenna* “fire burns from her eyes”, again expressing a suppressed strength within Þórr through the motif of burning.

³⁴ On geo-mythological poetry as a means of mitigating and responding to the alien phenomena of volcanism, see further Nordvig 2015, 76–77.

Conclusion

Modern commentators lack the wider cultural knowledge that medieval or Viking Age Scandinavians or Icelanders brought to these texts and as such must deal with the evidence as it stands, rather than relying on assumptions or parallels in sometimes unrelated cultures. If we connect the imagery of Lokasenna and Prymskviða with thunder and lightning, it is most likely from expectations inculcated by our own cultural backgrounds and not from internal evidence. Neither text specifically refers to thunder or lightning – nor for that matter volcanic eruptions or earthquakes – so, given how little scholars now know about the conceptual milieu of the poetry, comparing these motifs with those of other texts in the same tradition seems like the most reliable guide to their signification. In that case, the sole certain poetic portrayal of Þórr causing thunder and lightning, in *Haustlög*, offers only a weak correlation to the images examined above, beyond the basic proposition that Þórr's movement might have a turbulent effect on his surroundings. Instead, it is the shaking earth caused by Þórr in Þjóðólfr's poem and *Hallmundarkviða's* volcanic eruptions that provide better likenesses. They allow that conventional cosmological imagery of disruption, often used to demonstrate this and other supernatural beings' strength, might in the instances in *Lokasenna* and *Prymskviða* be rooted in a more general – if still weak – mythological connection between Þórr and earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

There is a logic to associating Þórr with volcanoes and earthquakes, though of course myth does not necessarily obey the dictates of logic. If the passing of a deity's chariot has a synonymy in Scandinavia with booming thunder, the same production of noise could be understood as the root cause of the shaking of an earthquake or volcanic eruption. The truth of this is demonstrated by *Haustlög*, which, without referencing a volcanic eruption (mainland Norway has none), trails an almost indiscriminate number of consequences in the wake of Þórr's movement, a cacophony of natural calamities, including thunder and lightning but also an occurrence resembling an earthquake.³⁵ Given that the landscape's quaking is associated with Þórr in both Icelandic and non-Icelandic literature, it is not difficult to

³⁵ On land, Norway's only active volcanoes are on the island of Jan Mayen, 1000km west of the mainland's north coast, and Bouvet Island (Norw. *Bouvetøya*) in the South Atlantic Ocean. The first confirmed discovery of Jan Mayen was in the seventeenth century, though it may be the island known as *Svalbarð* by earlier Scandinavians, and mentioned in Jakob Benediktsson 1968, I, S2 (H2), as such. Either way, it is unlikely that it was encountered

imagine that the shaking motif, which appears to be attached to Þórr over a wide area (though non-Icelandic sources are scanty), could become ascribed in Iceland to volcanism to fit the salient elements of its environment. As eddic texts are normally assumed to be mostly Icelandic, they testify only to the conceptual ecosystem of that island; thunder and lightning imagery may have died out in connection with Þórr in Iceland, even if it was significant elsewhere, as thunderstorms are a rarity on the island (Markús Á. Einarsson 1984, 685–686. Cf. Taggart 2015, 203–206, 211–212; Ellis Davidson 1965, 3, 5; Motz 1996, 40–41, 57). On the other hand, Lokasenna and Haustlöng attest that the idea of a fiercely shaking earth had continuity.

Going further and conceiving of Þórr as a volcano or an earthquake god would be naïve, however. While both concepts do seem to be tied to Þórr within these myths, as they are to supernatural creatures like Loki, Skrímir and the other protagonists of *Hallmundarkviða*, the links are too fleeting and allusive to dominate his mythological characterisation in the way that, for instance, his strength does. Indeed, the putative links between seismic and volcanic activity and Þórr may be limited to a purely literary domain as articulations of the deity's strength; while the imagery may reflect non-literary characterisations of Þórr (as well as other supernatural figures), the evidence of these texts, at least, does not push for that conclusion, and mythology need not absolutely reflect non-mythological conceptualisations of its gods and monsters (see further McKinnell 2005, 20–21; Whitehouse 2004). The conceptual category of a volcanic eruption itself may not even have been unified and fixed enough in medieval Iceland to be so systematically related to a deity: no term equating to *volcano* has survived from Old Icelandic (*eldfjall* is used in modern Icelandic), and one may not yet have been coined when *Þrymskviða* was composed (Torfing 2015, 92, 99). The assemblage of phenomena we now classify as a volcanic eruption may have been too loosely interconnected by the audiences of these texts for it to make sense to accord responsibility to any extra-sensory force for them as a group (see Torfing 2015, 97, 98–99), even if they were, as their entanglement in *Hallmundarkviða* attests, correlated by some people at least.

From an eco-critical perspective, it is interesting that geological movements within the landscape did not have a more obvious impact on medieval Icelandic literature and mythology. Overt examples of any sort of

before Iceland and Greenland, and its discovery is therefore pre-dated by *Haustlöng*. See further Jakob Benediktsson 1968, I, p. 34, n. 2.

geological calamity are rare enough, particularly outside the *biskupa sögur*, that their absence seems unlikely to be a reflection of the physical reality of living in Iceland at the time, even allowing for the vagaries of the survival of historical texts and concepts (cf. Falk 2007, 4–6).³⁶ While major volcanic incidents (and thunder and lightning) occur infrequently enough that a negligible impact on cultural outputs like poetry would be understandable, the same is not true when these phenomena are examined together in a group with other more common disturbances like landslides and earthquakes (cf. Torfing 2015, 98). Phenomena do not have to be proximate in space or time to have an effect on poets or audiences; the dearth of actors like snakes, wolves and forests from the Icelandic landscape did not prevent them achieving an enduring significance in Icelandic literature. They do, however, need to attain some kind of relevance, whether that is based in a physical or purely cultural reality.

In this situation, the comparative rarity of geo-calamities should perhaps be linked to the over-arching demands of these texts as works of literature. Whilst the conception of Þórr tearing apart the landscape with his movement is in part a by-product of humans living in and working a landscape that is prone to fits of shaking and spewing up molten rock, the appearance of such imagery in *Hallmundarkviða*, *Lokasenna* and *Prymskviða* is as much a result of a culture needing to capture the power of the supernatural figures in their stories. For all that these stories are one way of processing the landscape and providing spectacle to a story, characterisation seems a more pressing concern to Icelandic and Scandinavian authors, so the environment is appropriated into explicating the idea of Þórr and his strength more than it is examined, analysed and explicated itself. *Hallmundarkviða*, while also emphasising its lumbering protagonists' stature and might through the imagery, is unique in its focus on setting. In many Old Norse-Icelandic poems, unless characterisation and narrative require it, a calamity, whether the cosmological upheaval is related to specific geological phenomena or not, is unlikely to be mentioned – and in many genres, especially those of a (broadly speaking) soberer inclination like *Íslendinga sögur*, exploiting natural imagery in such a way would usually be inappropriate, at least as a means of heralding a character's

³⁶ Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough raises the counterexample of marine disasters, which appear in many texts but perhaps, in doing so, reinforce my main text's point further (2012, n.1). Given the major role of expeditions to Norway in many saga narratives and that the main drama (and narrative impetus) of such journeys is most easily provided by the environment rather than other human interaction, it is natural that such disasters would play a role.

power. While a deity can be represented as scenery-tremblingly strong, a text that is making even a token attempt at realism cannot depict its villains and heroes rocking mountains with every step.³⁷ In Old Norse-Icelandic literature, the landscape is often an important actor, but its part – ticks like volcanic eruptions and earthquakes included – is usually secondary to that of others, as well as to the demands of theme, plot and genre.

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³⁷ Partial exceptions do exist. See, e.g., Björn Karel Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943, 31, though even in that case the shaking is produced by remarkable feats of rock throwing.

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Summary

Recent scholarship has indicated that the conception of the Old Norse god Þórr as a thunder god may have been unfamiliar to Viking Age and medieval Icelanders and even to some Scandinavians. This throws much of the mythological poetry concerning the deity into a new light, and, in this article, I focus on the consequences for the interpretation of images of shaking and fire in two poems, *Lokasenna* and *Prymskviða*.

These images are compared with similar portrayals of natural calamities, also related to Þórr, in *Hallmundarkviða* and *Hauströng*. The perspective suggested is that, in some contexts, poets and audiences associated quite conventional cosmological imagery of disruption with specific natural phenomena, including volcanic eruptions and earthquakes, and that the turmoil in *Hallmundarkviða*, *Lokasenna* and *Prymskviða* may attest to an extra-literary – if still weak – connection between Þórr and these other phenomena.

Thereafter, I analyse the textual function of this seam of cosmological imagery and conclude that its primary function is to advertise the strength of the supernatural being causing it, in keeping with the persistent characterisation of Þórr in terms of his physical power in Old Norse-Icelandic literary traditions. By drawing out the cultural and textual significances of these motifs, this article aims to demonstrate the competing demands of genre, characterisation, and environment in the composition of Old Norse myths centring on Þórr and to elucidate the extent to which these images mediate responses to the terrains of Iceland and Norway.

Keywords: Þórr, eco-criticism, volcanoes, earthquakes, Old Norse mythology

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